Cadence of Love Divine

Indian Poetry in English

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N. SHARADA IYER

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Let my idle chatter be the muttering of prayer
My every manual movement the execution of ritual
My walking a cermonial circumambulation
My eating and other acts the rites of sacrifice
My lying down prostration in worship
My every pleasure enjoyed with dedication of myself
Let every action of mine be some form of worship to You

(Adi Shankaracharya - Soundaryalahari)

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IN MEMORY OF MY PARENTS SMT. MEENAKSHI
& SRI NATESHA IYER

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Writing a book is harder than I thought, and more satisfying than I could have imagined. None of this would have been possible without the unflinching support and help coming from my nephews, Arvind and Gautam, gifted with Encyclopaediac knowledge and Masters in their own field-Computer- who were always there to help this 'Damsel in Distress' tide over digital problems. And specially my young, bright promising Publisher Mr. Virendra Kumar Yadav, Adhyaya Publishers & Distributors, Delhi, who can be entrusted with any academic publication confidently and can be assured of excellent result. Diligent and intelligent he is sure to make a mark in the publishing world.

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PREFACE

Once the Divine Love is obtained one looks only to That, speaks only about That, one contemplates only about That..
(Bhakti Sutra)

The mystic muse is an expression of the Divine Bliss experienced by the Bhakta who aspires to share the Divine Ecstacy - Bramhandana- experienced by him with the world. It is an offering to the Divine, who inspires, sustains and nourishes it is a celebration of the Creator. It is a spontaneous overflow of the emotional ecstacy of the God Intoxicated in the form of Divine rendering. They create a pageant rich in Art and Divine in Essence.

India has a rich tradition of Sants who were gifted poets contributing to the ocean of mystic poetry suffused with Love of God, Whose touch as Tagore wrote in *Gitanjali*

At the immortal touch of Thy glory
My heart leaps with unbounded joy

To express their feelings some go on a pigrimage, some may construct a temple to their Beloved God, but a poor man like Basavana, a Veer Shivaite sings

The rich will make temples for Siva
What shall I a poor man do?
My legs are pillars
The body a shrine
The head a cupola of Gold
Things standing shall fall

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But the moving ever shall stand
O Lord of the meeting river

The poetic quest is inspired by the deep rooted desire to unravel the mysteries of the world through God. It is a poetry of mystery and mystfication, a poetry of loneliness and hurt which gets redeemed through Bhakti. It is a fine reflection of Indian sensibility. Indian literature fine art—Sculpture, Temple Architecture, Painting, Performing Arts–different forms of Dance and Music- shows the blending of our rich tradition, 'rasa', 'bhava' grace, form and beauty, which approximates to the Absolute—*Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram*.

Their outpouring acquires a Mantric or incantatory quality-comes as a dance of creative life. It strives towards a symphony of many notes, discarding no aspect of human experience, rejecting no segment of our national heritage, including the local, the Universal and the Transcendental, outer and inner life, the dynamics of Becoming and the poise of Being.

Overflowing with love for God, their outpouring, rich in feeling, rapturous in expression display high literary merit. With deep devotional fervor, reformist zeal and lofty ethical teaching they foster fraternity across the barriers of caste, class, gender, religion, creed, race and envision Universal Brotherhood - Vasudeva Kutumbakam.

These religious songs are known for their religious and philosophical value which fills the mind and soul with cardinal Truths, and the heart with tenderness and compassionss. All the writings have an unifying thread- the spiritual, philosophical, socio - cultural aspect of our nation

In an Age of Cultural Colonization when everything East appears to be outdated, and the present generation is blindly drawn to the West, viewing it as the best

resulting in De-Indianization. The present work *CADENCE OF LOVE DIVINE : INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH* is to make our generation understand, appreciate and feel proud of *WONDER THAT IS INDIA,* before it is too late, and our philosophical, spiritual, religious and cultural heritage is lost in the sands of so called Modernity

It is a pity that educated at the English medium schools, and with the newly rich Angilcized parents one fail to understand the importance of one's heritage. The primary task of each generation which used to be passing on the roots to the next has become secondary. While the choice of going abroad has become a matter of pride and status symbol one does not realise the resultant loss of identity due to loss or ignorance of roots. One should have the ability to tolerate, accomodate and asimilate other cultures without losing one's own. One has to establish roots in terms of the tradition to which one belongs. Today the universal predicament is a quest for individual identity In a globalized world people take their cultural heritage to ground themselves wherever they go else they would be a 'No WHERE Man'—Being Without Belonging. As Parthasaraty the modern poet writes

There is something to be said about exile
We learn how deep roots are

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INTRODUCTION

Love of God is not a thing which we produce in ourselves by excessive brooding, or by self hyponotism. It is a permanent flame slowly burning in the cavern of our heart

Few movements have influenced the Hindu faith as the Bhakti Movement that started as a ripple deep down in the 6th century, the ripple of religious fervour turned into a tidal wave that spread across the entire country. Emphasizing the idea of a personal God, the Movement took God to the people, allowing them to break free from the rigidity of Brahminical domination that held sway for centuries. In doing so, the Movement not only revived Hinduism, gave it a new definition and ensured that it stood up against the many onslaught it would over the time face

The Movement began in the Tamil region around the 6th and 9th century. Achieved a great deal of popularity through the writings of the Nayanmars and Alwars. They were the prime movers of the Movement that swept across Tamil region. The aim was to eliminate the non-Hindu sects like the Jains and Buddhists, and to revive the spirit of Hinduism. It had an electrifying effect throughout Tamilagam. It created awareness among the people and helped restoration of Hindu faith. Shaivism and Vaishnavism presented the Movement to

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the Tamil people as Tamil religion. It was a benevolent Movement that encompased the the entire fabric of the society

Nayanmars were God intoxicated people who were deeply immersed in their love for Siva, and the Alwars immersed in their love for Vishnu/Krishna, in their songs of longing, ecstacy and service.The Movement started by them had tremendous impact on the changing face of Tamil society. Heterdox sect like Jainism and Buddhism were facing doom and ultimate destruction. It was a mass movement in which the whole society contributed for the propagation of Bhakti.Tamil Literature flourished to an extent unknown in history. Tamilagam holds an immortal place in the history of India as the birth place of Bhakti culture.

This great wave of religious movement with great enthusiasm attained its peak in the early 7th century. Their divine literary work came to be treated at par with Vedas. They were collected and arranged in canonical book. The Shaiva canon in which their Hymns found a place and arranged by Namdiandar Nambi, Chief Minister to the Chola King. The Vaishnava canon received a definite shape in the hands of Nathamuni.

These saints revitalized the Indian religious milieu, sparkling a renewal of devotional worship throughout the sub-continent. Travelling from place to place temple to temple, holy place to holy place they composed exceedingly beautiful poetry, at once impassioned and lyrical. Their poetry composed in the language of the people attracted all to their faith. In doing so they sculpted a new religious heritage of intensely emotional Bhakti whose impact is still felt.

Religion for them was no longer a matter of contemplation of a Transcendental Impersonal Absolute, but of ecstatic response to an intensely felt experience, and paved the way to a philosophical justification of the

path of love and total surrender to their Beloved God.

No doubt the 6th century marked the beginning of a new wave of classical civilization in the history of Tamilagam. It was also the age of religious mysticism, flourishing under the serene atmosphere created by the saint poets The hymns were sung in the temples and their authors canonized as saints or as manifestation of the Divine. In fact the rise of the temple to an important place in the religious and social life of the land was a direct result of the Revivalist Movement. Bhakti Movement upheld the superiority of Bhakti as the simplest and easiest mode of spiritual practice. It saved the religion from the labyrinth of Vedic ritual and the society from being demographically wiped out

Earlier the Movement was seen as a literary or at best as an ideological phenomenon which had religion as its its base. But later it came to be regarded as an attempt at bringing about an egalitarian society and as a protest against the Brahminical monopoly. With the idea that God dwelt in every individual, and one could attain God through one's devotion, the Movement brought religion and spirituality to the marginalized class-especially women who were restricted in many ways. It was a movement that not only aimed at individual salvation and a mystical union with God but also aimed at a socio-religious egalitarianism. The Movement created a space where one could have a personal relation with God, and removed all intermediaries rendering the Brahminical tradition and the Brahmin priests as futile.

The Bhakti Movement was not just one movement but an accretion of smaller movements towards salvation and against oppressive hierarchies. It was a mass movement, secular in character finding popular support. In short it was a mass protest against Sanskritic-Brahminical-Hindu Religio Culture which they found

was highly biased to the core. The Bhakti Movement's aim was four fold

1) Off setting the spread of Jainism and Buddhism which had become more of a heretical movement than of moral or spiritual value, the Digambar sect of Jainism and their way of life was not acceptable, The brutal ritual practiced by the Saktas –offering human and animal sacrifices created a sense of fear than devotion. People found it embracing such a religion and tried to find ways and means to get rid of them , resulting in the rise of Shaivism and Vaishnavism which lit the flame of Bhakti Movement in the Southern Region of India.
2) Transcending all social barriers brought about by caste, class, gender, region and religion
3) A truly religious man was one who was pure in thought and action
4) To talk and sing in the language people spoke and understood, thus giving importance to the vernacular, instead of Sanskrit the Brahminical language. In the first phase it was more to revive Hinduism against the rising influence of Jainism and Buddhism, and to popularise the use of Tamil instead of Pali and Prakrits

The new found form of Bhakti did not remain confined to South India alone. From here it spread to Karnataka in the 12th century through the Veer Shaiva poets led by Basanana, and in the 13th century to Maharastra through the Varkari Movements. It was wide spread -Purandarsasa, Thyagaraja,Ramananda, Kabir, Tulsi, Ravi Das, Nanak, Tukaram, Jnandev, Eknath, Vallabhacharya, Chaitanya Maharabhu, Shankardev, Madhavacharya, Meera all carrying forward the Movement to different parts of the country

The background under which the Movement gained momentom during the Medieaval Period was under the Muslim rulers the Hindus suffered morally ,spiritually and materially. Apart from this, several evil practices

had crept into the Hindu society—especially the caste discrimination and exploitation by the upper caste Hindus. For fear of the stringent punishment at the hands of Muslims for resisting being converted, and the humiliation at the so called upper caste Hindus, most of the lower strata of society were forced to embrace Islam.

Society was in disorder everywhere—be it in political, socio-economic, cultural and religious field a chaotic condition prevailed. In view of the depressing situation and an atmosphere of fear and distress, many liberal minded reformers came forward to carry out the task of reforming Hinduism, purging it of the polluting element which were misrepresenting Hinduim and painting it as an intolerent, narrow religion, which in fact was all embracing, all loving. They aimed to make it liberal, vibrant and dynamic. The first and foremost step in this direction was to enhance the social status of the down trodden, give them the respect and dignity due to them, build the self confidence and self respect, make them feel they are part of us and not apart from us.

The foreign invasion had brought in its wake some Sufi saints who were liberal minded unlike the rigid Muslims They emphasised the value of love, devotion equality and brotherhood. They tried to remove the bitterness between Hindus and Muslims and lent a much needed healing touch, This helped to harmonize the conflict, by stressing that Ram and Rahim were one.

Between the 8^{th} and 13^{th} century the spiritual world of India experienced revolutionary changes. The numerous changes taking place in the world of religion gave birth to Bhakti Movement. The Movement tried to bring order into a chaotic society by means of novel ideology, which contributed to the cultural, and social revival.

After the advent of Ramananda in 1399 North India experienced a total transformation as he initiated the

Vaishnava Dharma, which gradually turned into a social revolution. The Saints took upon themselves the noble task of transforming the Bhakti Movement into a dynamic movement, so that it would reach the unreached, isolated ones of the society. In view of this noble cause they found the Vaishnava Bhakti Dharma as the most convenient mode to motivate the Hindu community. The gradual expansion of this would help in finding a firm footing in society.

The Bhagavad Purana was behind the evolution of the Bhakti Dharma. It was through Bhakti that the Bhagawad Purana gave a face lift to the society.It was at the initiative of the Nayanmars and Alwars that between the 7th and 10th century that Bhakti Dharma rose to its height of popularity. The renaissance of the Vaishna Movement started from this period, especially through the Alwars, who composed several thousand hymns of Bhakti. The Vaishnava Acharyas Ramanuj acharya, Madhavacharya, Nimbakacharya gave a strong philosophical basis to the concept of Bhakti. Vishnu and His Incarnation Krishna-Krishna Tattva-came to be popularized especially in the North. The Medieaval period was by and large an age of realising the path of Bhakti.

Even today after centuries the popularity of the Saints and the songs composed by by them are a testimony to their lasting appeal. They touched a chord deep inside and it is this legacy of these Bhakti Saints that has defined the devotional worship that one sees across India.

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