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Bhakti Yoga: Understanding Bhakti Through Rasa Sentiment

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**Bhakti Yoga:
Understanding Bhakti Through Rasa Sentiment**

by

Johanna Bennett

A thesis presented to the

Faculty of the Department of

Yoga Studies

Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Yoga Studies

2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER ONE - BHĀVA AND RASA	15
EMOTION	15
BHĀVA	17
RASA	19
RASA BHĀVA - RASA THEORY	21
CHAPTER TWO - BHAKTI	28
BHAKTI AS DEFINITION AND MOVEMENT IN CONTEXT	28
THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀNA	33
THE GĪTAGOVINDA BY JAYADEVA - KṚṢṆA FROM RADHA'S PERSPECTIVE	37
BASIC EXPRESSIONS, QUALITIES, AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A BHAKTA	39
2 MODES, 4 TYPES, AND 9 FORMS OF BHAKTI	46
THE GAUḌĪYA SAMPRADĀYA, CAITANYA, THE GOSVĀMINS, RŪPA GOSVĀMIN	49
CHAPTER THREE - BHAKTI RASA IN CONTEXT	50
BHAKTI RASA: RŪPA GOSVĀMIN - BHAKTIRASĀMṚTASINDHU	52
SĀDHANA BHAKTI IN THE BHAKTIRASĀMṚTASINDHU	56
MADHUSŪDANA SARASVATĪ - BHAKTIRASĀYANA: BHAKTI RASA FOR THE ADVAITIN	61
CONCLUSION	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY	71

INTRODUCTION

“Raso Vai Sah”
Rasa as Brahman,
Truly the lord is rasa

--*Taittiriya Upaniṣad, Ananda Valli, 7.2*

Devotion by nature is grounded in some variety of emotive experience. It can provoke a sense of transformed identity in which one’s ordinary state drops away and either a fear based (folk bhakti), heart centered (emotional bhakti), nationalistic (political bhakti), or universalist (Vedanta bhakti) devotional emotional flavor emerges.¹ The emotional experience acts as a psychological breakthrough and situates itself in the broader context of human aspirations. In a religious sense, devotion in varying degrees can be cultivated through structured ritual, worship of local traditional deities and rites that arise through spontaneous and sudden impulse or through the arts. Nonetheless, the devotee is the vessel of some sort of subdued, ecstatic or intellectual emotional response directed towards the god.

In an Indian context, emotion can be raw or refined and is identified at its most fundamental base mood in Sanskrit as a *bhāva*, whereas the maturation or almost universal form of this *bhāva* or emotive mood is called *rasa*. *Rasa* and *bhāva* developed as theories in Indian aesthetic tradition in both performance-based treatises as well as within art’s connections with the ethical and spiritual dimensions of life² through the works (among others) of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata and Abhinavagupta’s authoritative interpretation of

¹ June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145.

² Kathleen Marie Higgins, “An Alchemy of Emotion: Rasa and Aesthetic

² Kathleen Marie Higgins, “An Alchemy of Emotion: Rasa and Aesthetic Breakthroughs,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65:1 (2007): 43.

rasa theory based on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Yet *Rasa* and *bhāva* also relate to the expression of devotion in devotional religious contexts. *Rasikas* and *Bhaktas* form types of spectators in the larger *līlā* (play) of devotion. The *rasika*, as the educated connoisseur of art that can feel the relish of a fine tuned *rasa* of a performance and the *bhakta* that can surrender in total emotional love and worship to the *devata*.

In this essay, I am looking to understand the affective transformation of the devotee through *Rasa* sentiment. We will look at the theory of the eight and nine *rasa*, and based on this foundation look into the possibility of whether *Bhakti* as sentiment itself can be considered a *rasa* in light of ritual devotion. The Indian classical arts have used religion as inspiration and it is possible to study the religions of India through her performing arts.³ But, can we redirect this process and experience ritual devotion as art and *rasa* sentiment?

Ritual as a manifestation and expression of devotion is no doubt a highly communal activity. Even in the cases of practicing alone, one is connected to a larger group in which observing devotion as a devotee to a particular god establishes a link to identity and tradition. Thus devotional ritual can be a bridge between the philosophical and literary teachings of a tradition and the living tradition itself, pointing one towards understanding the richness and complexities of many Hindu traditions as they are practiced on the ground in popular and folk expressions, rather than through only a philosophized perspective. What is this emotional state that is inherent in emotional *bhakti* expressed in daily *Bhakti*

³ Susan L. Schwartz, *Rasa Performing the Divine in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.

traditions of India such as possession, specific local community rituals, music, poetics, dance plastic arts and dietary and gender regulations?⁴

For the purposes of this essay and in the effort to articulate a particular expression of bhakti, the focus will be on emotional *bhakti* through the lens of a form of *Kṛṣṇa Bhakti* that draws upon conventions found in aesthetic theory in order to communicate the loving devotion towards God. While there are many expressions of *bhakti* traditions depending on the deity of worship, the ontology subscribed or the way and goal taken asunder, I will explore the role of *rasa* in the discourses of *Kṛṣṇa bhakti* expressed in influential form in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva and theoretically elaborated in the dualist Gauḍīya Sampradāya tradition in a selection from Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* as well as in the *Bhakti Rasa* for the Advaitin Renunciate in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's theory of devotional sentiment from the *Bhaktirasāyana*. This is because the focus of this study will be to understand the cultivation of devotional sentiment drawn from the wellspring of affective experience that is gathered through a particular interweaving of artistic sentiment and devotional sentiment.

Bhakti can be expressed in a myriad of ways as noted earlier. Intellectual, contemplative *bhakti* or *jñāna bhakti* can result in devotion to god through renunciation and asceticism, which relies mostly on an Advaita Vedanta viewpoint and stresses a reduction of sensory input and an ultimate rejection of the bodily sensory input in search of *mokṣa* emphasized in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (c. second century BCE), the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (c. fourth to fifth century CE) and the Sri Vaiṣṇava of Rāmānuja (1017-1137 CE) for example. With that said *bhakti* can manifest differently within a local folk tradition with householder

⁴ Vasudha Narayanan, "Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 68:4 (2000): 768.

women as the keepers of daily or weekly worship to keep the goddess happy and family members free from illness. It can also find expression in ecstatic, ebullient emotional forms where the love of god is to be experienced through the emotions, and senses in order to embody the very love that is directed, and to achieve heights of bliss that takes ones mind away from seeking liberation to a dynamic relationship of separation and union with the beloved.

This essay is inspired and in effect a continuation of research I conducted in our Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Philosophy courses last year in The Masters in Yoga Studies at LMU. Significantly moved by the events of chapter eleven from an emotional standpoint, in my essay titled “Reflections on Kṛṣṇa’s Theophany in the Bhagavad Gita”, I connected Arjuna’s terrifying and embodied emotional experience of Kṛṣṇa’s Viśvarūpadarśanayoga to Bharata’s *rasa* theory in classical Indian aesthetics in the ultimate god/devotee relationship as a way to suggest that one could read the Gītā from the viewpoint of artistic sentiment and religious devotion simultaneously.

I wrote:

“In Indian art form such as dance, theatre, music and literature there is an insistence on the nearness of art experience to spiritual experience.⁵ Chapter 11 of the Bhagavad Gītā arguably fulfills this quality as literary art and spiritual message. The emotion, or *bhāva*, the psychological experience, is the foundation of the artistic sentiment, the *rasa*, as the aesthetic experience. The human emotion of being amazed, astonished, or surprised can be

⁵ Sushil Kumar Saxena, “Spirituality and the Music of India.” *In Hindu Spirituality Post Classical and Modern*, edited by K.R Sundararajan and Bithika Mukerji (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1997), 437.

dramatically enhanced into the aesthetic sentiment of wonder, the *Adbhūta-rasa*.⁶ This is succinctly expressed in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 11 where Arjuna is experiencing physical reactions to his emotional grief and/or terror regarding the impending battle and the vision of Kṛṣṇa's divine form. Both of these chapters immediately engage the reader in an emotional manner, allowing a psychological identification.

“My limbs become weak, my mouth dries up,
My body trembles, and my hair stands on end” (I.29).

And Saṃjaya tells Dhritarāshthra:

“Then Arjuna, filled with wonder,
His hair standing on end,
His head bowed to the god and with hands joint together,
Spoke” (XI.14).

Both *bhāva* and *rasa* evolving to create a palpable embodied experience of art and spirit.

In the words of Bharata (the legendary author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* [second century C.E.], the seminal Indian text on the theatrical arts), and oddly enough arguably a contemporary text of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, “The *Adbhūta-rasa* with *Vismaya* (amazement or astonishment) as its stable state (its essence, the emotion upon which it is based), arises on account of the following causes: visions of divine beings and acquisitions of desired wishes, going to a temple in a grove or seeing a divine chariot, a divine assembly hall, a magic show (*māyā*), a conjuring act (*indrajāla*), and so forth. It should be acted out with the following affects: staring with the eyes open wide, having goose bumps, shedding tears, sweating, being thrilled... twiddling the fingers, trembling, and the like. Its transitory states include:

⁶ Lee Siegel, *Net of Magic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 426.

paralysis, tears, perspiration, stammering, goose bumps, paroxysms, bustling torpor, passing out, and so forth” (after 6.74).⁷

Again Chapter 11 expresses this stratagem. After helping Arjuna calm his initial nerves through his teachings on *jñanakarmasamuccaya* (knowledge should be performed with duty), Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna his divine form. Arjuna describes this sight:

Vishnu [Kṛṣṇa], since I have seen you ablaze with many colours, touching the sky, flames in your huge eyes, your mouth gaping, my self trembles and I find neither courage nor calm...When I have seen your faces with many fearsome tusks, so much like the fires at the end of time, I do not know the way, and I find no refuge. And all these sons of Dhritarāshthra, alongside the gatherings of kings . . . together with our chief warriors, too, all in a rush, they enter your terrible mouths, gaping with tusks. Some appear with heads crushed, clinging between your teeth. The heroes of the mortal world enter your flaming mouths . . . As moths that fly to their full will rush to death in the blazing fire, so, too, worlds rush to death in your mouths. (11.24–11.29)⁸

As a result of witnessing this terrifying vision of Kṛṣṇa’s totality, and in effect the destruction of the world that will result from the war, Arjuna’s emotional response is the unspoiled blend of *Adbhūta-rasa* with *Vismaya* inline with Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* teachings.

This particular connection between *rasa*, devotion and religious art as *rasa bhāva* seemed worthy of further probing, so it is here that through additional research into *rasa* theory, I hope to unearth a deeper view of this potential.

After years of studying the philosophical dimensions of classical Indian thought, a schism between thought and praxis developed for me. Needing to find an embodiment of the concepts I learned in Vedanta, Saṃkhya, and the Epics, (texts readily available to western seekers), at the suggestion of a friend, I began to regularly attend Saturday

⁷ Lee Siegel, *Net of Magic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 426.

⁸ Geoffrey R. Ashton, “The Soteriology of Role-Play in the Bhagavad Gītā.” *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East*, 23:1 (2013): 15.

abishekam at the Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara Hindu Temple in Malibu. What I found there was another “Hinduism”, one that did not particularly speak of one god, karma, mokṣa and so on. It was not the Hinduism of textual religion, Hindu nationalists per se, Orientalist scholars, or diaspora communities that crafted a generalized or comparative theological Hindu perspective. Vasudha Narayanan has since provided some insight as to why this is in her article “Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils”. She states: “At best, it seems that a large part of what is portrayed in textbooks on Hinduism is not rampant in everyday life—Hindus do not usually walk around worrying about their karma or working toward *mokṣa* (liberation), nor are most folk familiar with anything more than the name Vedānta among the various schools of philosophy.”⁹

At the Saturday morning ritual, a particular form of Vaiṣṇava bhakti was being practiced called Sri Vaisnavism, where most everyone there was Indian born or of Indian descent. The languages being spoken were Tamil and Telugu vernacular from the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. I had been to various home pujas and *homam*, but this was my first introduction to a full- fledged Indian temple ritual to the presiding deity Lord Veṅkaṭeśvara, a particular incarnation of Viṣṇu, also called Srinivasa, Balaji, or Perumal and his consort Śrī in her forms as Mahalakṣmi and Bhū Devi/Aṅdal. Brahmin priests conducted the *abishekam*, and a combination of sacred recitations in both Sanskrit and Tamil were accompanied. Nothing I had studied prior was to prepare me for that initial visit.

Situated in the Santa Monica Mountains between the San Fernando Valley and Malibu beach, the towering gopuram of the white temple built as a gateway to the temple

⁹ Vasudha Narayanan, “Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 68:4 (2000): 762.

complex in the traditional South Indian style of temple architecture welcomed arriving devotees. Once through the gopuram devotees prostrated themselves before entering the temple proper and before coming close to the inner sanctum and the *darśan* of the deity in *archa* form. Men, women and children of all ages stood waiting in the thick, camphor bathed atmosphere. Quite unexpectedly, the din of their collective voices was pierced by the sharp abrupt toll of a bell sounding from somewhere in the room. Suddenly the curtain covering the inner sanctum snappishly slid open, and all attention raptly turned to Lord Venkestwara, freshly dressed, decorated and attended. The enthusiasm of the crowd welled up as people made their way with considerable difficulty (due to the large crowd in attendance) to hold the vision of the *murti* or *arcā*. The excitement was palpable.

What might account for this emotional effervescence? I learned later that most were seeking the kind blessings of the lord through acts of *seva* (selfless worship and service) or boons of fortune, luck, health, and good marriages and healthy babies for example. By attending to him, paying service in complete submission of the ego, the lord would bestow his grace and generosity upon you. The pouring of the milk, the bathing in turmeric and coconut water, the burning and smudging of sandalwood incense, the feeding of prasadam enlivened the murti to such strength that it was alive and vibrating. I could have sworn that it WAS alive, looking out at us, embodied in that place, in that statue, in that moment. In fact it was, as God is seen to actually exist in the *arcā* form.

Two distinct sects form this tradition, the Vadakalai and the Tenkalai, monkey and kitten viewpoints. The former more Sanskrit based, and the latter, Prakrit based in both oral and literal praxis. Either way, when the bell rung, the camphor lit, the aarti performed, and the recitations pulsated through the room, hovering in place, there was a tension that

was palpable. It is said that any devotional act, such as *puja* or *kirtana* is not performance based, and should not be confused with being one. Yet as a devotee, there is a response to the steps and progression of the ritual that incites emotional response arguably akin to a performance. I wondered if this question had been posed by the tradition itself. My own tendency to respond in such a way to devotional art forms also formed the impetus to wonder this.

I returned many times to those Saturday morning *abishekam* at the Malibu Temple. What I experienced (among other things) was perhaps what Abhinavagupta indicated as a ninth *rasa* sentiment, that of *śānta*, peace, tranquility, especially as an after affect of witnessing the ritual of the *abishekam* and the *alankaram* (flower devotion to Śri). Although hard to articulate what exactly transpired for me, the experience was most definitely one that was purifying, foreign, and compelling.

This experience showed me a form of Vaiṣṇava bhakti tradition on one end of a broad spectrum of *Vaiṣṇavism*. For the Vaiṣṇava, absolute reality is manifested in Viṣṇu, who in turn is expressed in many names and forms such as Rama, Kṛṣṇa and other avataras. *Vaiṣṇavism* comprises many sects and groups that differ in their interpretation of the relationship between the individual and God. The Sri Vaiṣṇava sect, for example, emphasizes the doctrine of *Vishishtadvaita* (“qualified non-dualism”) of Rāmānuja according to which, although the differentiated phenomenal world is an expression of God’s diversified world or power, (*māya*) and seen as real, it is nevertheless the channel through which devotees depend on and may gain access to God. Another group acknowledges the *dvaita* (“dualism”) of the philosopher Madhva, the belief that God and the soul are distinct entities and that the soul’s existence is dependent on God. The Pushtimarg (“Path

of Grace”) sect upholds the *śuddhadvaita* (“pure non-dualism”) doctrine of the theologian Vallabhacharya that does not assert the phenomenal world to be an illusion. The Gauḍīya sect, founded by Caitanya, imparts *achintya-bhedabheda* (“inconceivable duality and non-duality”), the belief that the relation between God and the world is beyond the scope of human comprehension.

In addition to these philosophical sects, many other Vaiṣṇava groups are scattered throughout India, often centered in local temples or shrines.¹⁰ Some even articulate their devout devotionism through Advaita Vedantic non-dualism such as Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, supporting either a *Saguṇa* or *Nirguṇa* imaging of divine Brahman. *Saguṇa* Brahman is defining Brahman as God or infinite awareness “with attributes” or form, and *Nirguṇa* Brahman, respectively, describes Brahman as God or infinite awareness “without attributes” or a formless state of being in which all distinctions are eradicated and overcome.

Bhakti traditions simultaneously span varied expressions. Some forms are slanted toward an “intellectual, contemplative, ascetic and/or meditative form in which the seeking of mokṣa from samsara is emphasized. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* (c. second century BCE), and Viṣṇu Purāṇa (c. fourth to fifth century CE) show this tendency towards a renunciatory form of bhakti. This is similarly found within the *Nārada-bhakti sūtra* (*Saguṇa* bhakti) and *Śāṅḍilya bhakti sūtra* (*Nirguṇa* bhakti)¹¹.

¹⁰ <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Vaishnavism>

¹¹ Karen Pechilis. “Bhakti Traditions.” *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, edited by Jessica Frasier (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 113-115.

Ecstatic expression of love for god as the lover, child, or parent of the devotee is seen through the Tamil Veda of the 12 Alvars, the *Naalayira Divya Prabhandham*. As well as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the *Gītagovinda*. The latter portray Kṛṣṇa as a handsome youth in the company of Rādhā and other gopīs (milkmaids). This is just a very basic overview of bhakti leanings from the Vaiṣṇava strain. Keep in mind bhakti is found in Śaiva, Śakta, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist and Smarta (God is both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*) traditions.

This and other temple experiences raised particular questions about the nature of emotion in the context of religious devotion. What was happening? Could this worship be a liturgical expression of *sthāyibhāva*, stylized emotional relationships at the center of much Vaiṣṇava devotional literature? What was the role of emotion in this worship? How was emotional experience valued in light of India's well-known ascetic practices and denial of the sensory world? What is emotion anyway? Is it the same in the Indian context as in the West?

As my research began to look into a means in which to process devotional sentiment in light of the spiritual nature of the arts, ritual in general and my own reaction to them, I began to uncover some interesting ways to define the sentiments of bhakti through the structure and taxonomy of Indian thinking. Rather than through the well-worn avenue of Vedic thought as the interpreter of devotional sentiment, I found the key to be through the performing arts. As Vasudha Narayanan so clearly states: "The performers of music and dance, the transmitters of the religious traditions, speak for Hinduism. We should listen to them."¹² In doing so, I listened and found in particular a beautiful devotional theology

¹² Vasudha Narayanan, "Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 68:4 (2000): 776.

inspired by the development of aesthetics called *rasa* sentiment in the arts. Therefore I will cover a range of themes related to *bhakti* as a relished *rasa*.

This essay will be divided into three parts. First, it is necessary to consider briefly the question of what do we mean by the term “emotion”? From there we will review *rasa* theory and a basic background on the development of *rasa* theory and the nature of the *bhāva* through the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata and Abhinavagupta. Next we will consider *bhakti* as a tradition, and then as aesthetic sentiment. This portion will form a basic foundation as to the environment of *bhakti*. Subsequently, we will delve into two particular *bhakti* thinkers. Rūpa Gosvāmin and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s theories on devotional sentiment will shed some light on *Bhakti Rasa* and the roll of the senses in any of these *bhakti* traditions in light of contrary ascetic ideal promoting a denial of the senses.

What happens in the mind-body and emotions of the devotee in the vision of the divine? While yoga teaches us to go beyond the body and the mind, I will ask if the devotee experiences devotional sentiment in an embodied way. A way through the body, senses and emotions in which the reciprocity of devotional worship is akin to the process of an acculturated spectator observing a compelling performance or work of art. Where a devotee in cultivating a relationship with the divine, in order to connect, merge or be close with the *iṣṭa devatā* does so as a *rasika bhakta* in light of the writings of the thinkers mentioned above.

C. J. Fuller distinguishes in his book “The Camphor Flame” between Popular Hinduism (the beliefs and practices that constitute the living, “practical” religion of ordinary Hindus) from “textual Hinduism,” the “philosophical” religion set out and elaborated in the sacred texts that are the principal subject matter for Indologists,

Sanskritists, historians of religion and other textual scholars. The sacred texts of Hinduism are often vitally important to popular religion, yet he states that themes central in the scriptures are not always central in ordinary peoples beliefs and practices. Ethnography, not scripture is both the major source and the touchstone of interpretation (Fuller, 5-6).

In light of this particular tension, this essay on *bhakti* will only touch the edge of the iceberg of ethnographic material necessary to fully broach the subject. Yet with this in mind, there is still something to learn. I will incorporate theoretical research derived from a myriad of sources stemming from sacred textual sources, rhetorical textual sources in Indian Aesthetic theory, and basic ethnographic research done by myself and others (as mentioned above) in order to explore the potential of understanding *bhakti* sentiment in its possible permutations.

Due to its ineffable nature, and in order to attempt to understand the particular emotional experiences felt in the mind, heart and body of the devotee, this attempt to understand the process of devotion will be viewed from both sacred and profane angles such as erotic love transposed into devotion. Mostly grounded in technique and theory, I will attempt to articulate an embodied *bhakti* experience through this research.

CHAPTER ONE – Bhāva and Rasa

Emotion

Rather than to assume a grasp of what is “emotion”, and to help clear the ground of the sometimes reflexively held, culturally determined assumptions about emotion, I briefly turn to Catherine Lutz’ study in emotion by way of Jeffery R. Timm in his article “The

Celebration of Emotion: Vallabha's Ontology of Affective Experience," in order to provide some awareness around notions of emotion. Essentially, from a western view we approach emotion from what is called a "Euro-American"¹³ guise. This viewpoint could instigate a slight learning impediment since the idea of emotion in this paper is viewed through religious aesthetics stemming from a non-western culture. Because of this, it may be helpful to make the reader aware of basic western views of emotional normalcy according to Catherine Lutz by drawing some attention to our own cultural viewpoint towards emotional expression.

Lutz points out that in the West, emotion tends to be devalued by placing it in opposition to and in conflict with rationality and commonsense. Contrasted with rationality, emotion represents a barrier and a weakness. "The wisdom of reason against the treachery and temptations of the passions has been the central theme of Western philosophy."¹⁴ In this Western commonsense view, the devaluation of emotion is comprehensive, but it does have its limits. A person lacking emotion is "cold blooded," lacks empathy, unable to enter into emotional bonds and is viewed at least with suspicion, or perhaps as a threat.

Despite the ambiguity of contrasting emotion with both rationality and estrangement, Western emotion concepts have typically understood emotions as singular events situated within the individual rather than the product of social context. Catherine Lutz challenges this understanding and states that emotion is about relationship not inwardness, about process not states, "...emotion words are everywhere used to talk about

¹³ Jeffrey R. Timm, "The Celebration of Emotion: Vallabha's Ontology of Affective Experience." *Philosophy East and West*, 41:1 (1991): 61.

¹⁴ Jeffrey R. Timm, "The Celebration of Emotion: Vallabha's Ontology of Affective Experience." *Philosophy East and West*, 41:1 (1991): 62.

the relationship between the self and the world. What is culturally variable however, is the extent to which the focus in emotion concepts is on the self or on the world which creates emotion, and on how autonomously that self is defined.”¹⁵

Even though there is a common saying that emotions are the spice of life, “much of the religious literature of the world is deeply dubious of the value of emotions, suspicious of whether emotions are to be trusted at all in ultimate spiritual pursuits.”¹⁶ This is arguably true of many of the ascetic teachings of India, whereby emotions are to be renounced as problematic forms of conditioned ignorance that bind one into personal thereby illusory experience. For example the great sage of classical yoga, Patañjali, defined yoga as the stoppage of mental or emotional movements of the mind.¹⁷ Here emotional excitement is seen as the adversary to the achievement of yoga, which is utter tranquility.

In an ascetic yoga framework, emotions hinder the practitioner from ultimate spiritual liberation, rather than emotions acting as barriers to commonsense and rationality. Yet, this view in light of Indian traditions is limited. We also find traditions that admit that emotions can be problematic if left in their ordinary state, yet also state that if used correctly, under the right conditions, have the ability to be tremendously useful in spiritual life. The power and potential of emotions rather than to be seen in the negative in the pursuit of ascetic denial can be extremely valuable as the bonding force to a loving relationship with God.¹⁸ This brings us to the Yoga of Divine Emotions.

¹⁵ Ibid, 63

¹⁶ David L. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xxix.

¹⁷ PYS 1.2 “yogaścittavṛttinirodha.”

¹⁸ David L. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xxix.

Bhāva

According to Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, the term *bhāva* has several general meanings. At its early appearance, *bhāva* is connected to the $\sqrt{bhū}$ defined as becoming, being, existing, occurring, and appearance. *Bhāva* conveys a process, and according to Tarla Mehta in referencing Bharata, “is an instrument of causation...that suggests a process of wider or deeper self-awareness of an experience in the manner of an organic development of a seed into a fruit...implying an extended process of being born, maturing, growing, decaying and dying.”¹⁹

In *Jyotish*, Indian astrology, *bhāva* indicates the state or condition of a planet, an astrological house or lunar mansion. Additional meanings range from state, condition, the set of the feelings, heart, soul, mind, manner of acting, conduct, behavior, way of thinking or feeling, sentiment, opinion, disposition, passion, emotion.²⁰

In *Classical Sāṃkhya* by Gerald James Larson, *bhāva* is defined through the lens of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa’s *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*. He states: “*bhāva*, predisposition or fundamental striving, are eight in number: *dharma*, *adharmā*, *jñāna*, *ajñāna*, *virāga*, *rāga*, *aīśvarya* and *anaīśvarya*, (translated as: virtue, vice, knowledge, ignorance, non-attachment, attachment, power and impotence) which reside in the *buddhi* and assist in determining the process of rebirth as well as the quality of one’s present life. All of these *bhāva* with the exception of *jñāna* continue the suffering, transmigrating life. *Jñāna* alone leads to salvation.²¹ These eight predispositions in turn relate to the fifty components called the *pratyayasarga* or

¹⁹ Tarla Mehta, *Sanskrit Play Production in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 76.

²⁰ <http://lexica.indica-et-buddhica.org/dict/lexica>

²¹ Gerald James Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011), 192.

“intellectual creation”. Presumably in classical Sāṃkhya, whereas the eight predispositions represent a deeper, causal level, the fifty components represent the same predispositions as effects that show themselves in ordinary, everyday experience.²²

A *bhāva* is also an emotional attitude, which a devotee may adopt towards God. In theistic devotion the *bhāva* are modes accepted in Hindu theistic spirituality:

The most important of these are six: *dāśya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, *śānta*, *kānta* and *mādhurya*. *Dāśya-bhāva* is the attitude of a servant to his master. Hanuman is the classical example of an ideal servant of God. This type of relationship marks the beginning of love. At a later stage bhakti gets deepened and is comparable to the love and regards that man has for his friend. This is *sakhya-bhāva*. The relationship between Kucela and Kṛṣṇa was of this higher type. Arjuna too for the most part moved with Kṛṣṇa as a friend. Still higher and more intimate is *vātsalya-bhāva*, the love of the parent to a child. Kausalyā had the Lord Himself as her child in the form of Ram. The love of Yaśoda to Kṛṣṇa was the nature of *vātsalya*. *Śānta bhāva* is the converse of *vātsalya*; it is the feeling of a child to its parent. Dhruva and Prahlāda are the classical examples. They were the children of God in every sense of the term. *Kānta-bhāva* is the love of the wife to the husband. The relationship between Sitā and Rāma, and between Rukmini and Kṛṣṇa was of this kind. This is a closer kinship than those we have considered so far. But the closest of all is *Madhura-bhāva*, the romantic love of the lover and the beloved, as in the case of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The last two types should not be understood to mean sensuality.²³

Rasa

A relationship between the innermost essence of the soul and the joy one receives from aesthetic experience can be, it is said, traced as far back as the *Atharvaveda* in 10.8.44.

Desireless, firm, immortal, self-existent, contented with the
essence, lacking nothing,
Free from the fear of Death is he who knoweth that Soul
courageous, youthful, undecaying.²⁴

²² Gerald James Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011), 239.

²³ T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana Limited, 1971), 251.

²⁴ Ralph T.H. Griffith, *Hymns of the Atharva Veda* (sacred-texts.com, 1895), 27

According to Krishna Caitanya, the germinal beginning of the later aesthetic theory of *rasa* can be traced to this verse “in which the soul is said to be enjoying the flavor or essence of experience.”²⁵ The term *rasa* is also found in Ayurveda, the Indian medicinal system that also has early ties to the *Atharvaveda*. According to Kenneth G. Zysk in his book *Medicine in the Veda*, “the early textual evidence of medicine is randomly inserted in the corpora of its principal religious literature, primarily in the *Atharvaveda* and to a much lesser extent in the *Rgveda*.²⁶

Rasa in Ayurveda extends the idea of flavor or essence into qualities of herbs, food, alchemy using mercury (*Rasaśāstra*), and the subtlest of tissues the plasma of blood and marrow. According to the Ayurvedic Institute in the UK, *rasa* employs “taste, enjoyment, essence, sap, liquid, potion, nectar, essence, semen, aesthetic appreciation, artistic delight, melodious sounds, the element of mercury or the other minerals used with it in alchemy, the expressed juice of fruit, leaves or other plant parts, an extract of meat (usually it’s soup), and emotion. *Rasa* represents every juice that makes life possible and worth living.”

The science of herbal energetics of Ayurveda recognizes six main *rasa*/tastes cross referenced with two of the five great elements: Sweet/*mādhurya* (WE), sour/*amla* (WF), salty, *lawana* (EF), pungent/*katu* (AF), bitter/*tikta* (AE), and astringent/*kasaya* (AE).²⁷ Each *rasa* have physical and psychological affects. The Indica et Buddhica online Sanskrit dictionary also supports these definitions.²⁸

²⁵ Sahebrao Genu Nigal, *Vedic Philosophy of Values* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2009), 74.

²⁶ Kenneth G. Zysk, *Medicine in the Veda* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 5.

²⁷ <http://www.ayurvedainstitute.co.uk/rasa-taste>

²⁸ <http://lexica.indica-et-buddhica.org/dict/lexica>

Barbara Holdrege writes in “Bhakti and Embodiment”, that the Sanskrit term *rasa* comprises a range of definitions, including “essence,” “juice,” “nectar,” “taste,” and “flavor.”²⁹ She continues, “*Rasa* is the central feature in Indian aesthetics as the pivotal word that designates aesthetic enjoyment.³⁰ It is in this particular application of the term, as related to the aesthetic theory of *rasa*, (*Rasaśāstra*) which will apply here in this essay in regards to *bhakti*. Even in the early Upanisads to mean “essence” or “joy” (ānanda) was associated with the highest reality. The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, for example, claims: “Verily he (*atman*) is *rasa*.”³¹

Rasa Bhāva - Rasa Theory

The aesthetic theory of *rasa* first appeared in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, “The Science of Dance” (c. fourth or fifth century CE), an authoritative dissertation on drama attributed to Bharata, which reached its high point in the writings of Abhinavagupta. In it Bharata tells the student that the play is meant to give delight as well as provide instruction. The drama was meant to evoke *Rasa*. It’s meaning can be accepted as “aesthetic delight”.³² *Rasa* is called such because it is relished. G.H. Tarlekar continues, “The latent basic mental states are roused through imagination of the situations of life presented in the dramatic spectacles.”³³ This latency of basic mental states will prove important when we delve into *rasa* theory as it can be related to *bhakti* sentiment later in this paper. *Rasa* lies neither in

²⁹ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 86.

³⁰ Ibid, 86

³¹ David L. Haberman, “A Selection from the Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthāyi-bhāvas).” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 411.

³² G.H. Tarlekar, *Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 53.

³³ Ibid, 54

the mind of the author nor the mind of the actor, it is focusing on the action on stage and the audience watching the drama. It is neither subjective nor objective.³⁴

For Bharata, the *bhāva* are forty-nine in nature, but are distilled into eight fundamental types of human emotions or permanent moods termed *sthāyi-bhāvas*, or abiding emotions.³⁵ These *sthāyi-bhāvas* are love, humor, sorrow, anger, courage, fear, disgust, and wonder. Eight types of *rasa* are also enumerated, which correspond to the *sthāyibhāva*: erotic, comic, tragic, furious, heroic, terrifying, disgusting and wondrous. *Rasa* then, becomes the savoring of these *sthāyi-bhāvas*. Some recensions of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as well as Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *Abhinavabhāratī*, add a ninth *rasa*, śantā (tranquil), which corresponds to the ninth *sthāyi-bhāvas* called śama (tranquility).³⁶

This savoring though is the result of a stirring of these basic abiding emotions presented in a performance through a combination, cooperation and interaction of three factors: the *vibhāva*, the *anubhāva*, and the *vyabhicāribhāva*.³⁷ The *vibhāva* are the stimulants in a play that set the instigation for emotional response, such as a hero or heroine, or the time frame or setting in which emotion is felt towards. The *anubhāva* are the words, bodily gestures and outward movements through which the *sthāyi-bhāvas* are expressed. The *vyabhicāribhāva* are transitory emotions such as envy, intoxication, and

³⁴ J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 135.

³⁵ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 86.

³⁶ Ibid, 86

³⁷ *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.31.

confusion that often accompany or strengthen the *sthāyi-bhāvas*. The three together generate *rasa*, bringing a *sthāyibhāva* or permanent mood to an actually relished state.³⁸

Bharata introduces a fourth category, the *sāttvika-bhavas*, which are involuntary bodily manifestations of certain emotional states, such as perspiration, bristling of the body hair, and trembling, that indicate the *sthāyi-bhāvas* are present in the character.³⁹

Jitendranath Mohanty in his historical overview “Classical Indian Philosophy” further clarifies that in this theory a level of cultivation of sensibility is necessary for this actualization of enjoyment to take place, which will figure similarly with the cultivation through practice for a bhakta to engender devotion to God. Mohanty continues:

“Each one of these, under appropriate conditions, is actualized upon reading a poem or watching a drama. A level of cultivation of sensibility is necessary for this actualization, as also, possibly, a community of cultivated minds (*sahṛdaya*). The enjoyment of *rasa* is said to unfold through various stages: other objects disappear from consciousness until *rasa* alone is left, the particular feeling is universalized (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*) into an essence, and finally there is a state of restfulness (*viśrānti*).”⁴⁰

Another Indian thinker named Ānandavardhana developed the *dhvani* theory of poetry in which *rasa* assumes a central role.⁴¹ “*Dhvani* is defined as the suggested meaning of words and sentences, whereby when a poet writes a sentence, each word of the sentence as well as the entire sentence has its primary meaning, but that is not what the poet intends to express. He wants to suggest a deeper meaning.”⁴² Abhinavagupta further expounded in regards to *dhvani* theory, that everyone has latent impressions (*vāsanās*) of the *sthāyi-*

³⁸ J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 135.

³⁹ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 87.

⁴⁰ J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 135.

⁴¹ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 87.

⁴² J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 133.

bhāvas generated by previous emotional experiences. If the latent impressions (such as love/*ratī*) are properly aroused by the dramatist or poet such in the characters or poem, then the *vāsanās* will be aroused in the *sahṛdayas*, sensitive person of refined taste, and become distilled into the essence of the emotion. Savoring this essence is *rasa*, which leads to a transcending of the ego-bound concerns of the individual and is experienced as pure impersonal joy. Abhinavagupta compares this to *ānanda* (bliss).⁴³ Aesthetic enjoyment then becomes somewhat like the contemplation of the *Brahman*.⁴⁴

This refined state conjures up the stillness and calm that results in a savoring of pure being likened to an awakened bliss. “From the fact that every *rasa* experience aims at the state of mental repose, it is natural to draw the conclusion that all *rasa* experience culminates in the experience of *śānta rasa*, or the *rasa* of peace.”⁴⁵

Abhinavagupta placed *śānta* as the highest *rasa* because of its relation to the state of *mokṣa*, so that poetic experience may approximate to realization of the *Brahman*.

Abhinavagupta was deeply involved in the world of Kashmir Śaivism, and was interested in the close connection between Tantric ritual and the aesthetic experience.⁴⁶ For

Abhinavagupta watching a play or reading a poem for the *sahṛdaya* (sensitive reader) necessitates a loss of the sense of present time and space. Since we are not indifferent to what is taking place, our involvement must be of a purer type than we normally experience. We are not directly and personally involved so our hearts respond sympathetically but not

⁴³ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 87.

⁴⁴ J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 136.

⁴⁵ J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 136.

⁴⁶ David L. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xxxix.

selfishly. The ego is transcended, and for the duration of the aesthetic experience we find ourselves in a state of mental and emotional calm, which is experienced as pure undifferentiated bliss. He says this is arriving at the same terrain as the mystic, both uncommon and impersonal experiences in which the individual self is surpassed.⁴⁷

While Abhinavagupta led the theory of *rasa* to the proximity of Vedānta, another author, Rūpa Gosvāmin, in his *Ujjvalanīlamanī*, developed the theory into the domain of *bhakti* or loving devotion to Kṛṣṇa. In his work, the *śṛṅgāra rasa*, or erotic love, becomes *bhaktirasa* with its various forms such as *śānta* (tranquility), *dāsya* (servitude or humility), *sakhya* (friendship), *vātsalya* (affection for a child), and *mādhurya* (sweetness).⁴⁸ It will be through Rūpa Gosvāmin and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition that aesthetic sentiment is seen in its highest form as *bhakti-rasa* or *mādhurya bhakti-rasa*.

Śṛṅgāra rasa, the erotic *rasa*, which is savored as the distilled essence of the *sthāyibhāva* of *rati*, love, is the most celebrated of all the *rasa*. The preeminence of the erotic *rasa* is emphasized in Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, which provides a detailed analysis of every phase of *Śṛṅgāra rasa*.

Bhoja was a king who ruled Rajasthan (Malwa) in the eleventh century and was a highly influential figure in the medieval world of Sanskrit aesthetics.⁴⁹ Bhoja's theory of *rasa* is unique in that, in contrast to other exponents of Indian aesthetics, he insists that there is only one *rasa*: *śṛṅgāra rasa*. Rather than Abhinavagupta's theory of the experience of *rasa* as an impersonal experience that is utterly distinct from the *sthāyibhāva*, Bhoja's

⁴⁷ J.L. Masson and M.V. Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1969), vii-viii.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ David L. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xlv.

theory emphasizes the personal emotional experience that is an intensified form of the *sthāyibhāva*. It is likely that Bhoja's reflections (more than Abhinavagupta's) on *śṛṅgāra rasa* had a significant influence on the *rasa* theory expounded by Rūpa Gosvāmin in the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* and *Ujjvalanīlamanī* ⁵⁰

Bhoja argues that the determining factor in experiencing *rasa* is the quality of one's inner nature and depends upon one's full development of emotional capacity. Like Abhinavagupta, Bhoja believes that aesthetic experience is dependent upon *vāsanās* (unconscious impressions), however the two men differ greatly in their understanding of the *vāsanās*. Bhoja upholds that the *rasa* experience is dependent upon "special *vāsanās* that are due to the past performance of religious acts (*dharma-kārya*)."⁵¹ Whereas according to Abhinavagupta the *vāsanās* on which the aesthetic experience depends exists in everyone.

Another important element of Bhoja's theory is his insistence that all *rasa* are really one. For him, *śṛṅgāra rasa* (amorous love) is the essential and unified *rasa* that underlies all experiences of pleasure. Love, therefore, is the very foundation of all aesthetic enjoyment. Subsequently, Bhoja's theory represents both singularity and multiplicity of *rasa*. Therefore love or *rati* is the founding *bhāva*. When intensified it is transformed to amorous love. This is expressed also in the *Agni Purāṇa*, a text most likely known and quoted by Rūpa Gosvāmin.⁵²

For Abhinavagupta *rasa* is manifested in a manner that marks it off radically from the *sthāyibhāva*, whereas for Bhoja *rasa* is the intensification and transformation of the

⁵⁰ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 87-88.

⁵¹ Rūpa Gosvāmin, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, trans. David L. Haberman (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xlvi.

⁵² Ibid, xlvi

sthāyibhāva. The exalted *rasa* for Abhinavagupta is *śānta*, an experience of deep tranquility and peace, where one has transcended ordinary emotional experience. By contrast, for Bhoja, *śṛṅgāra* is the very apex of intense emotional experience.⁵³

Neal Delmonico has identified these different theories as two different schools of *rasa* existing in India. The “northern school” which identifies with Abhinavagupta as its main spokesman, and the other the “southern school”, identifies Bhoja as chief spokesman.

The Nava Rasa:

<i>Sthāyibhāva</i>		<i>Poetical Expressions (Rasa)</i>	
Rati	Delight	Śṛṅgāra Śyama (green), Viṣṇu	Erotic (love in union and separation)
Hāsa	Laughter	Hāsyā Sitā (white), Pramatha	Comic, humor
Śoka	Sorrow	Karuṇa Kapota (dove colored), Yama	Pathetic, pathos, sorrow
Krodha	Anger	Raudra Rakta (red), Rudra/Śiva	Furious, anger, wrath
Utsāha	Heroism	Vīra Gaura (wheat brown) Mahendra	Heroic
Jugupsā	Disgust	Bibhatsa Nila (blue) Mahakala	Odious, distaste, recoil, disgust
Vismaya	Wonder	Adbhūta Pita (yellow) Brahma	Wonderful, wonderment, surprise.
Bhaya	Fear	Bhayānaka Kṛṣṇa (black) Kala	Terrible, fear, panic
Sama	Serenity	Śānta	Serene, serenity, peace, tranquility, enlightened repose

⁵³ Ibid, xlvi

Chapter Two - Bhakti

Bhakti as Definition and Movement in Context

“I (Bhakti) was born in Draviḍa; and grew up in Karnāṭaka. I lived here and there in Mahārāshṭra; and became weak and old in Gujarat.”

--*Bhāgavata Māhātmya 1:48*

In her book “Interpreting Devotion: The Poetry and Legacy of a Female Bhakti Saint of India,” Karen Pechilis writes: “Devotion generally conveys a person’s profound emotional and mental commitment to a sacred being, which is expressed in conscientious and purposeful activities.”⁵⁴ In her book titled, *The Embodiment of Bhakti*, she further contends “given bhakti’s emphasis on motivated action, we should understand the term more properly as “participation.”⁵⁵ She continues, “as a classical term, *bhakti* describes the human love for God, and not God’s love for humankind; thus, *bhakti* poetry, while it reaches for the divine, is thoroughly grounded in human experience.”⁵⁶

The term *bhakti*, from the root *bhaj*, “to share, partake of,” is first and foremost about relationship. The relationship is one concerning a relationship with a deity. Barbara Holdrege explains: “The term *bhakti* connotes sharing in, partaking of, and participating in the deity as Other.”⁵⁷ This relationship has been expressed in a variety of traditions that essentially carves a path that resolves the state of separation from the divine by engaging in an increasingly intimate relationship with the divine Other conceived as a personal God.

⁵⁴ Karen Pechilis, *Interpreting Devotion* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

⁵⁵ Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24.

⁵⁶ Karen Pechilis, *Interpreting Devotion* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

⁵⁷ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 21.

“This relationship finds fruition in the ultimate goal of union with the deity, which is variously represented, ranging from a state of union-in-difference to a state of undifferentiated unity without duality.”⁵⁸

Amid the earliest occurrences of the term *bhakti*, in Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (c. 500-400 BCE) and the *Mahābhārata* (c. 200 BCE-100 CE) the term *bhakti* is at times used to refer to a relationship of loyalty and service to a king or military leader, while in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (c. 400-200 BCE) and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (c. 200 BCE) the meaning of the term is extended to include service, reverence, love for, and devotion to a deity. In later *bhakti* traditions the term is also at times extended further to include the guru as the object of *bhakti*.⁵⁹

A restricted and erroneous definition (previously given in early scholarship) of *bhakti* no longer serves as an understanding of what is *bhakti*. Krishna Sharma states that the *Bhakti* movement is an amalgamation of a number of devotional movements of a differing nature. Yet generally, “Today scholars tend to understand *bhakti* as comprising independent *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* ways of imagining God.”⁶⁰

For example, the Tamil Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poets are classified as imagining a *saguṇa* god, as are the north Indian *bhakti* saints Surdās, Mīrābāī, and Tulsīdās. The Vīraśaivas of Karnataka, plus the north Indian saints Ravidās, Kabīr, and Nānak, are all held

⁵⁸ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 21.

⁵⁹ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 20-21.

⁶⁰ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement* (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2002), 1.

to imagine God as *nirguna*.⁶¹ A.K Ramanujan sees this distinction as not very useful as both play into notions of *bhakti* simultaneously. He states:

“All devotional poetry plays on the tension between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*, the lord as person and lord as principle. If he were entirely a person, he would not be divine, and if he were entirely a principle, a godhead, one could not make poems about him. The former attitude makes dvaita or dualism possible, and the latter makes for Advaita or monism...it is not either/or, but both/and; myth, bhakti, and poetry would be impossible without the presence of both attitudes.”⁶²

Bhakti as a movement originated in South India during the seventh century CE, spread northwards from Tamil Nadu through Karnataka and Maharashtra, and gained acceptance in fifteenth-century Bengal and northern India. It emerged as a localized expression and notion of divinity and embodied the conservative and the liberal, as well as the revivalist and reformist trends. It contained both conformism and dissent.⁶³ Yet it emerged from an earlier *bhakti* stream during the period between 200 BCE and 200 CE finding expression in the rise of sectarian devotional movements centering on the deities Viṣṇu and Śiva and “in the upsurge of multiform vernacular traditions venerating a panoply of goddesses at the local village level.”⁶⁴

Divine embodiment becomes an important object of worship and exploration for the bhakta and is related in a palpable way to the experience of *rasa*. Barbara Holdrege distinguishes post Vedic *bhakti* traditions from Vedic traditions through the emerging discourse of the body in *bhakti* traditions. She states: “...in which constructions of divine

⁶¹ Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21.

⁶² AK Ramanujan, “The Myths of Bhakti: Images of Śiva in Śaiva Poetry,” in *Discourses of Śiva: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Nature of Religious Imagery*, ed. Michael W. Meister (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 212.

⁶³ Karine Schomer, *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 1.

⁶⁴ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 21.

embodiment proliferate, celebrating the notion that a deity...can appear in manifold corporeal forms and assume various types of concentrated presence..."⁶⁵ She distinguishes seven ways in which this embodiment differs from earlier Vedic formulations. These ways will be relevant in light of our view of *rasa* and Rūpa Gosvāmin's theory on *Bhakti Rasa*.

1) Particularized Divine Bodies, where elaborate and particularized descriptions of the bodies of the deities are developed, such as distinctive postures, gestures, and emblems. 2) Embodiment of the Divine in Time, in which the notion of "divine descent" of the deity in different cosmic cycles. 3) Embodiment of the Divine in Place, such as sacred sites, or *tīrthas*, that act as centers of divine presence and representing various manifestations of the deity, parts of the body, special abodes, sites of the deity's divine play (*līlā*) assuming localized forms in rivers, mountains, forests, rock outcroppings, and caves or in landscapes of an entire region where temples and shrines are built to mark the sites of divine presence. *Tīrtha-yātra*, pilgrimage as a part of ritual is endorsed here. 4) Embodiment of the Divine in Image, where the divine actually takes form in the *murti* or *arcā*. 5) Embodiment of the Divine in Name, whereby the sound of the myriad of divine names signifies the sonic form of the deity. 6) Embodiment of the Divine in Text, whereby the divine is celebrated as becoming embodied in a variety of different kinds of sacred texts. 7) Embodiment of the Divine in Human Form, in which the divine is realized in the bodies of gurus, poet-saints, and exalted bhaktas, as well as momentarily in embodied practices of possession, dance, and dramatic performances.⁶⁶

This arrangement of notions pertaining to divine bodies is found in the *Mahabharata*, the *Harivaṃsa*, and the *Puranas*. Certain Epic and Puranic traditions

⁶⁵ Ibid, 22

⁶⁶ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 23.

pertaining to these various modes of divine embodiment are in turn selectively appropriated and reimagined in the earliest full-fledged *bhakti* movements for which we have textual witness in the form of devotional poetry. The Tamil Vaiṣṇava poet-saints known as the Alvars and their Tamil Śaiva counterparts, the Nayanars and Manikkavacakar, who flourished in the Tamil speaking areas of South India between the sixth and ninth centuries,⁶⁷ are some examples.

Finally, this notion of embodiment can help navigate the array of ontologies, devotional modes, goals, and practices found in *bhakti* traditions. Varying degrees of embodiment are found, with highly embodied traditions at one end of the spectrum and less embodied traditions at the other end.

Highly embodied traditions tend to celebrate the multiple forms of the Godhead. In this ontology, the modes favor more passionate and ecstatic forms of devotion, as well as emphasizing the goal of life as a state of union-in-difference in which the bhakta relishes the embrace of the deity in eternal relationship.

Examples of such traditions include the Ālvārs Nammālvār and Āṇṭāḷ (c. ninth century CE), the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (c. ninth to tenth century CE), and Caitanya (1486-1533 CE) and his Gauḍīya followers. Less embodied traditions tend to be associated with ontologies that underscore the formlessness of the Godhead in its essential nature, with modes of *bhakti* that lean towards contemplative forms of devotion, and goals of life that emphasize the state of undifferentiated unity without duality in which the bhakta merges

⁶⁷ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 23-24.

with the deity. The mystic poet, Kabīr would represent this expression of *bhakti*.⁶⁸ This spectrum of embodiment also parallels the *nirguna/saguna* expressions of understanding.

I would like to note that Karen Prentiss brings up an important point in her book “The Embodiment of Bhakti.” She points out that the English word *devotion* “does not accurately convey the issues at stake in *bhakti*. The Sanskrit root of *bhakti*, *bhaj*, meaning “partake, participate,” signifies the bhaktas’ relationship with God; it is a premise of their poetry that they can participate in God by singing of God, by saying God’s name, and in other ways.”⁶⁹ Thus embodying a participation in ones relationship with God is key here, and important for us to really understand this type of intense convening with the divine.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa

The nature of true devotion is highly emotional and causes horripilation, tears, loss of control, and frenzy. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa (11.14: 23-24)*

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the seminal text of Vaiṣṇava Bhakti. It is generally held to have originated in the South of India between the ninth and tenth centuries CE. The *Bhāgavatam*, written in Sanskrit, merges the religiocultural traditions of both the North and South. It adopts the canonical form of a Purāṇa and incorporates South Indian *bhakti* of the Alvars within a brahmanical Sanskritic framework that reflects the Northern ideologies.⁷⁰

As the most popular and influential of the eighteen *Purāṇas*, the authority of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is recognized by the five classical Vaiṣṇava sampradāyas, with each

⁶⁸ Ibid, 25

⁶⁹ Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 25

Sampradāya producing commentaries to demonstrate the Bhāgavata's support of its particular views. The five sampradāyas are: The Śrī Vaiṣṇava established by Rāmānuja; the Brahma founded by Madhva; the Sanakādi established by Nimbārka; the Vallabha, or Puṣṭi Marga, founded by Vallabha; and the Gauḍīya inspired by Caitanya.⁷¹

According to mythological tradition, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* tells of Kṛṣṇa's life as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and his role to slay Kāmsa, his murderous uncle, who is oppressing the earth with his wickedness.⁷² It is the tenth book of the Bhāgavata that provides a very personal depiction of God through his *lilas* – play, pastimes, or frolics – during his infancy, childhood, and adolescence in the forests of Vṛndāvan, popularly known as Braj, among the cowherd men and women.⁷³ It is in his relationship with the village women that the landscape of devotion is cultivated. As a child, Kṛṣṇa is doted on by the women of the village but as he matures their interest in him changes to passionate longing. They are all married women, but none are able to resist his beauty and charm.

He is described as retiring to the woods, where he plays his flute on autumn nights when the moon is full. Hearing the music, the women are driven mad with passion and give up their domestic roles and chores to dash away to be with Kṛṣṇa in the bowers of Vṛndāvana. They jump up in the middle of putting on their makeup, abandon their families while eating a meal with them, leave food to burn on the stove, and run out of their home to be with Kṛṣṇa. They are so distraught and frenzied as they rush to his side that their clothes and jewelry come loose and fall off (10.29. 3-7)

In the woods the gopīs sport and play with Kṛṣṇa. They make love in the forest and the waters of the Jumna River. In some accounts of the tradition Kṛṣṇa is said to

⁷¹ Ibid, 26

⁷² David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 84-85.

⁷³ Edwin F. Bryant, "Krishna in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa." *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 112.

multiply himself so that each woman has a Kṛṣṇa to herself. The mood is joyous, festive, and erotic.⁷⁴

The context of devotion is made relatively clear in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Those who love the Lord behave like the *gopīs*. They let nothing come between themselves and the Lord, not even their husbands.

This Purāṇa figures directly in Rūpa Gosvāmin's theoretics on *rasa*, or *Bhaktirasa* as he defines devotional relishing of the lord through the symbolism of the *gopīs* extreme emotion and frenzy as metaphor for the divine-human love affair.

S.N. Dasgupta calls *bhakti* a form of "devotional mysticism. He distinguishes three progressive levels of *bhakti*, from (1) self-abnegation, self-surrender to god, and contemplative union with God, as taught in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and reflected in the teachings of Rāmānuja, to (2) the desire for contemplative union combined with the longing to taste God's love, as expressed by the devotee Prahlāda in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, to (3) the intoxicating, sensual, blissful, and ecstatic love of god that is celebrated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.⁷⁵

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* thus marks the transition of *bhakti* as the old contemplative meditation of God stirred by a deep-seated love, to mad intoxication of love felt through the welling up of feelings and emotions of attachment to god as a sensory, sensuous, heart felt spiritual drunkenness of joy. "Such a person is beside himself with this love of God. He sings, laughs, dances and weeps. He is no longer a person of this world."⁷⁶

Without the hair of the body bristling, without the heart melting, without being inarticulate due to tears of bliss (*ānanda*) – without *bhakti* how can consciousness

⁷⁴ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 84.

⁷⁵ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 82.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 83

be purified? He whose speech is stammering, whose heart melts, who weeps repeatedly and sometimes laughs, who unabashedly sings and dances – such a person, united by *bhakti* with me (Kṛṣṇa), purifies the world.⁷⁷

Lee Siegel writes, “The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* homologized the sacred and profane dimensions of love, explicitly theologized sexual love, reconciled human passion as exemplified in the love of the cowherdesses for Kṛṣṇa with *bhakti*, religious devotion valued as the highest means and the highest goal.⁷⁸

Two centuries later, a very influential Sanskrit poem called the *Gītagovinda* (Kṛṣṇa in Song) written by Jayadeva emerged and shifted the joyful, chaotic intensity of the Kṛṣṇa lila, to a moody and desperate representation of Kṛṣṇa’s relationship with the *gopīs*. It was highly instrumental in the development of Rādhā as the preeminent devotee of Kṛṣṇa and one that is elevated to a goddess in her own right on par with Kṛṣṇa as Kṛṣṇa himself in the *Rasa-līlā*.

⁷⁷ Bhāgavata Purāṇa (84) BH

⁷⁸ Lee Siegel, *Sacred and Profane dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions: As Exemplified in the Gītagovinda of Jayadeva* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), 38.

The Gītagovinda by Jayadeva – Kṛṣṇa from Rādhā's Perspective

“The *rasika* becomes a *bhakta*...the connoisseur the devotee.”⁷⁹

The *Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva dates from the twelfth century, two centuries after the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Fashioned as a poem, Jayadeva wrote his famous work about the amorous love sports of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Due to the influence of South Indian Bhakti, the god Kṛṣṇa was becoming the focus of a popular devotionalism, an euphoric *bhakti* that imagined and expressed the devotee's relationship with the deity in terms of passionate human love and longing. It was an ideal milieu for Jayadeva to compose a Sanskrit court poem celebrating the erotic relationship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.⁸⁰ Jayadeva wrote the songs of the *Gītagovinda* with the intention to be sung out loud and played out with dance. Many translations, editions and manuscripts of the text specify raga and tala (musical scale and rhythm) for each of the songs.⁸¹

The word *Rasa* is an essential word in the *Gītagovinda* as a whole and used simultaneously in erotic reference and religious resonances by the “use of the word meditation (*dhyāna*), to describe Rādhā entranced in contemplation of Kṛṣṇa and drowning in a sea of *rasa*.”⁸² Possibly suggesting the goal of ascetic meditative practice. The word *rasa* occurs some two dozen times in the text, most often in direct reference to sexual

⁷⁹ Lee Siegel, *Gītagovinda Love songs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by Jayadeva* (New York: The Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009), xxx.

⁸⁰ Ibid, xxx

⁸¹ Ibid, xxxviii

⁸² Lee Siegel, *Gītagovinda Love songs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by Jayadeva* (New York: The Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009), xliii

pleasure, but because the text is about Kṛṣṇa it is never without some religious undertone or implication.⁸³

What is interesting about the *Gītagovinda* is that it is written almost entirely from Rādhā's point of view, and the dominant emotion is love in separation.⁸⁴ Rādhā's longing, jealousy and sorrow and illicit love are featured in this poem. Remarkably it is in the sentiments aroused in illicit love that metaphorically represents the sort of intense love necessary for devotion.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa represent eternal lovers in the dynamic of union and separation, and it was in this aspect that the subject was accepted by the Vaiṣṇava sampradayas. The *Gītagovinda* significantly influenced the medieval theology that developed interpretively around the erotic mythology of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Lee Siegel writes: "Jayadeva seems to have been largely responsible for the establishment of Rādhā as the particular and primary consort of Kṛṣṇa, she whom the god himself describes in the opening of canto three of the poem as "the chain that bound him to this world."⁸⁵

She gazed at Kṛṣṇa:
 long had he longed to make love to her,
 His one true love, his only miss;
 Love had made himself at home in him,
 And his face beamed bounteous bliss.
 By the grandeur of my song,
 Kṛṣṇa's ornaments are redoubled;
 Install him in your heart, worship him,
 And your life will be untroubled.

As Rādhā stared at her dearly beloved,
 Her pupils began to dilate and contract,

⁸³ Ibid, xliii

⁸⁴ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 85.

⁸⁵ Lee Siegel, *Gītagovinda Love songs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by Jayadeva* (New York: The Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009), xxxv.

And tears of joy spilled from her eyes;
 It was as though those eyes, trying so hard
 To go beyond their corners, all the way to her ears,
 Were dripping with sweat!

--*Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva, Canto 11, song 22⁸⁶

When Caitanya accepted the *Gītagovinda* (due to his own ecstatic experience where Kṛṣṇa appeared to him in a garden in Puri as he sang the third song of the *Gītagovinda*) as one of the masterpieces of Vaiṣṇava literature, its popularity increased to such an extent that the Vaiṣṇava poets of Bengal like Rūpa Gosvāmin wrote poetry (*kāvya*s and *natakas*) with the *Gītagovinda* as their model.⁸⁷ However the Caitanya School of Vaiṣṇava devotion maintained that erotic emotions and sentiments were sacred if, and only if the object of sexual desire and source of sexual pleasure was Kṛṣṇa.⁸⁸

Basic Expressions, Qualities, and Characteristics of a Bhakta

*Manmanā bhāva madbhakto
 Madyājī mām namaskuru
 Mām evaiṣyasi satyaṁ te
 Pratijāne priyo 'si me*

*Fix your mind on Me, worshipping Me,
 Sacrificing to Me, bowing down to Me;
 In this way you shall come truly to Me,
 I promise, for you are dear to Me.*

Chapter 18, verse 65 of the Bhagavad Gita

⁸⁶ Lee Siegel, *Gītagovinda Love songs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa* by Jayadeva (New York: The Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009), 167.

⁸⁷ Amaresh Datta, *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature: Devraj to Jyoti, Volume 2* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 1419-1420.

⁸⁸ Lee Siegel, *Gītagovinda Love songs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa* by Jayadeva (New York: The Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009), xxxiv.

While the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the *opus universalis* (as Barbara Holdrege coins it) of *Bhakti*, along with the *Bhagavad Gītā*, there are also two other important and famous texts on *bhakti* that express the self-abnegation and self-surrender of the devotee to God. The *Śāṅḍilya-bhakti-sūtra* and the *Nārada-bhakti sūtra* are the first systematic presentation of *bhakti* doctrine with definitions, which present *bhakti* as a *Śāstra* in the model of the six *Darśana*. They depict *bhakti* with reference to God Vāsudeva and described Him as the object of supreme loving attachment (*parānurakti*).⁸⁹ Swami Vivekananda references Nārada in his own writings on *Bhakti Yoga*. He quotes Nārada: “*Bhakti* is intense love of God. When a man gets it he loves all, hates none; he becomes satisfied for ever.”⁹⁰

Yet as mentioned earlier, *bhakti* can take form in widely variant expressions distinctively envisioned by multiple religions of India. According to Krishna Sharma in *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective* these two texts exhibit that *bhakti* can be explained from different points of view in the different religio-philosophical traditions.⁹¹

Briefly, both of these authoritative medieval treatises on *bhakti* speak of *bhakti* in the general sense of devotion while analyzing its nature and significance. The *Śāṅḍilya-bhakti-sūtra* defines *bhakti* as the supreme love for Īśvara (the Lord), whereas Nārada in the *Nārada-bhakti sūtra* takes *bhakti* to mean supreme passionate love for the Divine (*parama-prema*). The *Śāṅḍilya-bhakti-sūtra* also accepts a secondary sense of *bhakti*, in which devotional acts are taught to purify the devotee and help prepare him/her for receiving divine grace. Only then is the devotee able to feel the passionate love for the Lord.

⁸⁹ Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaisnavism: The Philosophy of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 121.

⁹⁰ Swami Vivekananda, *Karma-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1955), 117.

⁹¹ Pechilis, Karen, “Defining Bhakti.” *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, edited by Jessica Frazier (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 113.

Once the love has begun, gradually it saturates all aspects of life. Acts such as listening to the Lord's glory (*śravaṇa*), singing God's eulogy (*kirtana*) along with the nine fold acts explained in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (mentioned later in this paper) support the devotees cultivation of passionate love for the Lord.⁹² Sharma further clarifies,

“Whereas Śāṇḍilya's approach is more in keeping with Nirguṇa-bhakti and the classical systems of Sāṅkhya and Vedānta, Nārada shows a greater leaning towards the Purāṇic tradition and the sectarian characteristics of the Bhāgavatas and their Saguṇa mode of bhakti. The difference between Nārada and Śāṇḍilya as well as the nature of Śāṇḍilya's exposition of bhakti show that...no antagonism between bhakti and Vedānta was ever recognized, and that bhakti could be interpreted in the Purāṇic-Vaiṣṇava and the Upaniṣadic-Vedāntist terms.”⁹³

Nārada, a well-traveled Vedic sage figures prominently in a number of Hindu texts. He is seen as one who promotes the blessings of Viṣṇu. He is always depicted as carrying a tamera (a string drone instrument) in his hands, with a garland of flowers around his neck. He is always with the divine name of Viṣṇu on his lips in the form of “Om Namō Narāyana.” His connection to music is without doubt. Let's examine the opening sutras of the *Nārada-bhakti sūtra* to view some of the instruction meant for the bhakta. Here translated by Y. Subramanya Sharma:



Sage Narada offering respect to Viṣṇu on Garuda

⁹² Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaisnavism: The Philosophy of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 121.

⁹³ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement* (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2002), 125-126.

Nārada-bhakti sūtra:

- I.1 - Now, therefore, we shall expound on Bhakti.
 I. 2: It is of the nature of the highest love for This One.
 I.3: And of the nature of immortal bliss.
 I.4: On attaining which, a man becomes perfect, immortal, satisfied forever.
 I.5: On gaining which one wants nothing, laments over nothing, hates nothing, delights in nothing, and is never enthusiastic over anything earthly.
 I.6: Experiencing which one becomes exhilarated beyond self-control, stands perfectly still, and revels in the Self.
 I.7: It is no worldly desire, for it is of the nature of suppression.
 I.8: Suppression means abandoning all worldly and Vedic activities.
 I.9: And exclusive devotion to Him and indifference to all things that are obstacles to it.
 I.10: Exclusive devotion is abandonment of all other supports.
 I.11: Indifference to obstacles consists in undertaking only such activities –whether of ordinary life or those enjoined in the Vedas—as are favourable to it.
 I.12: Even after firm establishment in divine resolve, the Scriptures are to be respected.
 I.13: Otherwise there is apprehension of a fall.
 I.14: Even ordinary life is only up till then, though physical activities such as taking food continue as long as one wears this body.
 I.15: Definitions of this Bhakti will now be stated in accordance with different views.
 I.16: It is love of worship and other similar acts—says Vyāsa, the son of Parasara. (Devotion in works).
 I.17: Fondness for spiritual conversation and the like—says Garga. (Devotion in speech).
 I.18: These are Bhakti in so far as they do not clash with the contemplation of the Self—says Śāṅḍilya. (Devotion in mind).
 I.19: But Narada says “It is the offering of all acts to Him and feeling the highest pang of separation on occasions of losing remembrance of him.” (Complete self-surrender).

Y. Subramanya Sharma defines this sutra as the complete effacement of the self, and at-one-ment with God is the crucial test of genuine Bhakta. He states that the Purāṇas (Bhāgavata and Viṣṇu) have given vivid pictures of selfless love for God in their account of the Gopīs and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The account should not be misunderstood as physical love. He states that the author of the *Nārada-bhakti sūtra* pleads with “Students of *Bhakti* to not mistake the highest form of God-love for anything so grotesque.”⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Y. Subrahmanya Sarma, *Narada's Aphorisms on Bhakti* (Bangalore City: The Adhyatma Prakasha Karyalaya Holenarsipur, 1938), 7.

I.24: In that sort of love, there is no idea at all of one's feeling happy in the happiness of others.

I.33: Bhakti alone should be chosen by those who seek liberation.

I.34-37: Teachers have recommended various means to this Bhakti...it results from the renunciation of the objects of the senses and renunciation of attachment...from unremitting adoration...from listening to narration of various blessed qualities of the Lord and proclaiming them aloud even while attending to affairs of ordinary life.

I.38: In the main, however, it results through the grace of the great ones, through even a little of the grace of the Lord.

I.40: Nevertheless, it is attainable, and that is through His grace only.⁹⁵

Similarly, according to the *Bhagavad Gītā*, renunciation (as a more intellectual form of *bhakti*) through yoga practice results in supreme devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Here quoted from the *Gītā*:

Chapter 3 v.13

13:

The good, who eat the remainder
Of the sacrifice,
Are released from all evils;
But the wicked, who cook only for their own sake,
Eat their own impurity.⁹⁶

Chapter 9 v.26-29

26:

He who offers to Me with devotion and a pure heart
A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water,
That offering of devotion
I accept from him.

27:

Whatever you do, whatever you eat,
Whatever you offer, whatever you give,
Whatever austerities you perform, Arjuna,
Do that as an offering to Me.

28:

You shall certainly be liberated
From the bonds of action which produce good and evil fruits;
Liberated, with your mind disciplined

⁹⁵ Ibid, 7-11

⁹⁶ Winthrop Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 170.

By the yoga of renunciation,
You shall come to Me.

29:

I am the same (Self) in all beings;
There is none disliked or dear to Me.
But they who worship Me with devotion
Are in Me, and I am also in them.⁹⁷

Chapter 18 v.49-66:

49:

With his intellect unattached at all times,
With conquered self, free from desire,
By renunciation, one attains
The supreme state of freedom from action

50:

Learn from Me briefly, Arjuna,
How one who has attained perfection
Also attains Brahman,
Which is the highest state of knowledge.

51:

Endowed with a pure intellect,
Controlling the self with firmness,
Abandoning sound and the other objects of sense,
Casting off attraction and hatred,

52:

Dwelling in solitude, eating lightly,
Controlling speech, body, and mind,
Constantly devoted to yoga meditation,
Taking refuge in dispassion,

53:

Relinquishing egotism, force, arrogance,
Desire, anger, and possession of
Property;
Unselfish, tranquil,

He is fit for oneness with Brahman.

54:

Absorbed in Brahman, he whose self
Is serene
Does not mourn, nor does he desire;
Impartial among all beings,
He attains supreme devotion to Me.

⁹⁷ Winthrop Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), .402-405

55:

By devotion to Me he comes to know
Who I am in truth;
Then having known Me in truth,
He enters Me immediately.

56:

Performing all actions,
He whose reliance is always on Me,
Attains, by My grace,
The eternal, imperishable abode.

57:

Mentally renouncing
All actions in Me, devoted to Me as
The Supreme,
Taking refuge in the yoga of
Discrimination,
Constantly think of Me.

58:

Fixing your mind on Me, you shall
Pass over
All difficulties, through My grace;
But if, through egoism, you will not
Listen,
Then you shall perish.

59:

If filled with egoism,
You think, "I shall not fight,"
Your resolve will be in vain;
Your own material nature will
Compel you.

60:

What you wish not to do, through delusion,
You shall do that
Against your will, Arjuna,
Bound by your own karma, born of
Your own material nature.

61:

The Lord abides in the hearts
Of all beings, Arjuna,
Causing all beings to revolve,
By the power of illusion, as if fixed on
A machine.

62:

Fly unto Him alone for refuge
With your whole being, Arjuna.
From His grace, you shall attain

Supreme peace and the eternal abode.

63:

Thus the knowledge that is more secret
Than all that is secret has been expounded
To you by Me.

Having reflected on this fully,
Do as you please.

64:

Hear again My supreme word,
Most secret of all.
You are surely loved by Me;
Therefore, I shall speak for your good.

65:

Fix your mind on Me, worshiping Me,
Sacrificing to Me, bowing down to Me;
In this way you shall come truly to Me,
I promise, for you are dear to Me.

66:

Abandoning all duties
Take refuge in Me alone.
I shall liberate you From all evils; do not grieve.⁹⁸

2 Modes, 4 types, and 9 Forms of Bhakti

As mentioned earlier, the major figures of Vaiṣṇava Bhakti are Rāmānuja, Madhva, Nīmbārka, Vallabha and Caitanya/Gauḍīya/Bengal Vaiṣṇavas. For Rāmānuja and Madhva *bhakti* is knowledge of Brahman through an unfailing recollection of the supreme Lord, a constant meditation on Him that develops into direct perception of Him mostly through the performance of obligatory ritual. *Bhakti* for them is not characterized as a sweet love and comradeship between humans and God; it is rather understood as awesome reverence. It is through *karma* (work) and *jñāna* (knowledge) that they were deeply moved by the grandeur and majesty of God.

⁹⁸ Winthrop Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 710-727.

Nīmbārka was a teacher that emphasized God's grace and sweetness, and devotion was a love that sprung forth because of God's incomparable sweetness (rather than reverence at his greatness). His was a bhakta that implied a deep love for God and referred to three means to salvation as devotion and meditation (*upāsana*), self-surrender to God (*prapatti*), and self-surrender to the spiritual preceptor in addition to work (*karma*) and knowledge (*jñāna*).⁹⁹

Vallabha, while admitting the authority of the Vedas said there were three different ways of approaching God (*karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti*). Of these, *bhakti* is the best among them because it is the only true means to salvation because the states of love (*prema*) and service (*seva*) which *bhakti* implies is better than even release. He said that immediate liberation could be attained only through grace (*puṣṭi*) of God.

From this perspective people are grouped into three classes: 1) the common type of people that are always busy with worldly concerns and never think of God (*pravāha*); (2) people who follow the Vedic path, who worship God in accordance with scriptural rules (*maryādā*); and (3) people who worship God out of the pure love engendered only through His grace (*puṣṭi*).

Largely speaking, *bhakti* is of two kinds. *Maryādā* and *Puṣṭi*. The former connected to scripture and dependent on ones own efforts, and the latter inspired by a natural love for God and cannot be obtained by any means except for God's grace. In *maryādā bhakti* love for God results in the gradual cultivation and ascending order of nine forms of devotion: (1) hearing, (2) reciting, (3) remembering, (4) falling at the feet, (5) worship, (6)

⁹⁹ Sudhindra C. Chakravarti, "Bengal Vaisnavism." *Hindu Spirituality Post Classical and Modern*, edited by K.R. Sundararajan and Bithika Mukerji (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1997), 51.

salutation, (7) service, (8) friendship, and (9) self-dedication. In *Puṣṭi Bhakti*, it is not the result of the practice of the nine forms of *bhakti*, but the spontaneous devotion sprung naturally from the source of all spiritual activities (including the nine-fold above).¹⁰⁰

Vallabha divided *Puṣṭi Bhakti* into four further sections, which cultivate the bhakta towards deeper immersion into devotional absorption. Vallabha focused on what he viewed as the decidedly superior form of supreme expression of love toward God as *svarūpānanda*, the bliss of God Himself. This bliss is even greater than the bliss of Brahman. In this state the devotee sees everything in God and loves God as his or her sole belonging. This attitude of love is a gift of God. It cannot be obtained by human effort. God favors certain individuals by bringing them forth, giving them divine bodies similar to his own, and playing with them, allowing them to enjoy the pleasure of His company.

This bliss of devotion is characteristically portrayed in the *gopīs* (milkmaids of Vṛndāvana). They worship Kṛṣṇa because he is the most beautiful and loveable one, and they are in full possession of various *rasas*, of which *śṛṅgāra* (erotic love) is the most prominent as is expressed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹⁰¹

Additionally, Vallabha articulated that the expression of devotion is possible only in a feminine mode. The attitude of the *gopīs* is the best sketch of this kind of devotion. Those that wish to enjoy the highest kind of divine bliss should follow the *gopīs* example and remember that God Kṛṣṇa is the “natural husband of all souls,” and should love him as such.

¹⁰⁰ Sudhindra C. Chakravarti, “Bengal Vaisnavism.” *Hindu Spirituality Post Classical and Modern*, edited by K.R. Sundararajan and Bithika Mukerji (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1997), 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 52-53

Rādhā is the chief of the *gopīs*, and her love for Kṛṣṇa is the perfect model of the ardent love felt by a lover for her beloved as is expressed in the *rāsa-līla* (love-play).¹⁰²

The Gauḍīya Sampradāya, Caitanya, The Gosvāmins, Rūpa Gosvāmin

Caitanya inspired the Gauḍīya Sampradāya, also called Bengal Vaisnavism, in the sixteenth century in the northeastern region of India that is now known as Bengal. Caitanya did not leave a legacy of devotional poetry or literature aside from eight verses (*Śikṣāṣṭaka*) traditionally credited to him.

He is represented in Gauḍīya hagiography as the teacher of a group of disciples, who became to be known as the “Six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana.” These six disciples were given a two fold task: to recover and restore the lost *līlā-sthalas* (sites of *līlā* episodes) in the area of Vraja where Kṛṣṇa is said to have engaged in his playful exploits during his time on earth; and, second, to develop a formal system of theology and practice to perpetuate the *bhakti* movement inspired by Caitanya.

The six Gosvāmins – Sanātana, Rūpa, Gopala Bhaṭṭa, Raghunāthadāsa, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, and Jīva Gosvāmin – are credited with transforming the landscape of Vraja into a pilgrimage network of *tīrthas*.¹⁰³ They are also credited with formulating a *bhakti-sāstra*, a formal discourse of *bhakti*, along with the associated regimen of *sādhana-bhakti* that defines its distinctive tradition and identity of the Gauḍīya Sampradāya, a vastly complex tradition that emphasizes emotional Kṛṣṇa bhakti, and Kṛṣṇa as the Godhead.

¹⁰² Sudhindra C. Chakravarti, “Bengal Vaisnavism.” *Hindu Spirituality Post Classical and Modern*, edited by K.R. Sundararajan and Bithika Mukerji (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1997), 53.

¹⁰³ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 26.

For the purposes of this essay, the focus will mostly be on a dualist and briefly on a non-dualist interpretation of the notion of *bhakti-rasa*, the “sentiment of devotion” that found importance in all of the North Indian schools of Kṛṣṇa devotion and drew inspiration from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. From the dualist perspective, in focus will be Rūpa Gosvāmin and his contribution to *bhakti-śāstra* and *sādhana-bhakti* through portions of one of his works on devotional aesthetics, the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* translated by David L. Haberman as, “The Ocean of the Essence of Devotional Rasa”.

According to Mr. Haberman, this massive compendium of devotional aesthetics presents religious experience in terms of the classical aesthetic (*rasa*) theory of India and systematizes a way of thinking about religion that has had a lasting influence.¹⁰⁴ From a non-dualist perspective, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s theory of devotional sentiment from his work called *Bhaktirasāyana* will be observed.

Chapter Three – Bhakti Rasa in Context

The history regarding the development of *Bhakti* recognized as a sentiment.

Bhakti Rasa is a technical concept borrowed by Bengal Vaiṣṇava theologians from the writers on Sanskrit poetics. These Vaiṣṇava devotionalists adopted *rasa* theory as a device for explaining their imaginative, emotional religious practice.¹⁰⁵ It is centered largely on identification with the characters in the divine drama of Kṛṣṇa’s eternal *līlā*, as

¹⁰⁴ David L. Haberman, “A Selection from the Bhaktirasamritasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthāyī-bhāvas).” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 409.

¹⁰⁵ Lance E. Nelson, “Bhakti-Rasa for the Advaitin Renunciate: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Theory of Devotional Sentiment,” *Religious Traditions: A Journal in the Study of Religion*, 12 (1989): 2.

resolved through literary sources. While not the first to understand the close relationship between aesthetic experience and religious experience these Vaiṣṇava devotionalists took these ideas to a very developed stage.

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, a slightly earlier Kashmiri writer than Abhinavagupta was likely the first to develop an explicit explanation of aesthetic experience in terms of the spectator's inward experience. J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan in *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics*, remark: "It may well be that Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was the first person to make the famous comparison of yogic ecstasy and aesthetic experience."¹⁰⁶ Vopadeva in the 13th century recognized the sentimental value of *bhakti* and was the first to call it a *rasa*. According to Vopadeva, *bhakti* is only the means to attain *kaivalya*. He considered the *bhakti* that was marked by the *Gopīs* is improper and illicit, since they were either virgins or wives of others. Another writer and Advaitin renunciate Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, who wrote the *Advaita-siddhi*, said that the eternal god being the fountain of all bliss gets manifested in the form of a sentiment.¹⁰⁷

In brief, the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas adapt conventional *rasa*-theory to the Kṛṣṇaite context, leaving many of its key term intact. They are however forced to alter some of the underlying secular basis to accommodate their religious objectives. Rather than using the secular view that *rasa* is a purely literary experience (and has no bearing on the real world apart from a temporary relishing in the mind of the spectator) the Vaiṣṇavas frame and elevate the *gopīs* encounter with the Lord to become distinctly religious, metaphysical and permanent. "It is seen as an ongoing, transphenominal reality, eternally taking place on the

¹⁰⁶ Rūpa Gosvāmin, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, trans. David L. Haberman (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xlii.

¹⁰⁷ Nrisinha P. Bhaduri, "Bhakti Devotion as an Aesthetic Sentiment," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 16:4 (1988): 383.

highest celestial plane. Imaginative identification with the story, therefore, if practiced with sufficient intensity, becomes much more than a source of aesthetic pleasure.”¹⁰⁸ It can in effect act as means to create an ontological change where one can truly transfer one’s being to Kṛṣṇa’s eternal realm, or make that world manifest on the earthly plane.

Bhakti Rasa: Rūpa Gosvāmin – Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu

“All glory to the one whose form is the essence of all divine emotions!”

--The beginning of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*

Using classical *rasa* theory mentioned earlier, Rūpa Gosvāmin (1480-1564) in his understanding of *rasa* extended it beyond the walls of the theatre and extended it to all of life. *Rasa* is not a temporary aesthetic experience but at the core of a sincere human life. For Rūpa there is only one true experience of *rasa*, the love of God, which constitutes the highest of all religious experiences.¹⁰⁹ It is the culminating result of relishing a divine emotion.¹¹⁰

The *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* is one of two texts by Rūpa Gosvāmin that systematically studies human emotion in terms of Indian classical aesthetic theory whereby the object of emotions is God in the deeply religious world of Gauḍīya Vaisnavism.

This special nature of devotional *rasa* for Rūpa can be best appreciated by comparing his understanding of the *sthāyibhāva*. In the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Rūpa

¹⁰⁸ Lance E. Nelson, “Bhakti-Rasa for the Advaitin Renunciate: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Theory of Devotional Sentiment,” *Religious Traditions*, 12: 1-16 (1989): 5.

¹⁰⁹ David L. Haberman, “A Selection from the *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* of Rūpa Gosvāmin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthāyi-bhāvas).” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 413.

¹¹⁰ Rūpa Gosvāmin, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, trans. David L. Haberman (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xxx.

develops an entire system that declares that the *sthāyibhāva* are rooted in love (*rati*), which takes Kṛṣṇa as its object (*vishaya*).¹¹¹

This *bhakti-rasa* has a single and very special foundational emotion. For Rūpa all genuine *rasa* is based on some form of love for Kṛṣṇa. This form of *sthāyibhāva* is so important for Rūpa that a major portion of the text of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* is concerned with shaping how to cultivate it. This leads to a contemplation of *sādhana* (*bhakti sādhana*) in order to cultivate this single fundamental *rasa*, which will be briefly covered later.

Rūpa also recognizes the differences found in the variety of devotees, so he claims that the type of love experienced depends on the type of “pot” experiencing it. David Haberman writes: “thus he is able to develop a system that simultaneously recognizes the oneness and multiplicity of love. Though love is one, it is experienced as many because of the different types of people experiencing it.”¹¹²

Parallel to this, Kṛṣṇa’s form as it appears is decided by perceptual disposition of the devotee; this means that divinity is also simultaneously one and multiple. This take allows Rūpa to link his theory to previous theories that recognize a number of *rasas*, while maintaining that all *rasas* are rooted in love (*rati*) for Kṛṣṇa.¹¹³ Barbara Holdrege writes: “This theory gives precedence to *rati* – and more specifically to *Kṛṣṇa-rati*, love for Kṛṣṇa –

¹¹¹ *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*: verse 2.

¹¹² David L. Haberman, “A Selection from the *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* of Rūpa Gosvāmin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthāyi-bhāvas).” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 414.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 413

as the principal *sthāyibhāva*, which matures in the heart of the bhakta and is savored as the *bhakti-rasa* of *preman*, the pure transcendent enjoyment of supreme love.”¹¹⁴

Rūpa lays out a twelve-fold framework of *rasa*. He divides the *rasas* into Primary Rasas and Secondary Rasas. The Primary Rasas are self supporting, five in number and understood as direct forms of *rati* (love) for Kṛṣṇa. They are Peaceful, Respectful, Companionable, Parentally Affectionate, and Amorous, and are hierarchical in order, the highest being the last.¹¹⁵

The Secondary Rasas are based on the Primary Rasa, seven in number and correspond to the remaining *rasa* of classical theory. The ninth *rasa* of classical theory, the Peaceful Rasa of *śānta*, is included as the first of the Primary Rasas by being defined as a particular type of love. It is seen as the lowest form of the primary *rasas* due to Rūpa’s theory of “myselfness” (*mamata*), which shows personal attachment. Usually a negative term in philosophical literature concerned with realization and absolute unity with Brahman, Rūpa uses it in a positive way to show a strong connection with Kṛṣṇa.

Gauḍīya Vaisnavism emphasizes an intimate relationship with Brahman as the “infinitely qualified Bhagavan Kṛṣṇa.”¹¹⁶ *Śāntā* is viewed as the lowest Primary Rasa because the *sthāyibhāva* of the Peaceful Rasas arises in tranquil people who comprehend Kṛṣṇa as the *paramataman* (highest self) but are without a trace of the sense of

¹¹⁴ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 88.

¹¹⁵ David L. Haberman, “A Selection from the Bhaktirasamritasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthāyi-bhāvas).” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 20017), 414.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 415

“myness”.¹¹⁷ Additionally *śantā* is with the essence and form (*svarūpa*) of the Lord, and is not connected with his lilas or divine play.

Next on the hierarchical ladder, of devotional *rasa* is the Respectful Rasa (based in respect) where Kṛṣṇa appears as a superior master or protective elder and devotees take on appearance as servants or younger relatives. Companionship Rasa marks the third (based in friendship), and is where Kṛṣṇa appears as the devotee’s friend, and the devotee as equal friend to Kṛṣṇa. This *rasa* gives confidence and familiarity with Kṛṣṇa and a greater sense of “myness”. The Parental Rasa is the second most intense *rasa* and characterized by Parental Affection. Here Kṛṣṇa appears as a child in need of nurturing protection, and the devotee assumes the role of an elder who cares for the young Kṛṣṇa.

This *rasa* has a unique characteristic: it will not diminish when not reciprocated (different in friendship). Rūpa recognizes this as a special strength of love. The final and most supreme *bhakti rasa*, Amorous Rasa (*mādhurya-bhakti-rasa*) is the highest type of religious experience possible. Rūpa presents the erotically charming Kṛṣṇa as the object (*viśayas*) of this *rasa*, and the gopīs of Braj as its vessels (*asrayas*). The most exalted of all the women – of all devotees – is Rādhā, daughter of Vrishabhanu.

Rūpa wrote another book entirely dedicated to this single *rasa* called the *Ujjvalanilamani*, where various situations of union and separation are explored. This *rasa* is not diminished by any circumstances. It encompasses the strength of all the *bhakti-rasa* combined.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*: verse 18.

¹¹⁸ David L. Haberman, “A Selection from the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* of Rūpa Gosvāmin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthāyi-bhāvas).” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 20017), 416.

Emotion (bhāva) however is said to be that state of contemplation (bhavana), which is experienced by means of the deep unconscious impressions (saṃskāras) in the heart of a wise person with focused intelligence.

Southern Quadrant, Fifth Wave: The Foundational Emotions v.133

Sādhana Bhakti in the Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu

From the *Eastern Quadrant, Second Wave: Sādhana Bhakti 1.2.1-8* of the

Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin:

sā bhaktiḥ sādhanam bhāvaḥ premā ceti tridhoditā

*kṛti-sādhyā bhavet sādhyā-bhāvā sā sādhanābhidhā
nitya-siddhasya bhāvasya prākatyaṃ hṛdi sādhyatā*

Devotion is declared to be of three types: Sādhana, Bhāva, and Prema //1//

Devotion that achieves a foundation emotion (bhāva) through physical effort is called Sādhana. Its goal is the manifestation in the heart of an eternally perfected emotion (nitya-siddha-bhāva. //2//

This kind of devotion is mentioned by the divine sage Nārada in the Seventh Canto (of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa 7.1.31): //3//

Therefore the mind should be fixed on Kṛṣṇa by some means of practice. //4//

Sādhana Bhakti is of two kinds: Vaidhī and Rāgānugā. //5//¹¹⁹

Rūpa proposes that the *sthāyibhāva* of *Kṛṣṇa-rati* is raised to the relishable state of the *bhakti-rasa* of *preman* in the hearts of bhaktas through specific forms of *sādhana* that serve as a means of engaging the divine *līlā*. Three specific forms of *sādhana* are underscored through which the bhaktas can engage in Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*: hearing (*śruta*)

¹¹⁹ David L. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), 19.

recitations of lila narratives; learning (*avagata*) the *līlā* by seeing dramatic performances of *līlā* scenes; and remembering (*smṛta*) the *līlā* by means of *dhyāna*, meditation, or *līlā-smaraṇa*, contemplative recollection. Rūpa calls *līlā-śravaṇa*, hearing about, singing about, and meditating on the *līlā* as the three most important practices of *sādhana-bhakti*.¹²⁰

Rūpa sees the path of the *bhakta*, as a path of embodied aesthetics that engages both the external and internal aspect of the mind and body. This path is one that generates a devotional body, and is done through two forms of *sādhana bhakti*: *vaidhī-bhakti* and *rāgānugā-bhakti*.¹²¹

In *vaidhī-bhakti* (of which there are 64 practices) the *bhakta* performs external bodily practices such as *śravaṇa* and *kirtana* with the current material body that houses the *jīva* that is constructed by *saṃskāras* from the previous births. The procedure of *vaidhī-bhakti* is to re-form the *saṃskāras* constructed organic body into a body of devotion.

In *rāgānugā-bhakti* the *bhakta* engages in an advanced regimen of internal meditative practices such as *dhyāna* and *līlā smaraṇa* in order to attain an embodied state of consciousness in which he or she no longer identifies with the *saṃskāric* organic body and attains a *siddha-rūpa*, a perfected devotional body that is eternal and nonmaterial.¹²²

In the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Rūpa constantly emphasizes the embodied nature of devotional practices. He defines *bhakti* as “service with the senses (*hṛṣīka*) to the Lord of the senses (*Hṛṣīkeśa*),¹²³ and symbolizes the sixty four practices of *vaidhī-bhakti* as “forms of worship (*upāsanas*) for the physical body (*kaya*), senses, and mental faculties where the

¹²⁰ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 93.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 94.

¹²² *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.4-5.

¹²³ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 95.

whole psychophysical construct (including the mind, the ears, sense of touch, eyes, tongue, nose, mouth, hands, feet, limbs, and so on) are focused on Bhagavan.¹²⁴

From 1.2.74-92 of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*: The Sixty-Four *Vaidhī-Bhakti* are:

Surrender at the feet of a guru;
 Initiation and instruction regarding Kṛṣṇa;
 Serving the guru with trust;
 Following the path of the saints;
 Inquiry into the true nature of things;
 Renouncing ordinary pleasures for the sake of Kṛṣṇa;
 Living in sacred places such as Dvārakā or near sacred rivers such as the Ganges
 Acceptance of only what is necessary in ordinary life;
 Honoring the festival days of Hari;
 Respect for holy trees such as the myrobalan plum and pipal fig trees;

These 10 practices should be the primary in the beginning.

Keeping far away from those people who have turned away from the Lord;
 Avoiding the attendance of numerous disciples;
 Refraining from zealous involvement in grand projects;
 Giving up excessive attachment to books, artistic performance, lecturing, and argumentation;
 Avoiding ungenerous behavior;
 Not being overwhelmed by such emotions as ordinary sorrow;
 Showing no disrespect for other gods;
 Refraining from coercing or causing distress to other beings;
 Giving diligent attention to avoid committing an offense in service and chanting the name;
 Not tolerating any hostility or abuse toward Kṛṣṇa or His devotees.

These 10 practices are performed as things to be avoided.

Of these 20, the first 3 are the most important.

Wearing the marks of a Vaiṣṇava;
 Wearing the letters of Hari's name;
 Wearing flower garlands (worn by Kṛṣṇa);
 Dancing before Him;
 Prostrating before Him;
 Rising respectfully from a seat; following politely after a superior;
 Visiting temples;
 Circumambulating temples;
 Worshipping in temples;

¹²⁴ *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.94.

Assistance in temples;
 Singing;
 Congregational praise;
 Silent chanting;
 Praying;
 Reciting hymns of praise;
 Eating food that has been offered to the deity;
 Drinking water used to wash the deity's feet;
 Smelling the sweet fragrance of the deity's incense and flower garland;
 Touching the divine image;
 Looking at the divine image;
 Witnessing festivals and the waving of the lamp before the image in worship;
 Listening (to stories about the Lord);¹²⁵ perceiving the grace of the Lord;
 Remembering the Lord;
 Meditating on the Lord;
 Servitude toward the Lord;
 Friendship for the Lord;
 Fully entrusting one's self to the Lord;
 Offering things dear to oneself;
 Making all efforts for His benefit;
 Surrendering completely;
 Serving those things associated with Him, such as:
 His sacred Tulasī plant;
 Scriptures;
 Mathurā, and
 Vaiṣṇavas;
 Observing great festivals with the saints using whatever materials one can provide;
 Respect for the month of Kārttika;
 Celebrating the day of Kṛṣṇa's birth;
 Special love for the serving the feet of the divine image;
 Enjoying the meanings of the *Śrī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with sensitive people;
 Association with the highest affectionate saints who are of a similar temperament as oneself;
 Singing the names of the Lord;
 Living in the blessed circle of Mathurā¹²⁵

Rūpa summons the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa's* description of personified practices of the exemplary bhakta in a sensory exploration:

He engaged his mind on the lotus-feet of Kṛṣṇa, his words in recounting the virtues of Vaikuṅṭha, his hands in cleaning the temple of Hari, his ears in hearing glorious stories

¹²⁵ Rūpa Gosvāmin, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, trans. David L. Haberman (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), 35-39.

about Acyuta, his eyes in seeing the images and temples of Mukunda, his sense of touch in touching the bodies of his servants, his nose in smelling the fragrance of the Tulasī leaves placed at his lotus feet, his tongue in tasting the food that had been offered to him, his feet in traveling by foot to the holy places of Hari, his head in bowing to the feet of Hṛṣīkeśa, and his desire in serving him...¹²⁶

Of the sixty-four practices, Rūpa singles out the last five as most important.¹²⁷ They can be performed separately or collectively.¹²⁸

In *rāgānuṅgā bhakti*, the second form of *sādhana bhakti*, the bhakta engages in an advanced form of practice to develop a *siddha-rūpa*, a perfected devotional body that is eternal (*nitya*). In this advanced state the bhakta enters into an intimate relationship with Kṛṣṇa characterized by passionate love (*rāga*). This form is cultivated by emanating one of the four principal forms of *rasa* (service, friendship, parental love, and erotic love) expressed in the eternally perfected bhaktas residing in the transcendent domain of Kṛṣṇa, Vraja-dhāman, Goloka-Vṛndāvana.¹²⁹

In closing, according to Rūpa, in 2.5.129-132, for the bhakta immersed in *sādhana bhakti*,

“The *rasa* associated with the Lord is incomprehensible in every respect for those without devotion. He states that those who are burned out by worthless asceticism, those who possess dry knowledge (knowledge that is indifferent to devotion) are incapable of experiencing devotion. Because of this, the connoisseurs of devotion should always protect the Rasa of devotion to Kṛṣṇa from the dried-up old Mimamasakas, just as one would protect a valuable treasure from a thief. The Rasa associated with the Lord can only be relished by those devotees who have made the lotus-feet of Kṛṣṇa their all in all. Rasa is judged to be that which passes beyond the course of contemplation (*bhavana*)

¹²⁶ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 9.4. 18-20.

¹²⁷ *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.93.

¹²⁸ *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.95.

¹²⁹ Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 98.

and becomes an experience of abundant amazement that is relished intensely in a heart illuminated by purity.”¹³⁰

Much like the sublime *rasa* cultivated in the boundaries of dramatic theatre due to *abhinaya*, or within the textures of the *sargam* of a *raga*, *rati*, in the form of divine love is possible by that which is induced by an artful refinement of *sādhana* towards the divine object. The forms of experience of devotion become that of a connoisseur of devotion much akin to a cultivated audience member. Yet according to the Gosvāmins, divine *rasa* is of a higher form than ordinary sentiment.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī – Bhaktirasāyana: Bhakti Rasa for an Advaitin

I worship the great Light, the son of Nanda, the supreme Brahman in human form, who removes bondage of the world.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (ca. 1540-1647) was a sixteenth-century Bengali who wrote in Sanskrit. A monk of the Śāṅkara order, he was a younger contemporary of Rūpa Gosvāmin and according to tradition also of the equally important Vaiṣṇava *acharya* Vallabha.¹³¹ Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is considered to be one of the great expositors of Advaita and a major figure in the tradition. He is known for his brilliant arguments against Vaiṣṇava Vedānta, particularly Madhva’s theistic dualism.¹³² He is without a doubt among the most important intellectual figures of late medieval India. He was known for his

¹³⁰ David L. Haberman, “A Selection from the Bhaktirasamritasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthāyi-bhāvas).” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 432.

¹³¹ Lance E. Nelson, “Krishna in Advaita Vedānta: The Supreme Brahman in Human Form.” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 315.

¹³² *Ibid*, 315

dazzling, uncompromising defense of Advaita (non-dualist) Vedānta.¹³³ As noted earlier, theistic *bhakti* movements permeated the religious landscape at this time. So it is intriguing to note that Madhusūdana Sarasvatī developed a fervent devotional inclination to Kṛṣṇa and articulated this through an Advaita lens.

He was, according to Sanjukta Gupta, “the last great thinker in the Vedānta tradition and an ardent devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Although a strict Advaitin, he tried to forge a fusion between his monistic philosophy and his religion of emotional love for God.”¹³⁴

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is the celebrated writer of *Advaita-siddhi* (“Vindication of Non-dualism”) a classic of the Śāṅkara tradition. In addition, the devotional side of Madhusūdana is revealed in two works in which he writes extensively about devotional themes. Most well known is the *Bhagavad Gita Gudharthadipika* (Light on the Hidden Meaning of the *Bhagavad Gita*), in which he contest’s Śāṅkara’s view that the Gita’s essential message is to instill renunciation. Instead, he suggests that the idea is rather “complete surrender to God” (*bhagavad-eka-śaraṇatā*).¹³⁵

A third work (earlier than the *Bhagavad Gita Gudharthadipika*) is the only independent treatise on *bhakti* written by a major exponent of the classical Advaita tradition. Titled the *Bhaktirasāyana* (Elixir of Devotion), this work expounds an Advaitic theory of devotion and devotional sentiment (*bhakti-rasa*) on the basis of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which he extensively quotes.

¹³³ Lance E. Nelson, “Bhakti-Rasa for the Advaitin Renunciate: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Theory of Devotional Sentiment,” *Religious Traditions: A Journal in the Study of Religion*, 12 (1989): 1.

¹³⁴ Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaisnavism: The Philosophy of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 177.

¹³⁵ Lance E. Nelson, “Bhakti-Rasa for the Advaitin Renunciate: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Theory of Devotional Sentiment,” *Religious Traditions*, 12: 1-16 (1989): 1.

According to Lance E. Nelson, “the title of the *Bhaktirasāyana* contains a play on words. It can mean both “Elixir (*rasāyana*) of Devotion (*bhakti*)” and “The way, path, or course (*āyana*) of the sentiment (*rasa*) of devotion.”¹³⁶ He states that Madhusūdana spends a fair amount of the text defending the legitimacy of, and develops, the idea of *bhakti* as *rasa*, an “aesthetic sentiment.” As we have noted in this essay, the Bengal Vaiṣṇava School elaborated a comprehensive theory of *bhakti-rasa* in their theology. Due to their connection to dualist philosophy, theistic viewpoint and ecstatic devotionism, these theologians maintained a passionate hostility toward Advaita.

For Madhusūdana, the basic understanding is that the supreme deity is identified as Kṛṣṇa, whom is called Bhagavan (the Blessed Lord), instead of Īśvara, thought to be more devotionally charged. Breaking with Advaita tradition, Madhusūdana places *bhakti* on par with *jñāna* as a valid spiritual path. Yet staying close to Śankara’s distinction of the higher form of Brahman as *Nirguṇa*, and the lower form as *Saguṇa* Brahman, he identified Kṛṣṇa as the *nirguṇa*. He continues by identifying Kṛṣṇa as the non-dual Self, a conglomeration of perfect Being, Consciousness, and Bliss, the pure Existence, which is the ground of all being.¹³⁷ He writes from an Advaita viewpoint:

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s *Bhaktirasāyana* (The Elixir of Devotion):

First come knowledge of the Blessed Lord, then there arises the higher non-attachment, and then the devotion that is of the nature of love (preman)...what sort of knowledge is meant? ...Everything other than the Blessed Lord, because it is transient, is false (*mayika*) like a dream. It is devoid of true significance, painful, and to be shunned. The Blessed Lord alone is real; He is the supreme Bliss, self-luminous, eternal, the One to be sought after. This is the kind of knowledge spoken of. It is taught in the

¹³⁶ Ibid, 2

¹³⁷ Lance E. Nelson, “Krishna in Advaita Vedanta: The Supreme Brahman in Human Form.” *Krishna a Sourcebook*, edited by Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 315.

Bhagavad Gita also..."At the end of many births, one possessed of knowledge attains Me, thinking, 'Vasudeva is all!' Such a great soul is exceedingly difficult to find" (*BhG* 7.19). The meaning is: Everything other than Vasudeva, since it is a product of *maya*, is not real. Vasudeva alone is real, is the dearest, because He is the Self. (*BhR* I.32, pp. 76-88)¹³⁸

To make an attempt to demonstrate that *bhakti rasa* partakes in an ultimate state (like the Gosvāmins) he suggests that the permanent emotion of the sentiment of devotion is not one derived from ordinary empirical experience. Like the Gosvāmin's, Madhusūdana turns to the *sthāyibhāva*. According to Nrisinha P. Bhaduri in "Bhakti as an Aesthetic Sentiment," Madhusūdana writes that "the mind in its fluid stage bears the reflections of the objects seen, and this is called *saṃskāra*, *vāsanā*, *bhāva*, *bhāvanā*. These *saṃskāra* and *vāsanā* form the *sthāyibhāva*, which manifested, tend to be a sentiment. The eternal God being the fountain of all bliss (the fluid mind) gets manifested in the form of a sentiment."¹³⁹ This form of God is eternally and inherently present in the mind, since it pervades everything. "Because it is a reflection of the Lord, who is pure bliss (*ānanda*), the *sthāyibhāva* also is pure bliss. All the more, then will the *rasa* that arises from it be blissful."¹⁴⁰ The *sthāyibhāva* of *bhakti*, for Madhusūdana, has been determined as *govindākāratā*.¹⁴¹

In closing this section on an Advaitin bhakta, I quote from Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *Bhagavad Gita Gudharthadipika* (Light on the Hidden Meaning of the

¹³⁸ Ibid, 323-324

¹³⁹ Nrisinha P. Bhaduri, "Bhakti Devotion as an Aesthetic Sentiment," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 16:4 (1988): 383.

¹⁴⁰ Lance E. Nelson, "Bhakti-Rasa for the Advaitin Renunciate: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's Theory of Devotional Sentiment," *Religious Traditions: A Journal in the Study of Religion*, 12 (1989): 6.

¹⁴¹ Nrisinha P. Bhaduri, "Bhakti Devotion as an Aesthetic Sentiment," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 16:4 (1988): 383.

Bhagavad Gita), which expresses a compelling simultaneity of *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa bhakti*:

If the yogins, with their minds controlled by the practice of meditation, see that indescribable Light—attributeless, actionless, and supreme—let them see it! But as for me, may that wondrous blue Effulgence which runs about and plays on the banks of the Yamuna long be the joy of my eyes.

GAD 13, opening invocation, p. 521.¹⁴²

Conclusion

This investigation into *bhakti-rasa* was fueled in part by the requirement to bring the tools acquired in the Master of Yoga Studies program to a useful conclusion. The motivation behind researching the intersection between devotional and aesthetic sentiment and the choice of this subject matter in general was first to answer personal questions regarding *bhakti* experience through the use of academic resources. This motivation also stemmed from the desire to take advantage of having an access to the wealth of scholarship surprisingly already in circulation about the topic in which I chose to research and write about.

Secondly I truly trusted that both of these pathways seemed like natural bedfellows in their mutual expression of a holy human experience rooted in beauty and love. Experiences as such, that join someone with the sacred divine forces that are inherent in initiating artistic expression and spiritual and religious devotion that necessitate participation and communal engagement. Now after having efficaciously researched this topic for my thesis in the Masters of Yoga Studies I have realized that while quite new to me, this subject matter has been extensively covered in all manner of scholarship.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 321

When I stumbled quite accidentally on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* during my research into the use of magic devises in the *Mahābhārata* and in particular the *Bhagavad Gīta* as a way to utilize the tool of divine sight in a dramatic setting, I felt that I discovered the sacred chalice that gifted a look back into a fascinating philosophical and theological progression that included artistry and aesthetics vis-à-vis technique and process of acculturation articulated by Sanskrit philosophers leading all the up to the medieval period.

Even though making the statement that "Indian art is spiritual art" is somewhat specious and seems a cliché, I have been struck by the many occurrences in which this is true. Of course there are non-devotional artistic expressions in India, but because art in India has often been expressed through spiritual, mystical, mythical and religious subject matter it only seemed natural to wonder about the intersection of art to that of divine subject matter.

Looking into this intersection in which artists and artisans create pieces that link human sentiment to divine beings and or concepts was right up my alley. Rather than explore this particularly well covered angle on the capability of artists and musicians to channel divine stories, and their rumored possession of the true pulse of Hinduism according to several scholars, I wondered if one could look at religious acts, acts of religious devotion as another form of artistic expression. This question initially originated from a personal interest in devotional poetry, sacred music, in home religious practices of women, mystical experience, divine *Śakti* and abstract Tantric art. In some form or another, over the course of this masters program I have actually researched and written about all of these subject matters in some form, or either studied them through the electives offered as part of the Yoga Philosophy Certificate.

Many scholars and ethnographic researchers have stated that drama, dance, poetics and music have been perceived to be vehicles of religious expression and conveyors of yearning in the Hindu tradition. Vasudha Narayanan encapsulates so eloquently in her article, “Brimming with Bhakti, Embodiments of Shakti: Devotees, Deities, Performers, Reformers, and Other Women of Power in the Hindu Tradition” in *Feminism and World Religions*:

Drama, dance, and music have been perceived to be vehicles of religious expression and conveyors of yearning in the Hindu tradition. Classical music and dance were considered to have been given by gods and goddesses to human beings. Even now, the Goddess Sarasvatī is worshiped as the patron goddess of music and learning. Bharat’s Nāṭyaśāstra, the treatise on classical dance, is considered to have the essence of the four Sanskrit Vedas and claims to be the fifth Veda. The performing arts therefore provide an alternative avenue to salvation, paralleling the way of knowledge seen in post Vedic literature. While pure music and dance (as distinguished from music and dance with devotional content) is itself said to be of divine origin and understood to lead one to the divine, usually singing and dancing are connected with the *bhakti* or devotion contained in the lyrics being sung. Devotion to the deity is expressed through a number of *bhāvas* or attitudes; these include the loving attitudes connected with service, maternal love, romantic love, and the like. The combination of the emotional lyrics sung with the abandon of devotion is said to be a path through which one can reach the divine goal of one’s choice.¹⁴³

I have suggested here through my research that the theology of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition is in fact informed and built upon Indian aesthetics rather than the other way around. The *rasika* of Indian aesthetics gave birth to the *bhakti* of *Bhakti Yoga* expressed in this tradition.

¹⁴³ Vasudha Narayanan, “Brimming with Bhakti, Embodiments of Shakti: Devotees, Deities, Performers, Reformers, and Other Women of Power in the Hindu Tradition,” *Feminism and World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 50.

Music and dance also plays an important roll in expressing ecstatic embodied devotion in Gauḍīya Vaisnavism through the devotional practice of chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā through mantra, bhajans and the important *bhakti* practice of Sankirtana. These devotional acts form some of the ways in which to maintain a mind fixed on Kṛṣṇa.

Through the research done for this essay, I learned that it is possible to understand the affective transformation of the devotee through Rūpa Gosvāmin's extensive reinterpretation of *bhāva* and *rasa* sentiment articulated through Vaiṣṇava theology. Here in this case, we were able to take ritual devotion as the starting point and gaze into the eternality of the *Rasa-līlā* as a well-cultured *rasika bhakta* relishing the divine form through *śṛṅgāra rasa*, the ultimate of all *rasa* sentiment.

This emotional state felt through the body and senses is not of a mundane quality. It is heightened to a divine level in which all the separate nine *rasa* disappear and merge into one of pure love. In order to fully grasp this experience for the devotee, I imagine is to become a devotee oneself.

By practicing *Bhakti Sāadhanā* with a pure mind and a pure heart, one would at least begin to savor and relish what this experience might be. Just as a pure *rasika* is trained in the various ways of properly experiencing a dramatic performance, so is the devotee of the *Kṛṣṇa-līla*. Through a form of stylized emotional relationships such as the *sthāyibhāva* rooted in love, the devotee here pulls from *saṁskāras* created by devotional ritual, waiting ultimately for God's grace granting spontaneous bliss to reassure them of the path.

Yet the "performance" of ritual is designed toward creating a permanent state of the single *rasa*, where in a dramatic performance it is understood that the sentiment is temporary, savored and relished in the moment. Emotion plays an important roll in this

worship, yet it is not the emotion of ego-based fueled expression. Emotive sentiment is inspired through sensual descriptions of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and sacred places, people and things and used as a tool to transform the *bhakta* into possessing a devotional body. The body in light of India's well-known ascetic practices and denial of the sensory world takes form in respect to Kṛṣṇa. The body is not denied per se but transformed into a devotional landscape.

In closing I'd like to consider the question: Why study *bhakti*? I ask this especially against the more pressing issues of climate change, gender discrimination, pollution and poverty that are at the surface a more urgent calling.

The major significance of the study of *bhakti* for understanding Hinduism and religion in India more generally is that it gives a validation for many voices to be communicated and heard. The Epics, the Gita, and the Purāṇas are permeated with *bhakti*; guru traditions in Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Sikhism all define human relationship of love and loyalty. Individual bhaktas become inspirations and take a place in the history of saints by speaking of their own devotion, and for being remembered for doing so.

The abundant articles on *bhakti* saints can be a testament to the multiplicity of voices across a range of religious tradition, language, caste, class and gender. Having an access to the shared value of participatory devotion reveals various ways of imagining God and distinctive modes of expression.

Bhakti also leans towards sharing and inclusiveness. It is voluntary and not a hereditary association. Therefore breaking boundaries set by caste. Savoring the poetry or biography of a saint can be a form of encouragement as well as an embodied

representation to share in the *bhakti* of that saint. *Bhakti* is generally inclusive and also provides an alternate history to orthodoxy and secrecy, which are marked by exclusivity.

Among the many reasons to study *bhakti*, the prominent themes of either *nirguṇa* or *saguṇa* imaginings allow for a wide range of imaginings of God.¹⁴⁴ *Bhakti* as devotion in participation in its many permutations is ultimately a dwelling in the wellspring of love. It is perhaps for this reason that love has the potential to heal the world and open hearts. It can teach us to appreciate the divine manifesting in every living and non-living being, to find personal transcendence within God's immanence.

¹⁴⁴ Pechilis, Karen, "Defining Bhakti." *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, edited by Jessica Frazier (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 115-117.

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