

Key concepts

- The Bhakti movement was a devotional transformation of medieval Hindu society where Vedic rituals gave way to the idea of an individual loving relationship with a personal God. Liberation which was previously considered only attainable by men of the three top castes became available to everyone. Real development of Bhakti movement took place in South India between the 7th and 12th centuries through the teachings of poet saints.
- The main features of the Bhakti movement had a profound influence on Hindu identity socially, religiously and morally.
- One of the most important influences of the Bhakti movement socially was the rejection of caste distinction. Religiously the movement aroused awakening among Hindus regarding the futility of ritualism and superstitions. The movement encouraged religious tolerance.
- Bhakti is one of the four margas (or yogas), each of which offers a different path for reaching moksha.
- Bhakti marga is the way of loving devotion. The emphasis 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. Love is central to the understanding of bhakti marga. A devotee may love the deity in different ways – as a lover, friend, child or father.
- Vaishnava bhakti is a loving devotion towards Vishnu and is usually focused on an understanding of either Rama or Krishna as Bhagavan. In the West, the practice of this bhakti is most commonly known through the activities of ISKCON.
- Shaiva bhakti mirrors many of the practices of Vaishnava bhakti with the difference that the object of devotion is Shiva.
- A common practice among all types of bhakti is that of yatra or pilgrimage. The focus is on receiving darshan. 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.

Key quotes

"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 shall be free from the bonds of karma which yield fruits that are evil and good; and with thy soul one in renunciation thou shall be free and come to me." **(Bhagavad Gita 9v 26-28).**

"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).**

"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)." **Edexcel Religious Studies, 'Hinduism', Pearson Education, (2006).**

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.**

Key words

Bhakti	bhakti marga	Vaishnava bhakti	ISKCON	yatra	caste
marga	Bhagavan	liberation	Krishna	yoga	
Shiva	Vedic	Shaiva bhakti	Rama	ritualism	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that the practice of bhakti is more practical than spiritual. Others would argue that bhakti in essence is a spiritual relationship with the deity. Some would argue that it is a practical expression of a spiritual relationship.

Key questions

Is Bhakti a less spiritual expression and path of Hinduism?

How important is the Bhakti movement within Hinduism?

Do Yatra bhakti make all other dharmas and yogas pointless to perform as it is an easy way to get to Moksha/ Mukti?