Chapter: II
Nature of the Bhakti movement in India

India witnessed a reformation period in 14th 15th 16th centuries, which is known as the bhakti movement of India. In ancient period, a reformation movement was seen in the time of Upanishads and in 6th century B.C. with the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism. This movement was a reaction against the political social economic and religious condition of the period. The bhakti movement in general can also be regarded as a reaction to the prevailing customs. India in medieval period witnessed a feudal society. The general people had no connection with politics, the villages were economically self-sufficient, and all these led to rigid social customs. However, in 10 century A.D. there was a change in economic condition. The villages gradually lost their self- sufficiency with the development of trade in this period. There emerged a group of people who realized that the prevailing social condition had much evil. The caste system was rigidly followed and the religious rituals drained the common people. These groups of philosophers wanted a change in the social customs and most of them rejected the caste distinction. The age, which saw the growth of the bhakti philosophers were also referred to as the age of resistance. The coming of the Islams brought a new change in the social set up of the country. The Muslim rulers adopted the policy of converting the Hindus to Islam. This turn made the Hindus to strengthen their holds and the rules of the caste system were tightened. In addition to it, the rituals in the name of worship of the Hindus also increased largely. All this change in the social custom led to another kind of reaction. The lower caste Hindus were tired of this rigid caste system, where they had to suffer the highest. The philosophy of Islam i.e.to believe in one god and not following much rituals in their mode of worship attracted the people of the lower strata to their faith. And the absence of the caste division played strongly in the minds of the lower

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1. Reformation-. Reformation is the name given to the religious revolution of the 16t century, which culminated in the separation of many nations of Europe from the church of Rome. It was a dual movement having as its objects the renovation of moral life of Christendom and the repudiation of the papal claims to ecclesiical supremacy
3. K.M. Munshie’s, Opinion on the period of bhakti movement.
Caste people, who were tired of the ill treatment meted out to them. The bhakti philosophers propagated the doctrine of devotion to a personal God. The philosophy of Sufi saints of Sisti creed believed in equalitarian monotheism. The sufi songs centred around the union of soul with god which is also seen in the songs of the bhakti poet. The sufi saints were free from the rigidity of religion. The bhakti saints wanted to bind all group of people in one common fold. They elevated the position of the bhaktas (devotees) in the social order and most of the bhakti philosophers tried to rose above the caste based social order and gave an equal status to the people of lower caste.

The characteristics features which marked the period of the bhakti movement in North India was “the growing weakness of the state with the growth of the power of local landed elites, the decline of towns along with a breakdown in trade especially the long distance trade, the alienation of land to the Brahmanas and the rise of the Rajputs”4 in the political side. In religious side, it is observed that the brahmanas enjoyed the superior position. All the land grants reflected their strong relations with the ruler. The period saw the growth of image worship along with many superstitions. It also witnessed the elaboration of religion of work (Karma)5. In south India, in social structure, there were two caste Brahmanas and Sudras. And it is observed that unlike north, in south the Buddhist and Jainas dominated the royal courts. The early bhakti philosophers of south expressed their reaction against the Buddhist and Jains rather than brahmanas. There are evidences that the Jainas were ousted from the courts of Pandyas, the Cholas, the Hoyasala and the Kalachuri court by the influence of the Nayanmar and Alwar saints. The bhakti in south saw its growth in the hands of the Brahmanas (The Acharyas). The temples become the centre for growth of this movement. The new religious Islam’s rise and growth in India brought by the Turks also brought a change in the social set up. The simplicity of the religion devoid of much rites and rituals attracted the lower section of the Hindu society. The new religious order threatened the base of the Hindu society and the result was bhakti movement. However, there is a strong debate in this regard. The growth of Islam though wooed a few group of people to its fold, it cannot be concluded

5. Chandra S., ibid.p. 292
that the Hindu society faced avid danger from it. Ziauddin Barani observed that “even in the capital Delhi, the Hindus went in procession, beating gongs and cymbals and passed beneath the walls of the palace to immerse the idols in the river and the sultan could do nothing about it”\textsuperscript{6}.

2.1 Bhakti History:

To begin with, the words of Radhakrishnan “Bhakti can be considered as the emotional attachment distinct from other paths like knowledge or action”\textsuperscript{7}. Vivekananda considers bhakti as an ordinary emotion that can be converted into powerful feelings, ordinary love can be converted into Divine love or Supreme Devotion i.e the Bhakti Maya\textsuperscript{8}. Bhakti philosophy i.e. devotion to a personal God became a movement in medieval period of India history. The bhakti cult also known as Vaisnavism, where Vishnu is the Bhagavata (glorious), Purusottoma (the supreme person), Narayana, Hari as the sole lord\textsuperscript{9}. The history of bhakti however can be traced back to the Rig Vedic Age\textsuperscript{10}. In Rig Veda, the Sanskrit word ‘Bhaj’ shows it marks. Bhaj meant divide, share or distribute\textsuperscript{11}. Bhakti is a derivation from the word Bhaj. The supreme deity of the bhakti philosopher was Vishnu and his two incarnations Rama and Krishna. ‘Bhaj’ is the root of the word bhakti, bhakta and Bhagavata\textsuperscript{12}. Maitri-upanishad, and Svetasatra Upanishad also refers to bhakti\textsuperscript{13}. Maitri-Upanishad refers bhagavat Vishnu as food that helps sustaining in this world. Svetasatra Upanishad mentions bhakti in reference to devotion to a personal God.

\textsuperscript{6} Chandra S. opcit, p. 297
\textsuperscript{7} Radhakrishnan S. (1923), Indian Philosophy, 1993 (6\textsuperscript{th} impression), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.558
\textsuperscript{8} Lal B.K. (1973), Contemporary Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, p. 33
\textsuperscript{9} Murthy H.V.S.,(1973), Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva and Ramanuja (A Comparative Study), Indological Publishers, Delhi, p. 9
\textsuperscript{10} Vishnu is referred a number of times in Rig Veda. It refers that Vishnu strode over this universe, in three places he planted his steps, enveloped in his deity. Vishnu the unconquerable, preserver, stood three steps, thereby maintaining fixed ordinances.
\textsuperscript{12} Neog M,(ed), (1982), Bhakti Ratnakara of Sankara Deva and History of the concept of Bhakti, Punjab University, Patiala, p.6
\textsuperscript{13} Neog M.(ed) ibid, p. 6
In Maitri-upanishad, the word Bhagavata was used for first time in relation to Vishnu, which refers as bhagavata Vishnu. However, the term bhagavata was related in the epic age with Narayana, who was a new and personal god. With his introduction, bhakti imbibed the idea of personal love and devotion to the deity. The worshipness of Narayana was referred as Bhagavata.  

Chandogya-Upanishad refers to the beginning of the cult of Krishna-Vasudeva. It refers to the virtues of asceticism, charity, non-injury and selfishness and rejects the sacrificial ritual. Mahabharata brings in the concept of bhakti with Narayaniya and Bhagavad Gita, the two section of work. These two works were particularly significant in the evolution of bhakti with Narayana-Vishnu. The Bhagavad Gita became the base of bhakti marga. With Bhagavad Gita, the worship of Krishna-Vasudeva and Visnu become one of the most important creeds. It became one of the most inspiring books of bhakti movement that grew in medieval period. It talks about three principal path of attaining union with god knowledge (Gyan) action(Karma) and devotion(bhakti). Bhagavad Gita refers to surrender at the feet of lord(ek sarana). It says to believe in god, to love and to devoted to him and to meet him. It states that one could attain union with Supreme Being by the path of knowledge action and devotion. The greatest contribution of the Bhagavata Gita in the bhakti movement that it brought the concept of ultimately reality as a personal deity, who responds to intimate love and devotion (bhakti). Narayaniya brings in forth the other name of Vishnu i.e. Narayana. In the Gupta period, the Vaishnavite bhakti faith flourished in the territories under the Gupta Empire. The inscriptions of Gupta period give indication that the Gupta kings were devotee of Vishnu.

Upanisadic upasanas are regarded as the origin of the bhakti movement by R.G. Bhandarkar. In Panini’s Astadhyayi (5th century, B.C), the world bhakti is used to mean a thing to be liked or loved. But it was not necessarily to god. S. Radakrishnan opines

15. Neog M.(ed), ibid, p. 10  
17. Neog M.(ed), ibid, p.8  

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that- according to the Upanishads, the Absolute and God are one, he is the supreme Brahman to emphasizes its transcendence of the finite and he is called Isvara to emphasize the personal aspect for religious devotion\(^{18}\).

The *Pancaratra Samhitas* describe the devotion to the Vasudeva cult. These samhitas are considered to be written around 600-800 A.D. These samhitas describes the devotion to Vishnu. However, Vishnu was not worshipped in the devotional manner as found in Bhagawad Gita. It is a kind of tantric mode of Vishnu worship. *Narada-pancaratra* describes the love between Krishna and Radha. During the *bhakti* movement it is seen that Radha-Krishna was the main deity of devotion of Vallabhacharya and Chaitanya. The *Pancratra Samhitas* also refers to devotion to lord as the highest form to attain liberation.

The *Puranas* brought in a new character of Vishnu- the Gopala-krishna i.e. cowherd boy Krishna. The *bhakti* philosopher’s doctrine of *bhakti* in medieval India mainly centered on this child- Krishna, who is considered as the soul of this universe. The *Puranas* like *Harivamsa, Vishnu-purana* and *Bhagavata-purana* brings in the life of Krishna’s childhood in Vrindavana. *Harivamsa Purana* describes the early life of child Krishna. It brings a new phase in devotion to lord, *bhakti* to child Krishna. The Vishnu-Purana refers to the Vaishnava in theology. The *Puranas* describes the stories of child devotee of Krishna like Dhruba and Prahlad. In the literatures and compositions of the *bhakti* poets of medieval India, have described the child-activity of Krishna. The Purana refers to *nama, nama-kirtana, sravana, smarana, arcana* among the other form worships. *The Bhagavataa Purana* is the main inspiring book of the *bhakti* movement.*Bhagavata* Purana expresses *bhakti* in a new excellence. It mainly describes the early life of Krishna, and also depicts the role of *gopis* of Vrindabana. *Bhakti* in *Bhagavata Purana* is so intricate and magnificent exposition of *bhakti* that brings active all the emotion of person of pleasure, sadness etc. The *Bhagavata Purana* describes the nine mode of *bhakti*-sravana, kirtana,smarana ,padasevana ,arcana, vandana, dasya, sakhyya, atmanivedana. After *Bhagavata* Purana, the *bhakti* poets followed Narada-sutras and Sandilya sutras.

Sandilya sutra considers bhakti the supreme love for one personal God, while Narada sutras consider it as intense love for the supreme. Sandilya refers to bhakti in the following manner honoring him, or honoring everything that made to remember him, aversion to all that are not associated with, singing the glory of him and that he is immanent in all things. Narada describes bhakti as love for attributes and greatness of god, for his beauty, worship, recollection, love for him as a servant, a friend, a parent and a beloved wife love of self-consecration to him, to absorb in him, and the pang of separation from him.

The blossoming of bhakti began in South India with the rise of a group called Alwars from 6th – 9th century. They followed the path of spiritual liberation through the medium of music and dance, songs and poetry. Their movement was a reaction against the caste and ritual ridden society. They began to compose and sing their songs in the vernacular language, as a reaction against Sanskrit language which was considered as the language of elite. Their poems reflect the struggle of a living person questioning his own experience in native speech. These saints went from temple to temple and by singing and dancing chanted the name of the lord. A large group of people (devotee) followed their path and it took the shape of movement. In the early phase of the movement, it was more spiritual in nature then social. There were twelve Alwar poets Nammalwar, Madhur Kavi, Periya, Aantal (Andal), Paigaiyer, Pudatta, Tirumalsiar, Tiruppan, Tundaradipuri, Tirumangalai, Kulasekhar and among them one was Brahmin, Periyalwar and one women Andal. The early Alwars Pudattalwar, Peyalwar and Poygaialwar were probably present around 7th century A.D. They started composing the Pirabandhams in Tamil. During 7th -8th century, the Alwar poets Tiruppan, Tirumalasai, Tirumangai, Kulasekhar, Jondaradipodi, Periyalwar, Andal or Godadevi flourished. And in 9th-10th century, Nammalwar, the greatest of the Alwar poets flourished. The Alwar poets however never reacted against the Vedas and Puranas rather there movement was a reaction against

20. Neog M, ibid, p.45
21. Neog M,ibid, p.46
Buddhism and Jainism. They emphasized on chanting the name of god and there concept of *bhakti* gained momentum among the common people who was tired of excessive rites and rituals. Among the Alwars, Nammalwar was considered as the greatest. His work *Tiruvarritam* was highest among all the Alwar verses. There songs were the greatest medium of expressing their devotion to lord. ‘God’ in their song appears as a lover-hero to his devotee, and the devotee in the manner of lovesick heroine sends message through animals or birds. The songs also reflect the sorrow of separation from the lord and the longing for the divine being. The songs of Nammalwar however reflect a message of hope. Infact it can be said that the poems of Nammalwar was the main inspiration behind the conduct and shape of the Southern Vaishnavism. Tirumalisai, another great Alwar poet, brought human and devine closer to each other. “Narayana, I know, as I do not exist without you, so you too cannot live without me” Andal considered herself married to lord Krishna. She introduced the strong note of bridal mysticism. The songs of the Alwar poet reflects that the soul does not find rest until it finds God. They followed the books like *Bhagavata Gita* and *Bhagavata*. The Alwars represented the spiritually and divinity in their faith. “The *Bhagavata Purana* mention that men who have born in the age of Kreta, Treta and Dwapara will wish to take birth in Kali age, because in that age great soul would born, who will become the devotee places, but in Dravida land they would be found in great numbers near the rivers like Tamraparni, Kretamala, Payasvini, Kaveri”.

Along with the Alwars, there also emerged a group of Saiva *bhaktas* Nayanmars. The Nayanmars reacted against Buddhism, Jainism and even Vaishnavism. Their *bhakti* poems were like the instruments of religious war. The Nayanmaras to preach their devotion composed a number of literatures like *Tevaram, Periya Puranam, Saiva Panjabi Kabita, opcit.p. 9*.

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23. Panjabi Kabita, *opcit.*p. 9
24. *ibid.* p. 9
25. *ibid.* p. 9
27. Neog M. (ed), (1982,) *Bhakti Ratnakara of Sankara Deva and History of the concept of Bhakti*, Punjab University, Patiala,p.31
siddhanta sastras and so on. The Virasaivas were also Saiva bhaktas. The main emphasis of their devotion was “greatness of God and the feeling of submission, self-abnegation and self- surrender to God”.29

Acharyas followed the Alwars. They preached the teaching and concept of Alwars. They translated the work of Alwars into Sanskrit and preached it among the common people. They were Nathamuni (824 – 924 AD), Yamunacharya (11th C) Ramanuja (1027-1137 AD) and Sri Vaishnavism. The Acharyas introduced a new concept of taking the path of bhakti with the help of a preacher. The Acharyas developed the Alwars doctrine of prapatti. They based their teaching in both on Sanskrit and Tamil scriptures. They attempted to include the Vedic and Upanishadic teachings in the Prabandhams of Alwar. They include Jnana and Karma along with devotion in preaching in Bhakti.

Nathumani (Ranganatha Muni) was born in the first quarter of ninth century. He is considered as the founder of the Ramanuja School. The Tamil songs of Satagopa were given music by Nathumani30. Yamunacharya was the grandson of Nathumani. Before Yamunacharya, Shankaracharya’s monoism developed probably in 7th century. He preached the supremacy of Vedanta. He emphasised on attaining salvation through gyan i.e. knowledge. His bhakti was a reaction against Buddhism. He established the supremacy of the Hindus by establishing monasteries on the four directions. In the east, Govardhan in Puri, Sarada in the west, Jyotish near Badarkashram in north and Sringeri on the Tungravadhra in the south. He organized his disciples in ten orders to propagate his faith. They are Aranya, Vana, Saraswati, Bharti, Puri Tirtha, Asrama, Giri, Parvata and Sagara31. Yamunacharya was influenced by the work of the Alwars. He tried to establish the authority of the Pancaratra literature, the cannon of the Sri-Vaishnava sect. Yamunacharya started the philosophy of Visistadvaitaband which Ramanuja preached. His ‘Mahapurusanirnaya’ upholds the supremacy of Vishnu.

29. Majumdar A. K.(1979), Bhakti Renaissance, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Calcutta
31. Majumdar A.K. (1979), Bhakti Renaissance, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Calcutta, p. 17
The medieval bhakti movement starts with Ramanuja. Ramanuja preached the Visishtadvaita doctrine initiated by Yamunacharya. Ramanuja born in 1017 AD composed the philosophical words of Yamunacharya and gave it and solid base. The doctrine of Ramanuja influenced the medieval bhakti saints like Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak and Tulsidas. Ramanuja’s philosophy was against Sankarcharya’s philosophy of advaitavad (monoism) and maya (illusion). Ramanuja’s philosophy believed in the Supreme Being is one and is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. His doctrine believed that one could attain salvation through the path of bhakti. He was liberal in his outlook towards the caste system that the shudras and the outcaste could also attain salvation with the help of a guru (teacher). Ramanuja was a devotee of Narayana and his consort Lakshmi. The Vedantic philosophy was included, in the Sri-Bhasya of Ramanuja. The elements of bhakti becomes “the loftiest and the most important factor in the means of deliverance” in the philosophy of Ramanuja.

After Ramanuja, Nimbarka flourished around 11th, 12th century AD. He propounded the philosophy of Bheda-Bheda. In his bheda-bheda philosophy, he propagated that the God (world soul) and individual soul (atma) had similarities yet they are distinct. The chief centre of his activity was Vrindavana. He wrote Vedanta-parijata-saurabha and Dasaloki. He considers Radha as the eternal consort of Vishnu. His main deity of worship was Radha-Krishna. Moreover, the main theme of his doctrine was to surrender oneself to God. With the appearance of Radha, the concept of intrinsic energy entered into the bhakti movement. Vrindabana was the chief centre of Nimarkara’s bhakti movement. His concept was Dvaitabad.

Madhabacharya (1199-1278 A.D) flourished in 13th century. The Bhagavata Purana influenced his philosophy, which was distinct dualism. He rejected the philosophy of Sankaracharya’s qualified monism and Ramanuja’s Vishistadvaita. His bhakti movement made room for general Vaishnavism. He believed in devotion to Krishna,

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32 Mazumder A.K. ibid, p. 17
33 Neog M.opcit, p. 41
thus the end of the 13th century, three distinct philosophical schools developed aiming
devotion to a personal god34. The main element of his bhakti was adoration to Krishna. His supreme-deity was Vishnu but there was no mention of Vasudeva or Gopala-Krishna. He composed thirty-seven treaties on his doctrine, which includes Bhasya of the Vedanta Sutras, Bhagavata-tatparya nirmaya and commentaries on ten Upanishads. In the philosophy of Madhavacharya, there is adoration of Krishna by bhakti. He recognizes Siva, along with five other gods. Vishnu is the supreme deity. With Madhavacharya, the old tradition of Vasudevism of Bhagavata School disappeared and general Vaishnavism developed35.

Another two bhakti poets who based their teachings on Bhagavata Purana was Vishnuswami (14th century) and Sridhar Swami (15th century). Vishnuswami brought in the element of Radha to his teachings. He wrote commentaries on the Vedanta-Sutra, the Bhagavad-Gita and Bhagavata Purana. He believed in dualist philosophy. Sridhar Swami was the preacher of Gobindamath or Govardhara in Puri. His work Bhagavata, is influenced by the Sankaracharya’s philosophy of Advaitabhad. Sankaradeva was also greatly influenced by the writings of Sridhar Swami. The charita puthis mention that Sankaradeva after hearing the Bhagavata Purana having the tikkas of Sridhar Swami by Jagadish Mishra attained the complete knowledge of Bhagavata bhakti and, he started preaching his bhakti doctrine.

In 14th century, the bhakti movement received a new energy with the coming of Ramananda. He was fifth in apostolic succession to Ramanuja. He in his early years believed in the Vishistadvaita philosophy of Ramanuja. But later, he developed his own teachings. He could not reject the caste system but made a strong move by including the shudras and women as his disciple. Ramananda moved to North India and started his new school. However, he did not rule the supremacy of the Brahmanas but he included the lower caste and shudras in his movement and gave them an equal footage. Ramananda used vernacular medium Hindi to propagate his faith. Moreover, introduced the worship

34. Srivastava A.L.(1971), Medieval Indian Culture, Printsman, Agra, p.45
35. Neog M. ibid, p.40
of Rama and Sita. He had twelve disciples including a Jat name Dhanna, a barber named Sena, a cobbler Rai Das or Ravidasa and Kabir and two women Padmavati and Sursari and Anantamanda, Pipa, Bhavananda, Sukha, Sursura, Narahari, Ramananda. His main philosophy was devotion to God and brotherhood among all people. The preaching of his philosophy gave a boost to the bhakti movement. Ramananda’s reform was a radical reform. He allowed the people of lower caste to dine together with the brahmanas, but maintained that the former have to be the devotee of Vishnu. Ramananda is regarded as the main propagator of the bhakti philosophy popularly known as the bhakti movement of India. He is described in following manner:

_Bhakti Dravida Upaji_  
_Laya Ramananda_  
_Pragat Kiya Kabira Ne_  
_Saptadvip Naukhand'_

( Bhakti was born in Dravida, Ramananda brought bhakti from the Dravida land and Kabir made it popular in rest of India)

He believed in the philosophy of Vishistadvaita of Ramnuja. His adoption of Hindi as the medium to propagate his faith made it easier for the common people to understand the doctrine of his faith. The use of Hindi to compose the verses also led to the growth of Hindi literature. In addition, he used the common language, which attracted the people of lower caste, so that they could understand the essence of the Vaishnava teachings. All these elements greatly attracted the people to the movement. Moreover, the equality of the disciples gave impetus to the shudras and made them to accept the new religious concept. Even the status of women was raised by the teachings and concept of Ramananda. He believed in devotion to lord and rejected the ritual ridden worship to the lord. Ramanada democratized his movement by bringing all group of people to his

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fold. However, he could not completely disregard the caste system and supremacy of the higher caste Brahmanas.

Kabir (1440 – 1518 AD) the disciple of Ramananda was born to a Hindu widow and brought up by a Muslim weaver. Kabir’s teaching was directed towards inward spirituality and outward ritualism and the unity between Hindu and Muslim. He believed in devotion to formless god and rejected the system of worship of both Hindus and Islam. His concept of \textit{bhakti} accepts the transmigration of the soul and karma shows his inclination towards Hinduism. On the other hand, the rejection of idolatry traces Islam influences. He propagated the idea of spiritual theism. His poems \textit{Dohas} appealed the common people. His important works included \textit{Bijak}, \textit{Sabads}, \textit{Sakhis}, \textit{Mangal}, \textit{Basant}. The lower caste people were greatly attracted to his movement. He preached that without devotion, religion has no importance, and maintained that devotion is best expressed through the \textit{bhajans}. Kabir believed in devotion to lord through prayers and praises. He urges the devotees to chant the name of Rama. Kabir believed in the universal brotherhood and wanted Hindu and Muslims reside unitedly. He even condemned the division between poor and rich and believed in common brotherhood. He also rejected distinction among all castes. Kabir too used Hindi as a medium to propagate his faith. His poems specially the \textit{Dohas} criticized the prevailing practices and beliefs. This attracted the common people to his movement, who were tired of the ritual ridden practices and beliefs. Kabir considered the different expression of god in the name of Rama, Rahim, Krishna, Karim, Macca, Kashi as the one absolute force. He considered ‘God’ as one single force.

He emphasized on the unity of god, and to merge in him through the path of love, devotion and \textit{bhakti}. He maintained that there could be no religion without \textit{bhakti}. Kabir authored a number of poems, which are collectively compiled as the \textit{Khas Grantha}. He believed that god is formless and if there is necessity to give him a name, he can be called Rama. Kabir believed that one need preacher to understand the spiritual matters. His followers Kabir-Panthis carried the tradition of Kabir. Kabir like Ramanand attracted the
lower caste people to his movement. Kabir was a married man and believed that marriage or family is not a hindrance in propagation of *bhakti*.

Raviidasa, another disciple of Ramananda was a tanner. He founded another sect but believed in devotion to the Supreme Being and that by chanting his name can attain spiritual bliss. He preached that the lord resides in the heart of the devotees and that one could not attain union with him through rituals and ceremonies.

Mirabai (1498 – 1546) a great saint of the 16th century was a disciple of Ravidasa. She was a devotee of Krishna, Girdharilala and believed in worship with attributes. She was a Shaguna *bhakti* poet. Mira engaged herself in meditation of the lord by singing and dancing. She was surrounded by a large group of followers both men and women. She used to have religious discourses and kirtanas with them. Mira spent the last years of her life in Dwaraka and died in 1546 A. D. Mira composed her bhajan’s in Brajabhasa, partly in Rajasthani and some of her verses in Gujrati. The devotional lyrics were addressed to Krishna, Girdharilal. She felt his presence in her daily life. Her bhajans could arouse *bhakti* (devotion) in the mind and soul of people, which speaks of love and devotion. Mira is considered “as goddess of the gita (hymn) style of poetry by poet Nirala and Sumitra Nandi Pant considered her as the Sakuntala of the hermitage like forest of love and devotion and Mandakini of the desert land of Rajasthan”. Mira’s *bhajan* attracted a lot number of common people to her movement. Though a widowed Rajput queen, she led a life of commoner and wandered by singing songs in praise of Krishna.

Dadu, a Brahman from Rajasthan, established a new school known as Dadupanthi. His philosophy was similar to Kabir and was a Nirguna bhakta poet. They worshipped Rama and Sita. He too believed in the chanting the name of the lord Rama as the means of attaining spiritual liberation. His philosophy was against the idol worship. His devotees did not worship the idol of Rama. Two important disciple of Dadupanthi

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38 Srivastava A. L., *ibid*, p.52
was Rajjar a Muslim and Jivandasa from the lower caste. The main achievement of Dadu that he collected 5000 bhakti songs and compiled them in one book.39

There were other subsects like Khaki; Molukdasi who owed their origin to Ramanandi philosophy.40 The other disciples of Ramananda like Sena – the barber, Dhanna – a Jat carried forward the Rama bhakti of Ramananda.

Tulsidasas (1532 – 1623) seventh in descent from Ramananda carried forward the doctrine of Rama bhakti. He composed the Hindi Ramayana. Moreover, he believed in image and worshipped Rama-Sita as his lord. His Rama-charitamanas were a great literature of bhakti. It propagated that by chanting the name of Rama, one could be relieved from the worldly sufferings. His Ramacharitmanas is a book of every household of North India. He believed Rama as an incarnation of God. Moreover, believed that man can attain the union of god through bhakti or devotion.

Jayadeva one of the bhakti poet of 12th century wrote Gitagobinda. He was a worshipper of Radha-Krishna cult. Chaitanya, the bhakti poet of eastern India was greatly influenced by his Radha-Krishna bhakti.

Nanak (1469 – 1538) a great exponent of the bhakti cult of Pubjab promulgated the philosophy of monotheistic doctrine. Nanak reacted against the caste system, as such; his disciples include Hindus, Muslims and untouchables. He believed in the doctrine of karma and transmigration of soul. He believed in universal brotherhood and wanted all people to live harmoniously. He tried to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims. He used both Hindu and Muslim name of god like Rama, Gobinda, Hari, Murari, Rub, Rahim. “Nanak consider himself to be the prophet of god, who received from his door steps the signs (aitan),the chapters (surahs) and the tradition(hadith)of the

Nanak maintained that people should not be judge by his caste but from his devotion to lord. He started free community kitchen ‘Guru ka langar’ where every person irrespective of caste could eat together. This was his attempt to unite all people into one fold and assimilate them together in one platform. He believed in formless god and reacted against the images and idol worship. He believed that morality, humility, honesty, charity, truth and mercy were the greatest quality a person should posses. He considered that the main duty of Sikhs was to give alms, chant the name of lord and to obey the teachers (propagator) wholeheartedly by body and mind. He propagated chanting the name of lord and repeating his name frees one from sufferings of life. His poems and songs were later compiled and were published as Adi-Grantha. Sikkhism did not become a religion during his lifetime, but his later apostles made it a religion. The followers of this religion were known as Sikh. Adi-Granth became their main book. He made Angad, one of his disciples as the teacher of his faith to succeed him.

Vallabacharya (1479 – 1531) was a great exponent of bhakti cult of Krishna. He propagated suddhavaita or pure monoism. His three important works were Vedanta – sutra-anubhsya, the Subodhini’s commentary on the Bhagavata Purana and Jattva-di-pa-nibandha. He worshipped Krishna in the name of Srinathji. His philosophy was based on personal god. He considered Krishna as the highest Brahmana, Purushotamma and Paramananda, ie greatest of all which gives joy. He propagated that bhakti developed in seven stages viz bhava, prema, pranaya, sneha, raga, anuraga and vyas and for Krishna. He brought in the theory of passionate love in the bhakti movement. There were many followers in his movement. His followers were married man and mainly the rich people of Gujrut and Rajasthana. The teachers of this sect are married man and led worldly lives. They followed the commentary of Vallabhacharya as their main scripture.

Chaitanya (1486 – 1533) the eastern bhakti poet worshipped the cult of Radha-Krishna. Chaitanya’s philosophy became popular among the common masses of Bengal and Orissa. Chaitanya was influened by the doctrines of Nimbikara, Vishnuswami, poetry

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41. Rasid A.(1969), Society and Culture in Medieval India, Firma K. L, Mukhopadhyay, 6/1A, Dhiren Dhar Sarani, Calcutta, p.250
42. Mazumder A.K. Bhakti Renaissance,Bharatiya Vidy Bhavan, Calcutta, p. 23
of Jayadeva, Candidasa and Vidyapala. He believed in the philosophy of sravana and kirtana as the highest form of devotion (bhakti) to lord. He elevated the love of Radha-Krishan to a spiritual level in contrast to Vallabhacharya. Chaitanya believed in devotion to God through song and dances. Moreover, he maintained that one should follow the path of bhakti with the help of a guru. Chaitanya could not break the barrier of caste system, but accepted the lower caste people as his devotee. Two important followers of Chaitanya was Rup Goswami (1490-1563) and Sanatan Goswami (1488-1558). And they were the main proponents who propagated the doctrines of Chaitanya and made them popular. The two followers of Chaitanya Syamananda and Rasikananda preached the bhakti philosophy in Orissa.

Chaitanya did not organize any sect, but after his death, his followers organized his teaching and made themselves the follower of his sect. The six principle followers of Chaitanya known as six Goswamis of Vrindabana have molded the doctrines of Chaitanya into a definite fold and called it Chaitanyaism. The Vrindabana Goswamis considered Chaitanya as their preacher. However, the disciples of Navadvipa began to consider Chaitanya as an incarnation of Krishna and later as Radha-Krishna. In growing years, Chaitanya was worshipped as Gauranga Maha Prabhu.

Surdasa flourished in the later half of the 16th century. In early years, he was a follower of Vallabha sect. He was an ardent follower of Krishna cult specially child-Krishna. His three major works Sursagar, Sursarawali, Sahityaratna describes the incarnations of Krishna. The main scripture of his bhakti was Bhagavata Purana. He uses brajabhasa in scripting his literature. He also used hindi in propagating his doctrine.

Namadeva, Eknatha, Tukarama were bhakti saints of Maharashtra. Before Namadeva, Jnaneswara propagated the faith of bhakti among the common people with his Jnaneswari, based on the Bhagavata Purana. Namadeva belonged to late 13th century or early 14th century. He composed a number of abhangas, which were now compiled in

43. Neog M.(ed),(1982), Bhakti Ratnakara of Sankara Deva and History of the concept of Bhakti, Punjab University, Patiala, p. 58.
Adi Granth of Sikh. In his poetry, the influence of Islam is observed. Namadeva was a nirguna bhakti poet. Namadeva was against the caste system and idol worship. He believed in the devotion to god as the ultimate way to attain the spiritual bliss. People from the lower caste got attracted to his movement. Even, there was also few Muslim who was converted to his faith. Ekanatha (1608 AD) was against the caste system. He composed poetry in Maratha and he followed Bhagavata Purana. He wrote Haripatha, a collection of twenty-six abhangas. Tukarama was a contemporary of Shivaji. He was responsible for creating Maratha nationalism. His devotion was to a formless god and believed that God is present everywhere. Tukarama believed in kirtana and sang songs in praise of Lord. He believed that God is both visible and invisible. The bhakti saints of Maharashtra worshipped Viththala of Pandharpur  

The philosophers of Karanataka propagated the Dasa schools of bhakti. They wrote poems and songs in Kannad language. They praised the Lord Krishna and Viththala. The songs of the bhakti poets became the classical songs (raga based). The Dasa bhakti poets were mainly the followers of Madhabacharya’s philosophy.

Sankaradeva (1449 – 1568 AD) was a bhakti saint of Assam. He considered Sravana and Kirtana as the highest form of bhakti. He was a devotee of two incarnation of Vishnu – Rama and Krishna. He believed in formless god. His Ek-Sarana – Nama – Dharma brought about a revolution in the life of the people residing in the region. The Bhagavata – Purana is the main scripture of his religion. He used brajawali language to compose his poems, songs and dramas.

2.2 Concept of bhakti

The main book of the bhakti concept that emerged in the medieval India was Bhagavata Purana. The bhakti is the devotion to personal God based against the dogmatic rituals of the brahmanas and against the caste discrimination. It became one of the many paths of spiritual realization. It points to the relationship of human being with

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44 Neog M.(ed), opcit, p.54
God in the manner of enthusiastic congregational and the religion it describes. It also indicates the love, sharing, worship and devotion. The bhaktas serve this purpose and transcends this feeling with other and thus it became a movement by making people embrace this new and simple religion to unify with the lord.

The Vaishnavites did not start the bhakti movement that originated in south but a group of lower class people referred as Alwar in Tamil country. The main theme of this group was to show devotion (bhakti) to God through music and dance. The bhakti poets refer that through devotion one could attain the bliss of the supreme deity. One does not need to follow elaborate rituals to attain his blessings. Moreover, through bhakti one could attain liberation from this world. They emphasized on the importance of good company, service to the devotees, devotion to god, and devotion to the preacher. The Alwar bhakti poets were monotheists and were worshippers of Vishnu, Krishna and Rama. Vishnu was Vasudeva and Narayana. They considered lord eternal, endless and imperishable. He is the soul of the universe. He is also omnipresent, infinite and immeasurable. Their songs were based on the child activities of Krishna. They maintained that the service to the bhaktas was a part of the service to the lord. As they themselves were from the lower section, thus they could attract the people from the lower section, and preached the concept of devotion to them. The main concept of their devotion towards lord is self-surrender (prappati). It indicates that there is no restriction in knowledge, social status, observance etc. The Alwar poets while wandering from one place to another made the temples their base for preaching their doctrines. They gave services to the temples and advised their followers to do the same. And along with it, they advocated the recitation of the lord’s name and the meditation on his personal forms.

There are nine forms of bhakti, which includes Sravana, Kirtana, Smarana, Archana, Padasevana Dasya, Sakhitatva, Bandhan and Deh-Arpana. Among all these nine forms, the bhaktas (the philosophers) considered sravana, kirtana as the best but the

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45. Hawley J. and Juergensymeyer M.(2004), Songs of the Saints of India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 4
46. Neog M.(ed),(1982), Bhakti Ratnakara of Sankaradeva And Hisory of the concept of Bhakti, Punjab University, Patiala,p.34

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dasya bhakti was also observed in their devotion to the lord. The bhaktas along with their devotion to the lord also pays devotion to their teachers or propagators. The bhaktas were also divided into four divisions viz prakrita, madhyama, uttama and mahaBhagavata. The bhaktas are divided again into Virakta and Abirakta bhakta\(^\text{47}\). The bhakti poet utters their innermost devotion to lord without any selfish reason.

Devotion to one personal God is a feature of the bhakti movement. Vishnu is regarded as the prime deity along with his two incarnations Rama and Krishna. The bhakti movement simplified the elaborate rituals and customs. The bhakti philosophers preached that by chanting the name of the lord one could attain the spiritual bliss. The bhakti poets however can be divided into nirguna and saguna bhaktas. Kabir, Nanak, Sankaradeva and the like are the believers of formless divinity. Tulsidas, Mirabai, Chaitanya and the like are the believers of idols. They worshipped the idol images of Radha-Krishna or Rama, Krishna, but they do not follow the elaborate and rigid rituals of worship. But along with it, believed in chanting the name of the lord. Tulsidas was a devotee of Rama, Mirabai –Krishna and Chaitanya Radha-Krishna.

The bhakti poets rose above the caste system though it cannot be generalised. Nanak and Kabir believed in universal brotherhood and even wanted to bridge the gap between Hindu and Muslims. Sankaradeva also had a Muslim disciple Chandsai who was a weaver. They also referred the Brahman supremacy but it also cannot be generalized. Tulsidas was a Brahmin himself. Ekanatha, the Maharastrian bhakti saint was a Brahmin but rejected the caste system.

The interesting characteristics of this movement were that the bhakti poets used vernacular language to compose their poems, songs and literature. The Alwars used the Tamil languages to script their poems and praise their lord. Ramananda used Hindi as a medium to propagate his doctrine. The North Indian bhakti poets used Avadhi and Bhoj to compose their literature. In Eastern India, the bhakti poets used Brajawali language to

propagate their doctrine. The bhakti poets used music in the form of songs or poems to propagate their faith. The main theme of all the songs of the bhakti poets are uselessness of life, introspection of self, birth and death, friendship, betrayal and other human senses. They composed their poem in humble submission to lord and guru.

_Bhakti_ is oral poetry, orature\(^48\), signify the use of vernacular language, regional language (and the expression of faith by chanting the name of God by submitting himself humbly to God. Gita refers to union with God through bhakti yoga. In addition, it can be achieved by meditating about the lord, dedicating his action and finally by surrendering to God.

Shankaracharya defined _bhakti_ as _jnana-nistha_. His philosophy was _Advaitavedanta_ and belief in impersonal God. He propagated the theory of an “attribute less and unconditioned Brahmana”\(^49\). Sankaracharya emphasized on the reality of the Nirguna brahmana. He considered that the world, which looks real, was actually metaphysical. It is nothing but mere illusion created by the ignorance of the individual. “The believer in _the Advainta Vedantist_ never felt the need of a creator or god”\(^50\). They believed that god is attributeless, indeterminate Brahman. It maintained that salvation consists in the knowledge of this reality. The mode of attaining liberation was through knowledge. He propagated that salvation can be attained by _gyan_ (knowledge). He based his doctrine from the Upanishads and Gita.

In oppose to Shankaracharya’s _Advaitabad_, a new tradition emerged sensing a love to personal god with the system of Vedanta propagated by Ramaniya, Nimbaditya, Madhaba and Vallabacharya. They propagated the four main school of Vaishnavism\(^51\). Nathumani the great Vaishnava scholar can be regarded as the founder of Ramanuja School. Yamunacharya shaped the theory and philosophy of Ramanuja School. These

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\(^48\) Dilip Chitre uses the term while working in the Varkari tradition of Maharashtra.
\(^49\) Rasid A. (1969), _Society and Culture in Medieval India_, Firma K. L, Mukhopadhyay, 6/1A, Calcutta, Dhiren Dhar Sarani, p. 241
\(^50\) Lal B.K.(1973), _Contemporary Indian Philosophy_, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. p.93
\(^51\) Saikia N.(ed).(2010), _Bezbaroa-Rachanavali_, Vol II, Baroda lecture of Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Banalata, Guwahati, p.592
philosophies were based on the *Pancharatra Tantra*. Ramanacharya was the founder of the Vishistadvaita. He rejected the philosophy of *Advaitabad* of Sankaracharya. He wrote *Sri Bhasya* on the Vedanta sutra and considered Vishnu or Narayana as the supreme and the sole lord. His non-dualism philosophy maintains that god alone exists but considers the attributes of god as real and permanent.

Ramanuja is considered as the link between north and south Indian *bhakti* movement. The north Indian *bhakti* movement saw the emergence of the *bhakti* movement with regional variations. Along with the emergence of nirguna and saguna *bhakti* saints, bhaktas of Rama, Krishna, and Radha-Krishna emerged. Ramananda a disciple of Ramanuja was responsible for transforming the faith propagated by the south Indian bhaktas to a movement. Ramananda worshipped Rama and was against the caste system. Ramananda had twelve disciples from the lower caste; Ravidasa was a cobbler, Pipa a Rajput, Dhanna a Jat, Kabir, a weaver, Sen a barber. Nabhadji, a disciple from fishing community of Ramananda wrote *Bhaktimala*.

Tulsidas also belonged to the Ramanada sect and wrote Hindi Ramayana. Jayadeva authored *Gita-Govinda*. The main god of Jayadeva was Radha-Krishna. There were several sub sects of Ramananda’s doctrine like Khaki, Molukdasi, and Dadupanthis. These *bhakti* saints were devotee of Rama and Sita and believed in chanting of lords’ name. Ravidasa, Sen, all formed their own separate sect.

Brahmasampradaya founded by Madhavacharya’s gave right to brahmanas. The *Sanyasis* become the teacher or propagator of the faith. They followed the caste system. Their philosophy acknowledged *Dvaitabad* and believed in separate entities of *jiva* and *brahma*. The follower of this sect is known as *Madhavi*.

Vallabhacharya founded the Rodrasampradaya. His doctrines is known as *pustimarga*. His ideology was that *bhakti* depends on grace, and that there should be

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52. Saikia N.(ed), *ibid*, p.592
absolute surrender to god i.e. Krishna. He maintained that bhakti increases by renunciation, listening to bhakti literature and chanting the lord’s name and maintain that bhakti is greater than knowledge. The followers of this sect worshipped child Krishna. He considered Krishna as the highest Brahma, Purusottama and Paramananda. He propagated that one could attain union with the Supreme Being through devotion or bhakti. One gets so engrossed in devotion to lord, that they could visualize the activities of Krishna playing in Vrindabana with the gopis. The main scripture of this sect is Barta. Their philosophy did not believe in hard fasting rituals of Hinduism rather believed that one could attain spirituality by enjoying all the luxuries of life. They followed Gopala, Krishna and Radha. The bhaktas and philosophers were involved in trade and business. The rich people of Gujrat and Malwa were follower of this sect. The Vaishnava leaders enjoyed all the luxuries of life and the disciples gave the gurus not only the materialistic things but also body, soul and wealth. The head of the sect was referred to as ‘Maharaja’. Under the successors of Vallabhacharya his bhakti movement degenerated. Radha-krishna worshipped turn into idolatrous worship.

Mirabai was also a founder of a sect of Vaishnavism. She was a devotee of Krishna.

Nimbaditya founded the fourth sampradaya. The follower of his sect was known as Nimat. They worshipped Krishna and Radha. The main scripture of this sect was Bhagavata Purana. From the philosophy of Nimbaditya two separate subsects emerged from two of his disciples Kesav Bhatta and Harivasya.

Guru Nanak propagated a monotheistic doctrine of nama (name) and bhakti. His bhakti philosophy was reflected by taking the name of lord and the grace of god (najar, bakhsis, kripa, prasad, daya). Through god’s grace, the votary is brought to the way who

54. Saikia N.(ed),opcit, p. 597
into the lord, namely the lord’s name, which is but the lord, beyond whom there is nothing\textsuperscript{55}.

In Maharashtra, Gujrat and Karnataka and central India a sect Vithalibhaktas were famous. Pundalik founded the sect in 14\textsuperscript{th} century. Their concept was the love between worship and worshipper. This sect is also known as Buddha Vaishnavas.

Chaitanya sampradaya was influenced by the teachings of Madhavacharya. Jayadeva’s \textit{Gita-Govinda} and the \textit{Maithali} poet Vidyapati greatly influenced the \textit{bhakti} poetry of Chaitanya. He was an ardent devotee of Radha-Krishna legend. His poems reflected the \textit{madhura rasa}, the longing of the maidens (\textit{gopis}) for the return of Krishna. Chaitanya preached faith of one Supreme Being whom he referred as Krishna or Hari. His \textit{bhakti} movement was devoid of any ritualism and believed in chanting the name of the lord. He asked his followers to worship the lord through songs and dances, to felt the presence of god. He preached that one could find Krishna; if one adores Krishna, follow his teachings. If one does so, he will be freed from the illusion of this world and attain spiritual bliss at lord’s feet. Chaitanya laid emphasis on the inner and esoteric way of realization, which could be attained, with the help of a preacher. His followers considered him as an incarnation of Krishna.

2.3 Regional Variations:

The medieval India \textit{bhakti} cult became a movement with the common people embracing the new religion. The whole of the country including the northern, southern, western and eastern India united in one fold of \textit{bhakti} movement and it became a pan Indian phenomenon. A Sanskrit verse describes the journey of \textit{bhakti} movement in India that \textit{bhakti} took birth in Dravidian language, ripened in Karnataka, came to womanhood in Maharasta, and crone – like in Gujarat and reaching Vrindavana she re-emerged as a nubile young woman. The \textit{bhakti} movement has five distinct linguistion and cultural

\textsuperscript{55} Neog M.(ed), (1982), \textit{Bhakti Ratnakara of Sankara Deva and History of the concept of Bhakti}, Punjab University, Patiala, p.61
zones viz Tamil Nadu, Karanataka, Maharashtra and Gujrat and Vrindavan. The movement, which developed into different regions, had its own uniqueness. Moreover, even the bhakti poets of same region has its own philosophy and mode of propagating their faith. However, two unique characteristics of the bhakti poet was the use of vernacular language and music like poem and song as a medium to propagate their faith.

The element of bhakti first emerged in south India group of poets composed their poems and songs in praise of Vishnu and wandered around temples and temples singing and dancing. They were the Alwars. They composed their songs in Tamil. Their work prabandham has 4000 verses. There were twelve Alwar poets all belonging to the lower caste except one Brahmin and one woman Andal. They were not against the Vedas. The Alwars were called as spirit and mad-being because in their self forget fullness and divine vision, they laughed, wept, and danced and sang as if they have lost their senses, and were god absorbed they enamored and wandered from one place to another singing in praise of Vishnu. The songs of the Alwars emphasized on chanting the name of the lord rather than on rituals. The age of Alwar is also referred as the Age of Intution. They sang the activities of child Krishna and believed that the service to bhaktas was a service to Lord. The Acharyas, a class of Brahmin, preached the teachings and concepts of Alwar. They translated the concept of Alwar into Sanskrit and spread it among the people. The Acharys considered the prabandham of Alwar at par with the Vedas and accepted the Tamil language. In Sri Rangam temple, the Prabandhams of Alwar were recited as religious scripture. The use of Tamil language by the Acharyas made it more close to the common people. The age of Acharyas was referred to as the age of reason.

In the bhakti movement of Tamil land, it is observe that the Alwars did not denounce the supremacy of Brahmanas or was against the caste system. However, it was

59. Murthy H.V.S., ibid,p.19
a reaction against Buddhism and Jainism. Among the Acharyas, Ramanuja though could not break the caste barriers maintained that the Shudras and lower caste could also attain liberation by surrendering themselves to God. He also, maintained that the liberation could also be attained with the help of a preacher. Ramanuja provide the solid base to the *bhakti* movement with a philosophical ideology of Vaishnavism. The *bhakti* of South India was in a manner was to establish the Brahmanistic tradition. All the Acharya philosophers used Sanskrit as the medium to compose their *bhakti* doctrines. They followed the supreme principle of the Upanishads. Two *bhakti* poets of South India, Madhavachary and Vishnuswamis brought in the element of Radha to the movement. Through Madhavacharya was from south his centre of activity was Vrindabana, the land of Krishna. He considered Radha as the mistress of Krishna or was recognized as the favorites among all other maidens. Both the philosophers depended on the *Bhagavata Purana* in their philosophies. However, they brought the element of Radha, a new mode of devotion to the *bhakti* movement. Radha is observed in a more prominent manner, in the sects of Vallabhacharis and Chaitanaites.

In Karnataka, the Dasa saints propagated the *bhakti* movement. They could reject the social and caste distinctions and included all sections of people in their movement. The earliest Dasa *bhakti* poets were Sripadaraja, Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa. Kanakadasa was of low birth and considered *bhakti* as the supreme. The greatest gift of the Karnataka *bhakti* movement was the development of the Carnatic classical music. Puranadaradasa is considered as the father of it. The Dasa saints expressed their love towards God Krishna through music and dance. The Dasa saints did not worship Radha. Sripadaraja composed *Bhramargeet*, *Benugeet* and *Gopigeet*. Jagannath dasa composed ‘*Harikathamritsar*’. Tipamma Dasa and Maddhavadasa made the Vaishnava music popular in their vernacular language.

Jnaneswara, an outcaste Brahmin, stated the *bhakti* movement in Maharashtra. The Mysticism of Maratha *bhakti* began with him. Namadeva was a tailor. He rejected the

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caste system and worship of idol. He insisted on chanting the name of Govinda, Ekanatha a Brahmin by birth also rejected the caste system. His Haripatha, a collection of twenty-six abhangas reflected monism and mystic experience. Tukaram, the shudra shopkeeper wrote abhangas. The hymns of Tukaram had great significance in the Maratha country. They played a great role in spreading the bhakti movement. Namadeva, Tukarama were great bhakti philosophers, who did not formulate any philosophy. There love towards God was sincere devotion to him. The bhakti poets of Maharashtra were devotee of Vithoba. The bhakti poets of Maharashtra rejected the caste system and believed in devotion to God as the main medium to attain spiritual bliss of Almighty. The bhakti movement of Maharastra brought in a revolution. There were sprout of bhakti literature in vernacular language. It developed the nationalism in Maratha country. The position of the low caste or shudras increased.

In Gujrat, Narasimha Mehta (1450-80) led the bhakti movement. He was a devotee of Radha-Krishna. His songs compiled in Suratasamgraha expresses the love of Radha-Krishna Sahaja-nanda (1780 AD) founded the Swami Narayani sect in Gujarat. He rejected the caste system and accepted the lower caste people as his disciple. He also followed the universal brotherhood and accepted Muslim as his disciple. Both the madhura-bhava and advaita-tatta was found in the philosophy of Narasimha Mehta.

The growth of bhakti in North successfully reacted against the Islamic challenge and social system of Hindus as the language to propagate their faith. In North India, the religious life saw the clashes of the Hindus and Muslims. The mullahs and the Brahmin priest were trying to establish their own religious supremacy. In this atmosphere, Sufism and bhakti movement grew parallelly. Ramananda first used Hindi as the medium to compose his songs and literatures. This made the common people to relate with the bhakti philosophy. More and more common people accepted this new path and became disciples of Ramananda. It also led to the growth of literature in Hindi. Ramananda accepted the lower caste and women as his disciple. His disciple Kabir considered bhakti

as the best medium to attain salvation. He rejected the caste system and believed in the unity of Hindu and Muslim. His *dohas* in Hindi greatly appealed the common people. His *dohas* criticized the prevailing social structure. The Kabir *panthis* continued the tradition of their disciple. The *bhakti* movement of Kabir also inspired Sankaradeva. Kabir also influenced another north India saint Nanak. He too rejected the caste system and believed in the unity of Hindu – Muslims. His philosophy gradually shaped into a religion ‘Sikhism’ by his later disciples. He established gurudwara’s for religious discourses. Tulsiidasa too composed his poetry in Hindi, and in the reason behind his large group of followers. His *Rama-Charitmanas* is still a prized possession of every household of North India.

The *bhakti* saints as Surdasa used Brajabhasa to compose his poems. The main reason for using this language was to make the people connect with the doctrine of the movement. *Braja* is the language of Krishna’s land Vrindavana, and the *bhakti* movement revolves around the incarnation of Vishnu-Rama and Krishna.

The *bhakti* saints of eastern India i.e. Assam, Bengal and Orissa used brajawali language to compose their literature, poems and songs. Sankaradeva was the first eastern poet to use this language. Chaitanya too used this artificial language to compose his songs. The main reason for using the language is to connect their movement with the land of Krishna. Sankaradeva rejected the caste system and even had Chandsai a Muslim as his disciple. Chaitanya could not reject the caste system. He accepted the people of lower caste as his disciples but no Muslim devotee of him is known so far. Sankaradeva was influenced by Sridhas Swami’s *tikka* on Bhagavata. The advaita theory is seen in the philosophy of Sankaradeva. The pada “*Tumara Advaita Rup/Param Ananda Pada/ Tate Mur Magna Hauk Sitta* (your beauty in incomparabale, it gives pleasure and my mind be involved in you). However, in Chaitanyas philosophy, Radha element is the most prominent. The Nimbarites, Vishnuswamis and Vallabacaries influenced him.

Chaitanya was ardent devotee of Radha-Krishna. All his songs were written in praise of the lord. The movement started by these saints continues to attract a large group
of people. Umapati, Vidyapati the Mithali poets used brajawali language that was a mix of Maithali and Avahatta dialect to compose their lyrics.

The *bhakti* movement as a whole is considered in a homogenous spirit. Though the whole of India witnessed a major reformative change in religion and social outlook, the approach of all *bhakti* saints differed from one another. The main theme of *bhakti* movement was to glorify one personnel god, i.e. Vishnu. The Vaishnavism witnessed the worship of his two incarnations Ram, Krishna, Ram-Sita and Radha Krishna. Guru Nanak, Kabir, Sankaradeva, Ravidasa believed in worshipping god in formless. But Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabai, Chaitanya advocated image worship. Surdas was a devotee of child Krishna and his various activities. Narashima Mehta was worshipper of erotic Radha-Krishna whereas Sankaradeva believed in *dasabhava*. Guru Nanak, Kabir preached the doctrine of universal brotherhood where few other *bhakti* poets could not rise above the caste system, like Tulsidas who upheld the supremacy of the brahmanas and upheld the caste system.

It is difficult to distinguish them into regional variations. However, the *bhakti* poet of the same region used the same language to propagate their faith. Sankaradeva and Chaitanya used *brajawali* language to compose their poems. However, where Sankaradeva believed in formless god and never mentions Radha in any of his literature, Chaitanya was a devotee of Radha-Krishna legend. His poems and songs reflected the love of Radha-Krishna. In north India too all the *bhakti* poets preached their devotion in a common language Hindi. However, though the main devotee was Vishnu, Krishna and Rama, the *bhakti* poets believed in their own lord like Tulsidas in Rama, Surdas in SriKrishna, Mira in Girdharilal. In south India, the Alwars were pure devotee whereas Acharyas were scholars who founded their own philosophical school. The Alwars composed their songs in Tamil whereas the Acharyas sanskritized them, though not rejected the Tamil language. The Maharastrian poets mainly belonged to the lower caste whereas Eknatha, a Brahmin *bhakti* poet completed rejected the caste system. The Dasa *bhakti* movement of Karnataka could not become an organized faith with no converts. However, the movement gave India the Carnatic classical music. The Vallabhacharya
movement attracted the rich people of Gujarat and Rajasthan. The movement of Kabir, Ravidas, and Surdas attracted the common people.

The Bhakti movement should be understood in broader context following the philosophy of each individual saint differently. It was a reaction against the prevailing rites and rituals against the prevailing social order. The common element was that all the bhakti saints were devotees of Vishnu and spread their faith with the help of music. The bhakti movement was a phenomenon that grew in the whole of Indian sub-continent from the period of 14-16th century. This period witnessed the bhakti philosophers who reacted against the ritual ridden religious life and overburdened caste system. The movement saw its growth in south with the Alwar poets and a philosophical development with the Acharyas. However, the period of Indian history, which can be considered as the period of the bhakti movement, starts with Ramananda in 14th century. The concept of bhakti movement i.e. devotion to the personal god was essentially a Hindu concept with its root in the Rig-Veda. However, the Islamic influence in the devotion to one god cannot be ignored. The bhakti movement can be observed from two perspectives: as a reformation movement, i.e. to reform the evils in the Hindu society especially in the religious life and social order. In addition, to establish a harmony between the Hindus and Muslims. However, in both the perspective there cannot be generalization. Few bhakti saints like Kabir, Nanak, Namadeva and the like wanted to make reform in the society by disregarding the caste system. They wanted a unity of the people following both the religion. Nevertheless, Tulsidas, Chaitanya strictly adhered to the caste system and want to maintain the sanctity in the social order. It can be observed that though a few Muslim converts are found as disciple of Kabir, Namadeva, Sankaradeva, but there was not a large group of Muslim converts. Among the bhakti philosophers, it is observed that though all of them were the followers of Vaishnavism, their main deity varied from Rama, Krishna, Narayana, Lakshmi-Narayana, Radha-Krishna, Rama- Sita, Vithoba, Girdharilal and so on. Bhakti saints like Kabir, Nanak, Ravidasa and the like were the believers of nirguna (formless) god. Moreover, a few others like Mirabai, Surdas, Tulsidas were believers of saguna (with form).
It is also observed that few of the bhakti saints were philosophers but few others were devotee of high order. They never established any school of philosophy. The Acharyas, Ramanuja, Nimbikara, Vallabacharya, Madhavacharya were founder of their own religious school. However, Kabir, Chaitanya, Surdasa, Tulsidas never established any school. However, it can be said that all the bhakti saints aimed at improving the life of the people in a spiritual way. Moreover, they used the vernacular languages instead of Sanskrit and used music as the medium to propagate their faith.