

GCE A LEVEL

Eduqas A-LEVEL  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Theme 4D:  
Bhakti Movement

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## Glossary Key Terms

**Bhakti** - meaning 'devotion'. In bhakti traditions it is believed that love of God is the path to moksha (liberation).

### Other useful terms

**mukti** - liberation of the jiva (living being or atman) from samsara, to connect with Bhagavan (Lord).

**dualism** - the belief that Atman and Brahman are separate.

**Saguna Brahman** - God with form or physical attributes.

**sewa** - charity, helping those in need

**Shaiva bhakti** - devotion to Shiva.

**yatra** - pilgrimage

**Vaishnava bhakti** - devotion to Vishnu.

**marga** - 'pathway', the word is sometimes used instead of yoga.

**yoga** - the word means to join, or yoke together. It is believed that yoga is a pathway in which you will join your atman to the divine.

## Origin of the movement

According to the Gita, the purpose of human life is to realize God, and until this is done the atman cannot escape samsara. A person's atman will be creating more karma, whether good (punya) or bad (papa). This is like a bank account, if a person gains more punya, then they potentially can be liberated from the curse that is samsara and get to moksha. There are many ways in which to gain punya, whether it be following your dharma or yogic pathways, which were traditionally Jnana (knowledge of God), Karma (good actions) and Raja (the Royal Pathway of meditation). We are first told about another yoga by Krishna (an avatar of Vishnu); he told Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita a person deep desires of mukti or moksha will be given to them if they truly love and worship Krishna. This kind of love is called bhakti in Sanskrit. However, to have this devotion without understanding Krishna's nature is not enough. In the end, to attain this goal, Arjuna must have devotion and understand that it is Krishna's universal aspect that he loves. He will then attain the eternal immortal state. Chapter 9v 26-28 in the Bhagavad Gita highlights the idea that if you give divine offerings you will be free from the bondage of samsara and reach mukti. Mukti is liberation of the atman (jiva) to be with Bhagavan (lord). This is obviously highlighting a dualist understanding of atman (jiva) and Brahman (Bhagavan). The Bhakti movement is mainly dualist, believing that the atman or jiva is separate from Brahman (Bhagavan). Therefore, this practice mostly follows the understanding of Brahman as Saguna, Brahman with attributes, so to direct their focus of devotion. However, we must remember many Hindus don't just follow one type of Yoga, like most Hindus, they pick different aspects of different yogas and dharmas, to aid them in their own personal, pluralistic pathway. (Link back to AS Theme 2a Brahman and Atman, focusing on Dvaita Vedanta, Madhava).

Key quote: *"Whatever you do, or eat, or give, or offer in adoration, let it be an offering to me; and whatever you suffer, you suffer it for me. Thus thou shalt be free from the bonds of karma which yield fruits that are evil and good; and with thy soul one in renunciation thou shalt be free and come to me."* (Bhagavad Gita 9v 26-28)

The concept of Bhakti was revolutionary for its time. The main pathway within the Upanishads was jnana yoga (the path of seeking knowledge of Brahman) and the use of Vedic rituals, only open to males within the top 3 Varnas (castes) who had completed their Upanyana Ceremony (Sacred Thread Ceremony). Therefore, making a pathway to moksha/mukti very difficult for lower castes, untouchables and women. The Bhagavad Gita 9v32, combats this issue *"For whoever makes me his heaven, based on how he may be, Yes, women too, and artisans, even serfs - theirs it is to tread the highest way."*

Jamison: *“The final major Theme in the Bhagavad Gita is one that is absent from the Upanishads. This is the idea of Bhakti: that liberation can be achieved simply by loving Krishna, whose love for mankind is such that he dispenses liberation as an act of undeserved grace, removing karma from actions that are offered to God. Krishna speaks in detail about Bhakti, urging it as the best route to liberation.”*

Jamison, I., ‘Hinduism’, Philip Allan Updates, (2006), ISBN:1844894207.

Even though bhakti might seem an easy pathway, it is not the case because the Bhagavad Gita 16v1-3 explains the idea of servitude, compassion and purity. This illustrates that it is not just going to the Mandir and giving a deity an offering. This yoga requires their whole life to be a form of devotion to God. The word Bhatki derives from the word ‘bhaj’ meaning ‘attached to’ and showing complete surrender to their personal deity, whether it be Vishnu, Avatars (e.g. Krishna and Rama) or Shiva. The Bhagavad Gita requires the Bhakta or worshipper to surrender and devote all aspects of their life to their personal deity:

*“Be fearless and pure, never waver in your determination or your dedication to the spiritual life. Give freely. Be self-controlled, sincere, realize the truth of the scriptures; learn to be detached and to take joy in renunciation. Do not get angry or harm any living creature, but be compassionate and gentle, show good will to all. Cultivate vigour, patience, will, purity, avoid malice and pride. Then, Arjuna you will achieve your divine destiny.”*  
*Bhagavad Gita 16v1-3*

*“Bhakti Marga (yoga) was truly revolutionary because it allowed everyone even women and sudras, free access to moksha... if one’s whole life is lived as sacrifice offered to Krishna, then salvation is possible through the grace of a loving personal lord (Bhagavan).”* J. Smith

*Smith J. Edexcel Religious Studies, ‘Hinduism’, Pearson Education, (2006), ISBN:1846900018*

## Background

Bhakti dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century when the Bhagavad Gita was believed to be written. Jeaneane Fowler, in her commentary on the *Gita*, considers second century BCE to be the probable date of composition (Fowler, Jeaneane D (2011), 'The Bhagavad Gita: A Text and Commentary for Students', Eastbourne: Sussex Academy Press, (2011), ISBN:9781845195205). The Bhagavad Gita provided the scriptural guidance on how to obtain mukti. However, some may argue that within the Aryan time that the way offerings were made during the yagna sacrifice as shown in the original scriptures of the Yajur Veda, could be a form of collective Bhakti yoga. The Yagna sacrifice, was when a sacrificer would pay a Brahmana (priest) to perform the sacrifice to gain boons from the Gods. (refer back to Theme 1a, AS Hinduism)

The development and growth of Bhakti movement was in South India between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Century through the teachings of poets such as the Alvars. The word Alvars (means those who are immersed in god), were Tamil saints in south India, who created poems and songs which showed love and devotion to Vishnu. The Alvar or poets moved around India singing ecstatic mantras as they wandered mandir to mandir, giving their devotion to Vishnu. Also, the Nayanar who were Shaiva Bhaktas; whose hymns were created in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, promoted Bhakti as a form of devotional worship. They used Dravidian music (traditional south Indian Hindu Music) and incorporated it into Southern Indian mandir services. One of the most influential and popular Hindu Bhakti Saints was Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534). He renounced his life, focusing on complete devotion towards Krishna. According to many Vaishnavas (devotes of Vishnu) Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is believed to be an Avatar of Vishnu. Chaitanya stated that '*devotion to God clears the mirror of the mind.*' A Hindu sect came from Chaitanya's practices of Kritan (chanting the name of God), analysis of the Vedas and devotional services to Lord Krishna (sewa). Chaitanya copied the dancing and chanting that the gopis and Radha did with Krishna. The sect was called Gaudiya Vaishnavas, which later influenced the ISKCON movement. This movement of Bhakti has also influenced the Sikh religion; Guru Nanak practiced the idea of sewa (charity) and kritan (chanting the name of God).

## Bhakti maga (way of loving devotion)

The Bhagavad Gita was not the first time that the concept of bhakti was referred in the Mahabharata. In this scripture, Yudhishtira's (son of King Pandu and brother of Arjuna) dog was known as Bhakta, highlighting the element of complete devotion and loyalty to God. However, bhakti has such an eclectic mix of followers, there are some who just start by giving basic offerings of fruit or a flower, but there are others who offer their entire lives to devotion to their Bhagavan, whether it be Shiva or Vishnu. See below for the variety of followers (Bhava/Bhaktas) and worshippers.

### 5 Kinds of Bhava/Bhaktas (follower) in Bhakti:

- ★ **Shanta Bhava** - The worshipper is peaceful with heart filled with love and joy. Many would follow the practice of ahimsa. This is a less interactive bhakti that many people are used to when they understand this word, they won't dance or exhibit much emotion.
- ★ **Dasya Bhava** - The worshipper is the servant and aims to please Brahman by serving him. Any act, whether it be sweeping a mandir, cleaning the kitchen is an act of worship and servitude to Bhagavan. There are many of these types of bhavas in Ayodhya, Rama's hometown where they give complete allegiance to Rama.
- ★ **Sakhya Bhava** - God is regarded as a friend just like Arjuna and Krishna, in Bhagavad Gita. This highlights the complete devotion and love that is on a personal level rather than Advaita Vedanta. This relationship is clearly demonstrated in the Bhagavad Gita, where Arjuna felt comfortable enough to speak openly about worries and desires to Krishna on the battlefield, showing complete equality between God and the worshipper.
- ★ **Vatsalya Bhava** - Worshipper looks at Brahman as a child. Unconditional love for Brahman like a mother for their child. This Bhava treats Brahman with such compassion and love, caring for every human and living thing around them. Some may see this as being a father or mother to Krishna when he was younger. This makes people less selfish because parents themselves are altruistic when they care for their child.
- ★ **Madhurya Bhava** - This is believed to be the highest form of Bhakti, God is regarded as the worshippers' lover, they become one. This is not to be confused in a sexual way. They might look at the relationship with themselves and Bhagavan in the way Krishna and Radha had their connection. Some males take this even further and may dress and behave as women. They do numerous amounts of dancing like the gopis, eventually causing them to be exhausted.

## Kinds of Bhakti:

- ★ **Sakamya Bhakti** - this is a common form of Bhakti, as you are doing an act of devotion for something in return. It could be for the health of yourself or others.
- ★ **Nishkamya Bhakti** - the worshipper seeks to become one with God and receives wisdom/power from God. This Bhakti is the opposite of Samkamyā, as it does not seek to have a personal gain from God. Nishkamaya will do acts of selfless service or Sewa.
- ★ **Apara-Bhakti** - beginners yoga, offerings made to murti. The word apara means lower or inferior worship. This is the starting point do gradually move to Para-Bhakti, were the devote will grow in devotion to the Bhagavan
- ★ **Para-Bhakti** - highest form of Bhakti. Worshipper sees Brahman and feels his power everywhere. This Bhakti goes beyond worldly concerns and acts with complete selflessness, devotion and servitude. The practitioner with see to gain unity of God within themselves.

The kinds of bhaktas and the kinds of practices within bhakti highlight the diversity within the movement. Some bhaktas devote their whole lives to Bhagavan where as others merely do simple devotions for personal gain. Furthermore, there are differing focus of devotion, on who the Bhagavan (Lord) is. The two main popular pathways are Vaishnava Bhakti (loving devotion towards Vishnu) and Shaiva Bhakti (devotion towards Shiva). It looks at the intense love and devotion towards a main deity, in order to gain salvation, Mukti. These personal pathways for Hindus, focusing on feelings over formalised practices, making everything an act of loving devotion. Many believe that by chanting the name of God (kirtan) and bring God to your mind you will connect to Bhagavan. Bhakti marga movement (see above) demonstrate self-surrender and service to others and God. This movement has engaged not only Hindus in India, but Westerners (e.g. ISKCON) as it is a practice open to all; making no distinction between caste, gender or race. Hence this pathway is clearly the most popular pathway to moksha.

Key quote: *“The emphasis here is upon love. The deity loves the devotee, and the devotee should try as hard as possible to love the deity, in return for which the deity may remove the devotee’s karma and grant them Mukti.”* Jamison

Jamison, I. - Hinduism, (2006), Philip Allan Updates, ISBN:1844894207

## Vaishnava bhakti

Vaishnava is one of the most popular bhakti marga, seeing Vishnu, his consorts or one of his avatars as Bhagavan, the supreme Lord. This bhakti marga is monotheistic or dualist (Brahman and atman are separate), however it can be deemed as pantheistic (the universe as a manifestation of God). This has dated back to Vedic times where Vishnu was revered in yagna sacrifice. Some may worship a deity known as Satyanarayana, who is believed to be a combination of the Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). Furthermore, a Vishnavite might also worship the female consorts as a pathway, this is known as Shakti (cosmic energy, where the goddess responsible for creation and the physical forces in the universe) e.g. Lakshmi and her avatars (Sita and Radha). The focus on Vishnu is not only in the Vedas but prominent within the epics, where Rama (an avatar of Vishnu) is known as Purushatama (the perfect man) in the Ramayana and celebrated in the festival of Diwali (festival of lights). Additionally, Krishna reveals key teachings of Karma, Jana yoga, Dharma, Varna, and most importantly Bhakti, in the Bhagavad Gita. This emphasizes why these 3 key scriptures (Vedas, Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana) are central to worship and study.

Vasihavism is very devotional, focusing on ecstatic dancing and chanting the holy names of Rama and Krishna, which is known as kirtan. In mandirs they will congregate, doing kirtan, dharshan (seeing the murti in shrine), bhajan (reciting hymns from the Vedas) and aarti (worship using the 5 wicks). They might do the traditional Vedic practices of Havan as sited in Yajur Veda, where they give offerings to the fire god Agni. They can also private puja, by using mala (prayer beads) and dong nama japa, where the devotee will privately chant the name of God, using mala (prayer beads), making their day God focused. However, temple puja is far more elaborate, drawing many Vishnavas to the mandir, especially during Vishnavite festivals e.g. Divali and Holi. To a Vishnava Bhakti practioners, every action they do, should be an act of bhakti, even what they eat it should be devoted to Vishnu and become prashad.

A key belief is that upon death, if they have shown true devotion, they will reach Vaikunta (Vishnu's heavenly abode). The key idea is that the soul does not merge to Brahman like Advaita Vedanta but unites together.

### Appearance

The Vishnavite mark on their forehead visibly demonstrates their devotion to Vishnu. After their morning ritual of bathing and worship to Vishnu, they put 3 vertical lines on their forehead; the two white lines on the outside are known as Nama, representing the feet of Vishnu. The red line in the centre is known as Sricharanam and is the symbol of the goddess Lakshmi. This Vishnavite mark symbolises the complete devotion to their Bhagavan, with the head at the feet of Vishnu and Lakshmi.

## Vaishnavite Sects

### Madhava

Founded as a Dvaita Vedanta School of thought, or a Dharshana ( Dhashana – the 6 schools of thought is Hindu philosophy), believing in the concept that the atman and Brahman are separate. According to Madhava not all can obtain moksha or Vaikunta (Vishnu’s heavenly abode), some will have damnation. To get to Vaikunta you will have to have led a life of devotion, following the dharma and doing Bhakti yoga; giving offerings (puja) and doing sacrificial service (sewa).

*Dr G. Flood states about Madhava’s views “Liberation is the self’s enjoyment of its innate being, consciousness and bliss (satchitananda) which is a participation of the bliss of the Lord, attained through devotion (Bhakti) to an icon and the Lord’s grace.”*

*Flood, G.- An Introduction to Hinduism, Foundation Books, (2004), ISBN:8175960280*

### Gaudiya Vaishnavism

Gaudiya Vaishnavism is a sect that was established by Chaitanya (see above). The followers mirror the love between Krishna and Radha. They will do elaborate worship, prayers and dances in temples and in the streets. This group then influenced ISKCON, as shown in Theme 2A.

### The Swamiinarayans

This is a Krishna movement which has high moral codes of conduct, emphasising asceticism and devotion to God. They combine devotion by dharma and piety, living a life of purity by not having drugs and alcohol or eat any meat. They only eat a Sattvic diet (pure diet – vegetarian), so the mind is complete clean for people to realise the divine within. They believe by doing four things you will attain moksha; these are: dharma, moksha, Jnana yoga and detachment from the world. This practice is very similar to Samkhya yoga (see Theme 4B- Philosophical understandings of the nature and reality and religious experience found in Samkhya Yoga and Advaita Vedanta).

*J. Smith “Vaisnava traditions are more prevalent among European Indian communities and are more familiar in the west.”*

*Smith J. Edexcel Religious Studies, Hinduism, (2006), Pearsons Education, ISBN: 1846900018*

## Shaiva bhakti (loving devotion towards Shiva)

Shaivas (also known as Shaivites) are focused on Shiva as the Supreme God. This sect is mainly prevalent in Southern India and Sri Lanka. According to Shaivas all of the other gods, e.g. Krishna, Agni and Indra etc. are all mere expressions of the Supreme God, Shiva. Shiva cannot be limited to just murtis, but is within anything. One form that might seem unusual to the West is the lingam, which is a phallic object, symbolising both the universe and fertility, also denoting the female cosmic energy (Shakti) and the male deity of Shiva. Other forms which are observed are Rudra (Storm god) in the Vedas and Pashupata (Lord of the Animals) as shown in the Indus Valley Civilization. Shiva is seen a very ferocious image as Bhairava (frightful), showing his power to annihilate as part of the Trimurti. Many Hindus worship Shiva's consorts (Parvati, Durga and Kali) and his sons e.g. Ganesha and Murgan.

There are 5 beliefs or tenets of Shaiva Bhakti according to Lakulin (avatar of Shiva):

- 1) Karya - Jiva or atman is trapped in samsara
- 2) Karna- the promise that Shiva will redeem us from Samsara and aid us to Moksha
- 3) Yoga - ascetic practices to gain tapas (ascetic energy)
- 4) Vidhi - perform rituals to show devotion to Shiva
- 5) Dukhanta - final release of the atman from samsara and union with Shiva as Bhagavan.

Shaivites can worship in a temple, but also at home. They might have natural linga-shaped Salagramam (fossilized shell, used as an icon) stones, where they do puja and offer flowers or food, gaining prasada (blessed food) as part of worship. They will read or chant some of the Vedas that focus on praise of Shiva, as the god Rudra.. Many Shaivites bathe daily, to ritually purify themselves and afterward cover themselves with sacred ash from ghats (funeral pyres), as a sign of respect to Shiva Mahayogi. They may meditate in a quiet place, building up tapas (the inner fire, that is ignited by self-discipline), helping them gain a better understanding of the atman. The devotees use the syllable Aum as an aid to focus their raja yoga (meditation) and repeat the word Na-ma-si-va-ya (earth, water, fire air and sky), focusing upon every aspect of the human soul, universe and divine existence. They may use mala bead (prayer beads, that have 108 beads) and repeat Na-ma-si-va-ya. This can be recited at home and is known as japa yoga, the repetition of names.

Shaivite temples have Shiva specific Brahmins (priests) called Shivacaryas, therefore, Brahmins are not allowed to perform the worship in the Vimana (inner sanctum), as they are deemed not as holy. The holiest of the Shiva mandirs is the Nataraja (Lord of the Dance) Temple in Tamil Nadu. Even though Shiva is the main deity in the Nataraja Temple it also has deities dedicated to Shaktism (goddesses) and Vaishnavism (deities connected to Vishnu), illustrating the holistic nature of Shaivites. Benares (Varanasi) is the holiest place to perform

yatra as it is the home place of Shiva and Parvati; and where it is believed the beginning of the universe.

Shaivites also focus on Tantras, which are esoteric (secret teachings) traditions and mastering the natural world (prakriti). Some may learn this teaching by deep meditation, or Raja yoga. This was just how Shiva is shown in his images; one image, the Mahayogi, shows Shiva covered in ash, alone in the Himalayas meditating. Another time Shiva is completely involved in the world, dancing it into creation as shown by the Nataraja. Therefore, some Shaivites pollute cremation grounds and are anti-social or go into an ecstatic dance. They do all of these acts so show dominance over the environment, to enable them to realise self as divine. (see Shaivite sects below)

*“Some of the ecstatic tendencies of Shaivism are embodied in the mythology of the deity Shiva himself.”* Dr Flood.

Flood, G.- An Introduction to Hinduism, (2004), Foundation Books, (2004), ISBN:8175960280

## Appearance

Shaivites physical mark is 3 distinctive white horizontal lines, on the forehead, using ash. This symbol is known as Vibhooti, representing the 3 gunas: Sattva (purity or noble), Raja (energy or vibrant), Tamas (decay or laziness), illustrating the 3 parts of the physical world or prakriti.

## Shaiva sects

### Ati Marga

This is a pre-Vedic approach that has two subsects:

**Pashupatas:** The fellow disconnect from society completely and act inappropriately, so people in the community ignore and shy away from them. This gives a Shiava isolation, allowing them to focus completely on Shiva, without distraction. They might make jokes, dance erratically event taunt women, by making perverse jokes. They even might completely devote their time by standing on one leg for years as a way to connect Shiva.

**Kapalikas:** This sect is also anti-social; followers are usually living on the edge of society, naked and covered in ash from a funeral pyre collected the day before. Some may carry skulls around and use one as a begging bowl. To please Shiva, they might give blood, meat, alcohol or even bodily fluids as an offering to him. This sect is only in Benares and very rare to be seen anywhere else in India.

Dr Flood states “*Pasupatas seem to have been very much on the edges of orthodox householder society, going beyond the four stages (ashrama) to a fifth, ‘perfected stage’ (siddha Ashrama) and spurring Vedic householder injunctions on purity and family life.*”

Flood, G.- An Introduction to Hinduism, (2004), Foundation Books, (2004). ISBN:8175960280

### Vir-Shaivas or Veer Shaivas

Vira-Shaiva wear a small lingam around their neck, believing that it contains the real presence of Shiva, demonstrating his omnipresence. The Vira - Shaivas also emphasise the importance of a properly initiated guru, who has a clear understanding of Shiva. It is believed that by learning from a guru who is not initiated will not provide them with a true guide to enlightenment. Therefore, some of their worship focus on Shaiva sadhu's (holy men) or ascetics, believing them to be incarnations of Shiva (jangamas). Some may wash the feet of the jangamas, even treating the water as prashad; once they have cleaned the jangamas feet, the follower might even drink the water. Some may offer food to either the linga, a guru or a jangama. After the food is blessed by them, the congregation share the food among worshippers. They will also wear the vibohooti of Shiva (3 horizontal lines), made from burnt cow dung instead of cremation ashes. They might also do rudraksha, which is wearing very large mala beads and recite a mantra 'Om Nama Shivaya' or Na-Ma-Si-Va-Ya (see information above).

### Mantra Marga

**Mantra Marga** approach is more modern and practiced in the south of India and Sri Lanka. It is very similar to Vaishnava worship, basing focus on Bhakti. Shaiva Siddhanta is a Tamil (South Indian) type of Bhakti. They follow the Mantra Marga, chanting the name of God. This sect accept the idea of dualism (Dvaita Vedanta, where the atman and Brahman are separate and distinct properties. This is unusual for Shaiva's, most of these sects are monist, believing the atman and Brahman are one. They have daily practices which are:

- 1) Purifying the body with a focus towards the spiritual pathway to Shiva.
- 2) Seeking divine energy in the body by doing such practices as Kundalini yoga. This is a yoga in which you need a guru to help you do Hatha yoga (physical yoga) and focus the breath (prana), feeling the power/force move up through the spine. It is believed by doing this they will receive powers from Shiva.
- 3) They awaken the soul with the mind, focus on breath control (prana) and visualize Shiva's trident.

This practice could be seen as a hybrid between Bhakti Yoga of Vaishnavism and Sankhyan Yoga- the practice to seek eternal bliss with God.

## Aghoris

This modern form of the Kapalika sect is very antinomian (anti laws), breaking society's laws constantly, enabling them to live ascetic lives and focus on Shiva as Bhargavan (Lord). They usually camp in cremation grounds like Mahayogi Shiva, and after they have done their ritual bathing, cover themselves in ashes taken from the ghats (funeral pyre) from the previous day. They have dreadlocks like Shiva and often carry a skull, which is used as a begging bowl. They also do tantric rituals and provide Shiva with impure offerings (blood, meat, alcohol, sexual fluids). Some even preform a sexual act with someone from a different varna (caste).

*Fowler "Although a very complicated deity to understand, Shiva is one of the most fascinating. To his devotees, he is seen as Brahman, the Absolute and it is not difficult to see why because just as all opposites are united in the unmanifest Absolute, so also are they united in the manifest of Shiva."*

Fowler, J. Hinduism: Beliefs and Practices, (1996), ISBN:9781898723608

## Shakti Bhakti

Another form of Bhakti is Shakti which focuses on the feminine side and some believe the most powerful side, of Brahman because it provides the creative energy, responsible for the forces behind the physical universe. As many Shaiva Bhakti worship Shiva's consorts, Parvati, Durga and Kali. Both Shaivites and Vishnavas can also worship this side of Brahman, as they may worship the consorts connected to their deity e.g. Shaivites might worship Parvati and Vishnavas might worship Laksmi. They may give devotion as part of Sakamya Bhakti for them to have a child (prajana), hopefully being a boy, to enable them to perform Anteyesti customs.

## Yatra (pilgrimage) as part of pilgrimage

Yatra means 'journey' or 'procession'; it is a spiritual journey in which Hindus can show their devotion to their deity, by journeying to a special place of worship of spiritual significance. The centre of a pilgrimage is known as 'tirtha', meaning crossing place or ford, showing the idea of moving from the physical world to a divine, spiritual place. All types of Bhakti followers can go on a Yatra; Vaishnava, Shakti and Shaiva. Although, it is not compulsory or a dharma but is a desire of many to observe yatra because they will do darshan (seek a deity), in an auspicious place or time, connected to their deity. For example, Vaishnavas may visit Vrindavan where Krishna grew up, or Shaivas may visit Varanasi, Shiva's home place. Some yatras focus on washing away Papa (bad karma), especially during auspicious moments e.g. Kumbha Mela (see below). Other yatras may be a spiritual geographic sites e.g. the Himalayas or the Ganges. Some pilgrims made the yatra a more difficult journey, to reach their place of destination; it is believed by doing such acts, you are gaining punya (good karma) along the way. They might make the yatra more difficult by fasting, or continually prostrating, or rolling on route, as a way to remove papa or even fulfilling a vow made to a family member. For Vishnuvites there is a route of 4 key places of pilgrimage called Char Dham (four abodes) and there are 4 pilgrimage sites in India, it is believed to help the pilgrim achieve Moksha. The 4 places are Badrinath, Puri, Rameswaram and Dwaraka, which are the 4 points of the compass within India.

There are numerous amounts of Yatras, however we will focus only on 3 big pilgrimages:

### Kumbha Mela

Kumbha Mela is known as the 'Great Bath' where the River Jamuna and Ganga meet. Hindus believe that every 12 years the Nectar/Amrit of the gods descends from the heavens into the water and it can wipe every papa (bad karma) away. It is believed to be the world's biggest gathering where millions of devotees go to, for the six bathing days, showing their devotion to Brahman. At the last Kumbha Mela, there were 100 million pilgrims from every Hindu sect and even Sikhs, Buddhists and spiritualists. This is where the worshipper might feel like Madhurya Bhakti, where the worshipper and Brahman become one. They may also be seen to be following Para-Bhakti - the Highest form of Bhakti, when the worshipper sees Brahman and feels his power everywhere.

**Dr Srinivasan** *"...everyone is dipping in the water at the confluence of three sacred rivers; the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati."*

**Dr Srinivasan** *"imagine the sounds of conches, drums, pipes and shouts of praise, and vedic chants from millions."*

Srinivasan, A. V., *Hinduism for Dummies*, (2011), John Wiley and Sons Ltd, (2011), ISBN:9780470878583

## Varanasi – the abode of Shiva

Varanasi or Benares is the most popular Hindu yatra site. Varanasi is situated on the banks of the River Ganges, who is believed to be the goddess called Ganga. The River Ganges is so spiritually pure that it can wash away all papa (bad karma), aiding you in gaining Moksha or Mukti. Furthermore, it is believed that if your ashes are scattering into the River Ganges then you will obtain Mukti, making it a pilgrimage site for those nearing death. Many elderly people go to places called 'Death Hotels' where they wait to die in Varanasi, so that their ashes will be scattered in the River Ganges. It is believed to be the home place of Shiva and Parvati, containing many mandirs dedicated to Shiva. The main temple is the Vishvanath Temple (ruler of the universe) and it was referred in Hindu scriptures as central focus of Shiva worship. Many Hindus would want to perform darshan in the temples dedicated to their chosen deity, as there are mandirs not only for Shaivites but also Vishnavas. Ganga Aarti is a site to see for any pilgrim in Varanasi. It is where Brahmins perform the aarti ceremony (5 wicked ceremony) in the open air, facing the River Ganges or Mother Ganga.

**Dr Flood** *"Varanasi is regarded as the centre, not only of India, but of the cosmos. All the gods are gathered there and all pilgrimage places united in the one."*

**Dr Flood** (about Varanasi) *"....this city sacred to Siva, is to attain liberation (moksha) upon death."*

Flood, G.- An Introduction to Hinduism, (2004), Foundation Books, ISBN:8175960280

## Jagannath at Puri

This is a temple dedicated to the Lord Jagannath, a form of Lord Vishnu. It is a key pilgrimage destination for Vishnuvites. The temple in Puri, has a famous chariot festival (Ratha Yatra) where 3 deities are pulled along on mobile mandirs; the deities are Jagannath, Balarama and Subhadra. They travel 3 km to the Shri Gundicha temple on the mobile mandirs, allowing the devotees it passes to behold the deities and receive dharshan.

**Dr Flood** *"Pilgrimages are especially auspicious when undertaken during a temple festival, such as the annual process of the Lord Jagannatha at puri. As such places Hindus can rid themselves of 'sin' (papa) or accumulated karma, fulfil a vow (vrata) or simply enjoy the transforming experience of pilgrimage."*

Flood, G.- An Introduction to Hinduism, (2004), Foundation Books, ISBN:8175960280

## Things to discuss

- Is Bhakti a less spiritual expression and path of Hinduism?
- Is Bhakti an important movement in Hinduism
- Are Vaishnava and Shiavas separate religions to Hinduism?
- Is Vaishnavism the best Bhakti pathway?
- Do Yatra bhakti make all other dharmas and yogas pointless to perform as it is an easy way to get to Moksha/Mukti?

## Bibliography (of books not already referred to in this document)

Zaehner, R.C., Hinduism, Oxford University Press, (1983), ISBN:019888012X

## Other Useful Resources

<https://resources.wjec.co.uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?rId=2941> - WJEC Unit 3E: Scheme of Work

## Books

Fuller, C.J. The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in Hinduism, Chapter 3, (1992), ASIN: B01A1MQQG8

Knott, K., My Sweet Lord: The Hare Krishna Movement , Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, (1986), ISBN:9780809570232

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Sharma, A., Classical Hindu Thought, D.K. Printworld Ltd, (2010), ISBN:8124606439

## Websites

<https://www.livemint.com/Sundayapp/Oirwa2rMY1IUJKtPEtX4sO/A-brief-history-of-the-Bhakti-movement.html>

- an article by Karthik Venkatesh on the history of the Bhakti movement from livemint.com.

<http://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/bhakti-movement-causes-hindu-society-andfeatures/3166>

- a brief history of the Bhakti movement, its causes, etc. from the Historydiscussion.net website – article on Historydiscussion.net on the history of the Bhakti movement.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/bhakti>

- Encyclopedia Britannica article on the Bhakti movement.