

# **Locating the Emancipatory Potentials in the Bhakti and Sufi movements: A Study on their Strengths and the Limitations**

A Thesis Summary Submitted

To

**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

**Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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October, 2024

Both Bhaktism and Sufism hence, were socio- religious and philosophical movements as much as they were epistemological ruptures and belonged to a period even earlier than the Cartesian era as in the West. Bhakti and Sufi assumed the proportion of movements in India beginning the 10th Century onwards and both underwent changes from within over time. The Bhakti movement, broadly, can be divided into two phases; the first phase was started by Sankaracharya in Southern India from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century onwards and it underwent significant changes in form as well as in content in the 12th century and spread all over India during the 14th to 15th centuries. This was when Buddhism was on the verge of collapse in the Northern India. Sufism was introduced in India around 11th century, though it had spread outside India from 10th century onwards. Sufi saint Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti was responsible for bringing Sufi in India around the same time of Muslim conquest in India.

Bhakti and Sufi Movements were located on the trajectory and the changes that were brought into their particular religion, Hinduism and Islam respectively. They had one ultimate goal that was the realization of God. They expressed a strong dislike to blind faith in their respective scriptures and did not believe in the discrimination sanctioned by those scripts and the traditions in vogue based on caste and creed. Rituals and ceremonies were not of concern to them; their concern and the path to emancipation or realization of the God in the self was premised on the individual relationship with the master who would give them the right knowledge to realize God through their personal devotion to God. Bhakti and Sufi were thus not a part of their respective orthodox groups; they seriously resisted the principles of their respective religion and were totally against it.

In some sense, the Bhakti and Sufi had resemblance with the reformation movement in Western Europe, inspired and given shape by the single event when Martin Luther pinned the 95 theses on the walls of the Wittenberg-Church in Germany and set rolling the long history

of reformation. However, while Luther's act was in the midst of a crisis in Western European feudalism and the Reformation alongside the Renaissance paving the way to modernity, the Bhakti and the Sufi movements cannot be seen as its mirror image.

The search for liberation was a continuous process, and it was in the twentieth century India as a country witnessed a massive freedom struggle and its roots can be traced in the emancipatory movements of Bhakti and Sufi. It was the liberation that they were seeking from the foreign powers and their domination. The demand for the freedom took a shape of mass movement and it was some enlightened and conscious liberation seeking people who had their heart and soul for the freedom in the country.

The thesis made an attempt to understand the emancipatory ideas of the Bhakti and the Sufi movements and its praxis. In the process it also tried to understand the movements in the light of one another. The movements were a result of the logical and rational thinking of the people and their philosophy emerging from the concerns of liberation. It was the *Vedantic* philosophy which had got into the ideas of the movement. The breaking from the old and the urge to surrender oneself and seek God erupted in the form of devotional songs which were sung by both the Bhakti as well as Sufi saints.

The protestant movement in the West was also a liberation movement in the larger sense and understanding of the term. All these movements, basically, were some form of protests and also search for liberation. The philosophy of liberation is the common thread. The protestant movement is a subject matter of study to have a comparative understanding with the Bhakti and Sufi movements in India.

The continuity of the liberation movement can also be traced in the twentieth century India. Along with the material freedom it was the metaphysical freedom that was sought by prominent leaders Aurobindi, Tagore and Gandhi.

The thesis is divided into five chapters followed by a conclusion. The first chapter dealt with the genesis of Bhakti and Sufi movement and its course. This chapter was an attempt to understand Hinduism and Islam as a religion in order locate the Bhakti and Sufi movement, which was developed as a protest movement within these religions. The saints as well as their followers were sought liberation from the worldly affairs and thus emancipate themselves. While discussing about the liberation it is also understood that the freedom was in two forms i.e., the materialistic freedom and the metaphysical freedom.

The second Chapter dealt with the idea of liberation in the Bhakti and Sufi movement. Freedom in its two forms that is the material freedom and the metaphysical freedom has been understood in the previous chapter has been discussed in detail this chapter. The perception about the liberation by Hinduism, Islam as well as by the contemporary religions has been discussed.

The third chapter is about looking at the idea of liberation in Christianity, it looked into the protestant Revolution. In the context of liberation, the West had a similar kind of movement which resembled the Bhakti and the sufi movement in the aspect of liberation. The Western European experience was significant in the sense that the liberation in the material sense took concrete shape there. The destruction of feudalism and the institution of serfdom at one level and the decline of the Catholic Church, essentially its position as the largest land-holder and the lord as such, brought about a condition where the world seemed to turn upside down. The degradation of the Catholic Church and the emergence of the protestant theology brought about substantive changes in the political and social condition of Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>

centuries and these changes impacted the social, economic and political lives in the rest of the world too. The Reformation as such was an open dissatisfaction with the abuses within the Catholic Church, by the clergy, involving the role of the Priesthood and with ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Fourth chapter discussed about the idea of liberation in the Twentieth century: Aurobindo Ghose, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. This chapter discusses about the concept of freedom in a larger framework of the liberation of a people from the colonial subjugation. This is so, particularly with the contributions of three personalities – Aurobindo Ghose, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and discussed about the material as well as the metaphysical aspects of the Indian freedom struggle. The spiritual aspects of the freedom struggle owes to the Indian Bhakti tradition. Too.

There was a thread of commonality among them insofar as liberation is concerned and they all agreed with one another on the point that liberation ought to be seen in both the material and the spiritual sense. In this way, Ghose, Tagore and Gandhi in their own way went about seeking liberation in ways internalizing the bhakti tradition as much from the way liberation meant in the Western European or liberation in the context of modernity. In the process, their effort to attain the liberation on the individual grounds as well as for the nation as a whole has been discussed.

To conclude, liberation is understood as continuous process. Though there were limitations to the Bhakti and Sufi movements, as a tradition of protest and path for liberation, it impacted the future liberation movements also.