

BHAKTI TRADITION OF MEDIEVAL INDIA: BHAKTI PADA-VALIS, BHAJANS OF MEERA BAI AND HER DEVOTION TO KRISHNA

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Abstract

Meera Bai, was a prominent figure in the Bhakti movement, which emerged in medieval India. She made significant contributions to the bhakti literature through her poetry and devotional songs. Her contributions to bhakti literature were instrumental in shaping the devotional and philosophical aspects of the Bhakti movement. Meera Bai's devotion was centred around Lord Krishna, and her works express intense love, longing, and surrender to the divine. Hence, this paper offers to study the emergence of Bhakti movement in India with the focus on contributions of Meera Bai towards the bhakti literature.

Key words: Bhakti Movement, Bhajan, Pada, Lord Krishna, Devotion, Love.

INTRODUCTION

The era of 7th century was remarkable in the history of India as it witnessed some momentous transformation not only in the economy, polity and social order but also in the culture as well as ideology of the people. Hence, the changing socio-economic context had supported the origin of bhakti feelings among the people of India that led to the growth of a cultural movement which came to be popularised as 'Bhakti Movement'. With time, the Bhakti movement has been appeared in various forms of cultural expression including religion, philosophy, language, art and literature.

BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA AND NORTH INDIA

From the 6th century onwards, in the southern part of India, there was an emergence of the early form of bhakti tradition those related to devotion of Hindu God with spiritual perfection. Most of the protagonists of southern bhakti movement were belonged from the upper brahmin caste who endeavoured for the upliftment of Brahmanical ideology which earlier lost its importance due to the presence of Buddhism and Jainism. There were two major sectarian groups known as Alvars and Nayanars who were enthusiastic to the devotion of Vishnu and Shiva respectively.

The movement was later brought from south India to North India by Ramananda in the early 12th century who preached his bhakti ideology in the society irrespective of caste and class. He propounded a new kind of bhakti tradition based on socio-religious reform. Later in medieval time, influenced by Ramananda's ideology many followers were come forward to preach the bhakti but segregate themselves into two groups *Saguna* and *Nirguna* based on their methods of belief. Although there were some distinctions in their methodology, their philosophy was the same that to believe in the 'One God' and to bring 'Social Equality'. They used some easiest way to connect with God, thus composed many poems, songs, padas

in vernacular and regional languages which could easily understood by the common people. Those poems, songs, lyrics still have its significance in the present Indian society and culture.

BHAKTI TRADITION, BHAKTI POETRY AND SONGS

The bhakti movement had tremendously contributed in the formation of rich Indian culture and tradition where the bhakti saints reluctant to improve their vernacular literature through the composition of various songs, poems. Hence, free from the classical language such as Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit; literatures in regional languages entered into a new phase of growth and development. Bhakti literature, liberated from the feudalism culture, ancient poetic form, and royal courtly atmosphere, is now become a medium of expression and emotion of the common people which could reveal in their own language. Therefore, the bhakti poems and songs were developed in the form of folk culture which inherited from oral tradition of villages. The Bhakti poets were inspired by common life; thus, their experiences and thoughts were rooted in the common scenario. Their theme of the poetry and songs often centred around the refutation against the religious hypocrisy, casteism, social discrimination, which reflects realities of common life, beauty of folk culture and desire for an egalitarian social order. Some prominent Bhakti saints Kabir, Sur das, Tulsidas, Meera bai, Lal Ded, were the propagator of such Bhakti ideology who contributed their spiritual vision to the Indian Culture.

BHAKTI LITERATURE, BHAKTI POETRY AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF MEERA BAI

Meera Bai, a prominent devotee and personality from medieval India, lived from 1498 to 1547 was come from a Rathor royal clan of Udaipur. Since her childhood she was trained in music, poetry, dance and Sanskrit language as raised in a royal family. At an early age, against her will she was forced for marriage to a chief of Chittor named Rana Kumbha from Sisodiyas. However, Meera bai's marriage life was struggling and became more complicated after the death of her husband that was reflected in her poems and songs. After confronting all complications, she became a mystic saint and dedicated her life to writing devotional songs or *bhajans* in glory of the Lord Krishna whom she affirmed as her husband. She was anguished as *Virahini*, as one who gave up the world for God and as a rebel, the rebel against the injustice done with her. Nevertheless, the contemporary state of the society was suitable for her to evolve as a bhakti saint and bhakti poet who offered her life wholly to Lord Krishna.

A bhakta's relationship with God is self-directed and Meera bai choose to posits her God Lord Krishna as her husband and as a lover. She says: "*Of my own violation I became enslaved*", this enslavement was entirely different from the enslavement forced upon one by external force. Followed by Nirguna ideology of bhakti, thus she composed many songs and poems which were attributed to Krishna in different names sometimes calls Ram, sometimes Giridhar, sometimes Hari or Prabhu. The compositions of Meera bai had majorly contributed

to the Bhakti movement and Literature that represented the Indian mythology and religious ideology. Nevertheless, the writings of Meera bai became an integral component of the oral literary bhakti tradition of India.

Meera Bai composed numerous '*bhajans*' (devotional songs) and '*pada-valis*' (poems) dedicated to Lord Krishna. Her compositions were deeply personal and expressed her yearning for union with her beloved deity. She expressed liberation from the social prejudice through her poetry and songs, which were revolutionary themselves. She was able to overcome the obstacles of the world because of her complete submission to Krishna, which is also reflected in her works. Meera bai's poems can be classified into some categories according to their themes and subjects: poems of separation; poems of dissatisfaction with the world and society; poems of salutation; poems of love for Krishna. The most significant poems are those which she accepts Krishna as her husband and describes her loving devotion to him that shows the depths of her heart and mind. Her poems of separation are finest which were composed in Hindi language that became more popular among her followers. The devotional songs of Meera Bai popularly known as Bhajan, has great prominence and still widely sung in the temples of Northern India.

The poetry of Meera bai which popularly known as '*Pada*' or '*Pada-valis*' that occupied a significant position in the Hindi literature. The poems of Meera bai had some melodies or *ragas* that could be sung along with music. Among the many ragas cited are *Tilang, Hamir, Multani, Malkos, Pilu, Khamach, Jaunpuri, Malhar, Todi, and Asawari*. Hence, in the late medieval period, the padas of Meera bai became well known among the musicians of India and attributed her in their songs. Among the important meters used by Meera bai are *sar, sarsi, visnupad, doha, upman, savaiya, sobham, tatank, kundal*. Since the poems of Meera bai were meant to be sung, she often twisted and changed words in order to make them fit into the rhyme schemes and melodies of the poems.

BHAKTI IN MIRABI'S WORKS:

After the death of husband and the separation from the family, Meera bai impetuously became an outcast as he left her house in search of liberation. Some poets of later time narrated that Meera bai was not respected among the Rajputs of Chittor and Udaipur. But her bhakti poems and bhakti ideologies were followed as well as collected by the people of lower castes in the Rajput society. Hence, a deep intensity of the pain of separation persists all through her poems. Nonetheless, the major subject of her works concentrated on Krishna who is a incarnation of God, saved his bhaktas and even saved prahlada and Dhruva; saved the honour of Draupadi. She described him as Navatar, Mohan, Girdhar, Avinasi who is 'eternal one' and thus she narrates: "*o antaryami, come to me soon, I cannot live without you.*" Sometimes, she also identified him with the character of Rama, but not seems to be the king yet the one who dwells in people's heart.

Some of her famous devotional songs or Bhajans are narrated as:

“Payoji Maine Ram Ratan Dhan Payo
Payo ji maine Ram Ratan dhan payo
Vastu amolak di mera sataguru
Kripa kari apnaayo ji
Kripa kari apnaayo.”

Here, Meera expresses her devotion to Lord Krishna and portrays her ultimate satisfaction and fulfilment in finding the divine love of Krishna. She considers this love to be a priceless treasure, surpassing any material wealth.

"Mere To Girdhar Gopal
Mere to Girdhar Gopal, duja ko na koi
Mere to Girdhar Gopal, duja ko na koi
Radha pati Govind, Murari, Keshav, Madhav
Gopala, Krishna, Hare, Murari, Keshav, Madhav.”

Meera beautifully describes her personal relationship with Krishna, referring to him as her beloved Giridhar Gopal. She considers herself to be forever dedicated to Krishna, seeing him as the ultimate source of love and happiness.

“Jo tum todo piya, mai nahi todo ri
Tum todo piya, mai nahi todo ri
Meera ke prabhu Giridhar Nagar”

Meera sings about her unwavering commitment and surrender to Lord Krishna. She expresses her willingness to leave behind all worldly attachments and embrace a life dedicated to serving and loving Krishna.

Nevertheless, the love and bhakti of Meera bai towards Krishna resembled loving relation of a husband-wife as she refers to Krishna as *pritam*, *piya*, *dulha*, *sajan*, *sainyan*, *balam*, *kant*, etc in her Bhajans. Meera bai also says that the love between Krishna and herself was not new but existed from time immemorial. In her few poems, she describes her marriage with Krishna in which she accepts him as her husband in a formal way. Notwithstanding, the actual number of padas or poems composed by Meera bai is difficult to determine as most of

her works are orally versed, collected and transmitted among her followers. However, her works played a significant role in popularizing the Bhakti movement and its core ideas. Her devotional compositions resonated with people across different backgrounds and social classes. Until today, Meera's poems and songs continue to inspire and touch the hearts of people, transcending time and cultural boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Meera bai lived an extraordinary life through overcoming all obstacles with her boldness and inspiring personality that made her distinctive from the contemporary saints of the Bhakti movement. In the medieval Indian society where the women were mostly acted as submissive to the society, in meantime Meera bai acted alone as a self-liberator from the society's prejudice. Through her writings, Meera challenged the traditional gender roles and advocated for the idea that spiritual devotion transcends societal boundaries. Meera Bai's bhakti literature often criticized social conventions, rituals, and restrictions imposed by society. She emphasized the importance of devotion and love for God over external religious practices. Meera's works focused on the inner spiritual experience and the belief that true devotion could be achieved through pure love and surrender. Thus, she emerged as a devotee and lover of lord Krishna as well as a prominent female poet in the Hindi literature. Nevertheless, her noteworthy melodic quality of work made her poems suitable for singing and dancing that provides an intense emotion of joy and pain.

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