2.0 Song Cultures in Tamil

The Tamil Shaivite sect, a Hindu sect which centers on the worship of Siva, has a large following in the Tamil-speaking area of South India. Saint poets and Bhakti-poets were inspired by and devoted to a feeling of common good. Their experiences and their poetic practice were rooted in common life. The voice of chanting and song to the accompaniment of unfamiliar instruments, floats out over the high wall of the temples in the coolness of the evening or the dawn, making the passers-by wonder what is that is being chanted and sung. They are the songs of saint-poets who search for god through their poetry.

The song composers are the poet-saints who spend their life singing and wandering. These songs are worth studying for they are being sung in temples and homes throughout...
the nation. The songs composed centuries ago are still sung and performed in one or more than a religious or a social occasion. How it is possible? How the song cultures of 4th century are still alluring the people of the current century. How the songs are made available, though they are not written and printed or stored? The answer is that there is no death for the cultures of memory; song cultures in the world, in particular India song cultures are transmitted orally from one generation to the other by singing and as they are sung, memorized and performed by embodied memory of the singers.

In this section, out of immense number of songs composed by various saint-poets, I have selected some representative songs from the compositions of famous saint-poets, singers and song composers of Tamil oral cultures. The songs selected for the section contain the most striking thoughts. At the same time, it is amazingly difficult to give an adequate idea of them in an English description. There are essentially songs, intended to be sung with its tunes. Much of their charm depends upon assonance, play upon words, and close knitting of word with word.

How shall we evaluate this work by saints on the lives of the saints? After reading various songs composed by famous saint-poets, one can see that the central doctrine of the song cultures of Tamil is: God is the supreme reality and the \textit{jiva} or individual soul is of the same essence as Siva, but not identical. The supreme reality, so called the God is infinite consciousness. He is eternal, changeless, formless, independent, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, one without a second, beginning-less, causeless, taintless, self-existent, ever free, ever pure and perfect. He is not limited by time. He is infinite bliss and infinite intelligence. He is free from defects, the all-doer, and the all-knowner.
There have been many ‘intellectuals’ from the West and from India, who looked down upon song cultures as something inferior to the written cultures and print culture. Their short-sightedness becomes at once apparent when we study the lives of the saint-poets in Indian song cultures and realize that they were great saint poets who love to visit the temples and sing the glory of the Lord. How shall we understand the wonderful spirit of renunciation that characterized the lives of the singer-poets? They had understood the true nature of the world, and wanted only god. Can we not draw a parallel in our study? Let us also never forget that in the case of all the Nayanmars, devotion invariably meant expansion of the heart and therefore, service and charity. It is essential that in our study of these great lives, we take them as a whole: the sixty three blending into one marvelous scripture on song cultures. Else it might lead to perversion. Perversion in spiritual path can be quite disastrous. If we study as a whole, we will not fail to note that the song cultures hold before us the ideal supreme exemplars of the highest form of devotion. If we approach the saint-poets with commitment in our hearts, we shall grasp the message they have for the world.

Song cultures of the Alwars and Nayanmars in Tamil language are expressions of devotion, a personal, devotional approach to worship of God. Thus, because of the above reason, the scholars who worked on the oral poetry of several languages in India such as Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and Telugu is named “Bhakti literature” or “devotional poetry”.

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In the process of naming, the efficient thinkers and scholars have forgotten the basic issue about the oral poetry is that they are sung and singing had made them alive.

Hence, “singing” is a major component of the oral literature, I call it “song cultures” that is composed and transmitted by the saint-poets. Song cultures are tools rooted in various regions of India at different point in times, and the key figures in what has been called the “Bhakti movement” are the saint poets who manifested the devotional ideal in their own lives and who often became leading figures in song cultures of India. The saint-poets of Tamil who lived between the fourth and seventh century and the ninth centuries AD were the first exemplars of the ideal of song cultures. While some of them were devotees of lord Vishnu and lord Siva, many motifs are common to the entire Tamil song cultures corpus.

The song-poets, of course, speak a great deal about contact with god, or the consequences of being deprived of such contact, in their poems. Further, this important aspect of bhakti comes into play not only in the content of the saint’s poems but also in their rhetorical form in interpretative accounts of their significance and in performance. From each of these perspectives the saint’s songs can be viewed as medium of contact. The song cultures are not unique in this respect. Every work of art, literature, indeed every communicative verbal event, mediated contact between the poet-singer and audience. Singing is the most fundamental feature of song cultures of the above languages. But no
scholar from pre-modern times to modern times has given any scope to the singing in the song cultures. So the present work would find out how the modern scholars are looking at the singer and song composers of pre-modern times of Indian languages. The scholars worked on these song cultures, mostly translate the poem-songs into English, describe biographical sketch of the song composers, general feature of the song-poems. Thus, knowingly or unknowingly, the singing cultures have been transformed into reading cultures.

Song cultures of Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and Telugu are composed orally, sung and performed where the body of singer plays an important role in the song cultures. The body in the song cultures is as important as song, meaning, rhythm, and the lyric. The singer moves his body including hands, eyes and other parts, according to the songs and its theme. Body fills the gap between the song and audience with his gestures and postures.

But the scholars like A.K. Ramanujan and others in the modern times, could not understand the invaluability of the body and also ignored the feature of singing in song cultures. They did not give any substance to the question how the song cultures are alive in the present times. Therefore, I would focus on the above questions like how the body is important and what is its role in song cultures. What is the importance of memory in song cultures?
It is true that the intellectuals give importance to oral poetry; unintentionally the work of the modern scholars has made the song cultures as literary cultures where one has to read a song-poem as a textual poem which has to be sung in fact. Finally the singing voices in song cultures are made less important. The voice and noise of song cultures are almost eradicated in the print cultures. Music and melody are changed into a textual or reading of the cultures where the scholars silenced the voice and the importance of the body and performance in song cultures.

The present chapter, apart from attending to the above questions, also deals with questions such as; do the scholars understand the role of singing? Do they acknowledge the Jati based phenomenon in song cultures of the pre-modern times? How many writers studied and acknowledged the oral poetry as the cultures of singing. The whole oral poetry is sung, and the embodied memory becomes an important part of song cultures in any oral poetry. When I focus the work on the song cultures I would try to find whether the writers have given any attention to the poetry as song cultures. In this process the voice is suppressed and has not given any importance.

Various kinds of song in the world are to be sung in voice, with some musical instruments, but not to be read. But the writers in the modern times assembling them into reading cultures which are really song cultures. Most of the singers in Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and Telugu are the singers and who wandered from place to place in their times.
The song cultures of the pre-modern times are sung melodiously. The saint-poets belong to the different periods in the history of song cultures belong to different Jatis. The saint-poets composed different songs, particularly in song cultures of Tamil language are from various Jatis or castes. The song composers and singers came together in 4th century, composed songs on the theme of devotion as one. In fact the song cultures or a culture of composing and singing the oral poem-songs have brought them together. It might have not possible to see the saint-poets of different castes and classes to come under one section, if there were no song cultures in 4th or 6th century of the Tamil History. The scholars of the modern period did not give any importance to the Jati background of the composers of song-poems and singers in Tamil song cultures. And people in the recent time have not given any significance to the body, memory and singing as the major components of song cultures.

Tamil song culture is one of the classics of song cultures of 5th and 10th centuries, surviving over a millennium. Tamil song cultures represent social, political devotional, cultural and historical awareness of Tamilanadu. The songs of the two groups had reached even other parts of the Indian subcontinents since the saint-poets move from one place to another by singing their songs. Tamil is one of the descendents of Dravidian language spoken by Tamil regional people in the Indian subcontinent. It is also recognized as one of the classical languages of India. In Tamil song cultures, there were two groups of saint-poets or poet-singers. They were known as Alwars and Nayanmars. Alwars were the devotees of Siva and the Nayanmars were the devotees of lord Vishnu.
Both the Lord Siva and the Lord Vishnu are famous gods in India and became powerful deities. Alwars' and Nayanmars' poetic culture is the major part in the whole Tamil language and literature. The poetic culture of Alwars and Nayanmars emerged in the period of Bhakti movement. Bhakti movement was the central part for the whole devotional poetry. The culture of Tamil poetry gradually traveled to the other parts of India through vocal transformation. They have composed poetic-songs in a simple language which is easy to the local communities of Tamil region. The saint-poets of the two groups, not only compose oral poem-songs but also they sing the poem-songs as songs perfectly. The song-poems composed by the two groups of poets are to be sung but not to be read as a literary poem as it happens in written literature. Since we came to know that singing is the most common feature in the poetic-culture or song-poems composed by the Tamil saint-poets, I consider that it is justifiable to call the oral poetic cultures 'song cultures'.

The Tevaram hymns evoke the motif of pilgrimage in various ways. The actual journeys of the Nayanmars are commemorated in their songs. In some hymns the saints urge other devotees to “join” them in their travels. The famous books consisted of song-poems in Tamil song cultures are: the Tevaram, an anthology of song-poems written by the saiva saints, the Nalayira Divya Prabandam, an anthology of songs composed by the Alwars, and Srimat Bhagavata, one of the puranas. The first two works are in Tamil and the third

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one is Sanskrit. Tevaram means the necklace of gods, was compiled by a Saiva poet Nampi-Antar-Nampi during the reign of Rajaraja Chola in 985-1030. It is collection of songs composed by three Nayanmars, Sambandhar, Appar and Sundarar. Nalayira Divya Prabandam means a collection of four thousand divine songs and it was an anthology of songs written by all the twelve Alwars. It was compiled by Nathamuni or Ranganatha Muni in the tenth century almost at the same time when Tevaram was compiled. The third work, Srimat Bhagavata was probably composed in 10th century, although scholars are not unanimous on this. These two texts, the Tevaram and the Nalayira Divya Prabhandham are products of the same religious milieu, results of the spiritual activities of several poets and saints that continued at least four hundred years.

In emphasizing pilgrimage and poetry, the Tevaram, saints drew upon two ideas which are characteristic of Tamil culture: one the presence and apprehension of the sacred in particular places. (2) The intrinsic relatedness of poetry, landscape, and love as exemplified in the early classical love poetry of the Tamils21. The significance of the above song-books necessitates some information about the life of the poet-saints, the Alwars and the Nayanmars22. Extensively, the poet-saints in song cultures of every Indian


languages, travelled from the temple to temple, singing and dancing with their devotional songs.

There are certain similarities between the song-cultures of the Alwars and Nayanmars. Alwars use the theme of transformation of human love while the Nayanmars genre is based on the conviction of praising the valor and generosity of earthly kings. Nevertheless there is constant overlap of these convictions in the devotional poetry. And slowly the devotional poetry has taken a form of poetic-movement and the poetic activities of Tamil saint-poets had spread to the other parts and other languages in India.

The similarities and dissimilarities of Nayanmars and Alwars in Cutler's views:

1. The saint-poets of Alwars and Nayanmars share a common repertoire of the prosodic and rhetorical techniques. In their hymns the saints incorporate convictions of classical Tamil poetry in both erotic and heroic forms, and also the features of the Sanskrit stotra, often adapting the more subjective tone of devotional poetry. The expressions of a saint-poet or saint-poetess serves his or her own feelings as paradigm for the relationship between the devotee and the God and thus as a medium for bringing devotees together as the members of community of Bhaktas.

2. On the one hand, the Tamil Bhakti corpus includes visual descriptions that closely correspond to a particular iconographic of Siva and Vishnu, descriptions of ritual acts of

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worship, and hymns in celebration of particular temple and their environs. On the other hand, by the eleventh century the saints’ poetry was recited as part of the ritual performed in the temple, a practice which continues to the present day. Thus the devotional poetry documents the growth of the temple as the preeminent worship environment in the Tamil region, and they also became an important element of the environment. Hence, the devotional poetic songs may differ as per the religion that the singer-poets may differ but the theme and the language and the sect is so similar. Let us look at the poetic-creed of Nayanmars below.

2.0.1 Nayanmars

Nayanmars were a diverse section of saint-poets who created devotional haunting melodies (songs) in Tamil literature. There are 63 saint-poets in the group. They were devotees of lord Siva whereas the Alwars were the devotees of lord Vishnu. The Most significant point about the poets of these two groups, Alwars and Nayanmars, is that they were the singers who used to sing their poetry as songs. The two devotional groups have composed 20,000 poems and gifted to glorify Tamil song cultures. The poets of Tamil literature ignored the caste system and other social discriminations. That is why their

poetry has attracted all the sects of the society. Though the Bhakti is the major theme among their poems they also have included moral and social philosophy in their song cultures. Thus, various poets and song composers have immortalized the song cultures in India. The below chart gives us a clear idea of song-composers belong to different Jatis. If we look at the whole history of the song-poets in the above we will come to know that the poet-singer is from a different background of Jati or the caste or community. It is known that in India every Jati or the caste has its own caste myth which is called Kulapurana in local language. But as we analyzed above and after having a close reading of some important texts in the song cultures of Indian languages it is known that the hundreds of songs composed by the various communities, song composers have not been examined and analyzed or have not been considered according to the Jati of the song composers. As I above said, the history of the song cultures in India also tells that the song cultures are owned by most of the people in the country, it may be because, and the saint-poets are from various Jatis. The following chart tells about the Jati of the saint-poets of the Nayanmars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jati</th>
<th>Nayanmars</th>
<th>Alwars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kshatriyas</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaishyas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherds</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>
In the early pre-modern period, the Alwars and Nayanmars saints of south Indian gave an emphasis to Vaishnava and Shaiva song cultures of devotion that was deeply rooted in the Tamil land, language and ethos. The most important feature that they belonged to different castes, not all Brahmins; they were from several strata of the society and professions. Among the Alwars, one was a prince, another was a bandit and highway robber, yet another one was an untouchable. There was one woman saint in these groups Sri Andal or Godha and a woman among the Nayanmars, Karaikkal Ammayar. Another significant feature is that they sang all their songs in the local Tamil language. They went into flights of non-dualistic height of one absolute or God, at the same time, worshipped and sang praise song of personal God Rama and Krishna in the case of Alwars and Lord

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Siva in case of Nayanmar. They all went through trials in the hands of God. They were drowned in the spiritual life. The saint-poets show their devotion in different attitudes towards the lord. The most common bhava or attitude is that of the servant or the slave of the lord to serve him forever. Then some take on the role of a friend. The Tamil word that the Alwars and Nayanmars used to express their devotion to their God was Anbu, which means Love. The relation between the devotee and god was perceived as a reciprocal one and the term used to refer to the love of the god for his devotee was arul. The roots of song cultures of devotion can be traced to certain features in late sangam poetry.

The general structure of these poems is normally an address to Lord Siva expressing one’s suffering in the mortal world and longing for the vision of God and also the ecstasy of the realization of the presence of God and his grace. They also contain references to particular temple. On many occasions descriptions of the nature surrounding the temples. On many occasions, one finds reference to the personal life of the poet and to the enemies of his faith. It is a new genre where the poet occupies the central place. The poem-songs composed by Sambandhar below is a fine example of the structural and thematic distinctiveness of the devotional poetry. Sisir Kumar Das in one of the chapters in his book A History of Indian Literature 500-1399: From the courtly to the popular, says that Tamil Bhakti comes first, as seen in the Nayanmars and Alwars poem-songs, and popular saint-poets driven by a divine ecstasy and filling up the temple yards with their songs; these songs comprised of major canons, Tevaram and Divya Prabhandam.

2.0.1 Karaikkal Ammaiyar: A Woman Saint

Ever since I was born and learned to lisp, I have loved you. Today I have taken
Refuge at your feet. Oh, radiant, blue-
Throated god of gods, when will the day
Come when you will release me from all
The agonies of life.27

The above song-poem is composed by Karaikkal Ammaiyar, one of the woman saints of the Nayanmars. In the song-poem, she sings that one can distinctly hear the measured voice of a poetess, who had received nothing but suffering from the world around her, in all her poems. The only solace that she had in her life is the hope of salvation. Karaikkal Ammaiyar, is the earliest poet-saints of the 63 Nayanmars. Her real name was Puneetavati but she was popularly known as the mother of Karaikkal, the place where she was born. This woman saint lived in sixth century, she was married to a rich man who treated her harshly, married another woman and finally abandoned her. Then she wandered from temple to temple till she reached the shrine of Tiruvalangadu which is about thirty miles from the present Chennai where she attained salvation. Her life of misery and suffering was finally crowned with sainthood. Among her works that have come down to use are Arputat-tiruvantai, irattai-manimalai and Muttatiruppattikarikal. One of her oft-quoted songs, given below is a fine example of a medieval lyric, which is

27 Ibid., p. 32.
thematically connected with the Gathas of ancient time and the writings of women poets who suffered like her in the medieval period.

Some say he is in heaven, let them say so.
Some say he lives in the Kingdom of Indra.
Let them say so. But I will say, the god,
Whose throat became dark as he drank?
The poison in the ancient times, yet so
Radiant is He, lives in my heart.

In this song-poem, the woman poet saint strongly believes that the lord Siva hears to the songs of her and she hopes that He will give her salvation from the life that she had been living for years on.

2.0.1.2 Sundarar

O madman with the mooncrowned hair,
Thou Lord of men, thou fount of grace,
How to forget thee could I dear?
My soul hath age for thee a place,
Vennayallur, in Grace's shrine
South of the stream of Pennai, there
My father, I became all thine
How could I now myself forswear?

28 Ibid., p. 34
Sundarar is one of the famous saint-poets among the Nayanmars. He was also one of the lovable song composers, singers of Tamil song cultures. He lived in 8th century in Tamilnadu. He was a contemporary of Perumal Nayanar. He is an important figure in the Nayanmar group because he used to visit devotional places in Tamilnadu. Wherever he goes he sings the poetry of lord Siva which is written by him. Thus he preached lord Siva and composed a number of poems in Tamil language.

The real name of the saint-poet Sundarar is Sundaramurti and eventually he became famous as Sundarar. He was a Brahmin but challenged the caste system by marrying a dancing girl from a temple at Tiruvarur at Tanjor district. His second wife was a Vellarai woman. It is known what prompted him to accept Saivism, but like other saints his life too abounds with legends. One such legend says the Siva appeared in the disguise of an ascetic and prevented Sundarar’s marriage with a Brahmin girl arranged by his father. Sundarar, an obedient child, abused the ascetic as pitta (madman) and asked him to rudely go away. In a dramatic move, the ascetic disclosed his identity and then Sundara surrendered himself to the great Lord. His hymns throb with incense emotion of total surrender to God—the most significant feature of the Bhakti movement—expressed in simple words and moving musical words. He celebrated this occasion of his meeting with lord in a verse which begins with the word pitta.
Sing, O bards, our holy God
While with ash, in puhalur.
In the deathless one’s abode
He shall reign for evermore.

In the above poem-songs, Sundarar asks the poets of his age not to sing of the kings for their presentations and not to lead the luxurious lives. He says that the kings of the kingdoms will not be eternal but Siva is the king of the kings and all the kingdoms and will reign eternally; therefore one must sing of the king who shall reign forever. He sings about the greatness of the lord who appears always with ashes. He is also asking the other poets of the lord Siva to sing the glory of the God. The poet expresses that his lord is eternal one and the immortal one. The poet adds that the lord Siva reins the world ever and ever.

Sundarar is not the only one, however, to criticize the poets seeking favor of the rich, other poets of this period too were also critical of this habit of their fellow poets, many of whom, it must be realized, had a hard life. All the medieval poets earned their living through the patronage of the kings and local landlords. Nammalwar wrote one of these poems “so long there is my lord on the Tiruvenkata hills; I am not going to dedicate my songs to any man”. The Bhakti poets were the first to face the moral dilemma -whether to serve the king or the king of the kings. They clearly saw signs of change in the patronage system. In feudal society, the medieval Western Europe, the poet or the musician had to
look for the patronage of kings and chieftains for their survival. The patronage for some of the poets of Bhakti movement came from the temples of many which grew into financially strong institutions. But we do not know of any poets of Bhakti movement living a life of comfort and ease. One of the luxuries in the courts of various kings both in Sanskrit for example, lived a life of luxury in the courts of various kings both in the south and north India. The Bhakti poets, both the Nayanmars and Alwars, created a new paradigm of patronage. They had greater freedom, but they had to face greater hardship of life. The poets who served the kings were all householders. They had to look for the rich patrons for obvious reasons\textsuperscript{29}. Sundarar by his name itself was good looking and the most lovable poet; so was his poetry. He together with Appar and Sambandhar was regarded as the three powerful leaders of the Nayanmars song cultures.

2.0.2 Alvars

The poems of Alwars are in antadi meter, a Dravidian metrical system where the last (anta) word of the previous stanza is the first (aadi) of the next stanza, corresponding as it were the canon of continuous thought or flow that interpenetrates and fuses as it flows. The general structure of the song-poems is normally an address to the lord Siva expressing one’s suffering in the moral world and longing for the visions of god and also the ecstasy of the realization of the presence of the god and his grace. The song also contain reference to particular temple and cities or rivers occasionally descriptions of the

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 34

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nature surrounding the temples. On many occasions, one finds reference to the personal life of the poet and to the enemies of his faith. The literal meaning of the Alwars is the people who immersed with the god. The Alwars are the Tamil saint-poets who lived and composed devotional poetry between the 6th and 9th centuries. They were the devotees of lord Vishnu. There are 12 famous alwars in Tamil literature as whole. Among them Poigai Alwar is the first foremost saint-poet. Bhoothathalwar, Peyalvar, Thirumalisai Alwar, Nammalwar, Madhura Kavi Alwar, Kula Shekar Alwar, Periyalwar, Anadal, Thondaradippodi Alwar, Thiruppan Alwar, and the last one are Thirumangai Alvar. A.K Ramanujan claims that their songs are the forbearers of later traditions of Vaishnava poetry, reaching as far as Chaithanya in 16th century Bengal and Tagore in our times. Characteristic pan-Indian themes find some of their first and finest expressions in the poetry of the Alwars.\textsuperscript{30} Thereafter in the 11th and 12th century Karnataka the Shaiva movement-known as the Veerashiva or the lingayat movement, gathered splendid movement. The devotional movement provided a path to some extremely fine and emotional poetry, and drew an immense attention and participations from the lower classes.

The devotional outpourings of Alwars are composed during the medieval period of the Tamil song cultures. The songs helped to revive the devotional movements through their hymns of worship to lord Vishnu and his avatars. The religion of Alwar poets which included a woman poet named Andal was devotion to god through love and devotion and

the ecstasy of such devotions they sang hundred of song which embodied both the depth of feeling and felicity of expressions.

The Tamil song cultures that sprang from Alwars has contributor to the establishment and sustenance of a culture that broke away from the ritual-oriented Vedic religion and rooted itself in devotion as the only path for salvation. In addition they helped to make the Tamil religious life independent of knowledge of Sanskrit.

Irrespective of caste and social order they came together with the notion of oneness, one devotion and glorified the Alwar poetic-culture and spread them to the whole world. Among the 12 saint poets, Nammalwar was from an upper caste family, Thirumalisai and Tiruppan were from untouchable castes. Kulasekara was a king from Kerala. Vishnuchitta and Periyalwar were from Brahmin communities. Nammalwar and Peiryalwar were famous in the Alwar poetic genre. The contribution of alwars has come down to the people through the Tamil sangam literature. Their devotional sentiment is marked with a tone of unconditional submission expressed during the devotional movement.

2.0.2.1 Nammalwar

My lord, my cannibal
While I was waiting eagerly for him
Saying to myself.
-if I see you anywhere
I will gather you
And eat you up,  
He beat me to it  
And devoured me entire,  
My lord dark as raincloud,  
My lord self-seeking and unfair  
(Elsewhere Nammalwar says:)  
...I have caught him  
the big-bellied one  
not content yet  
with all that guzzling  
on the sevenfold clouds  
the seven sees  
the seven mountains  
and the world that hold them all.  
I have caught him  
I contain him now."
language and composed songs in Tamil language, his poetry reached all corners of the
country. Devotional song-poems were the major compositions done by him. He spent
most of his life singing of god through his poetry.

Makes me serve him all the time and everywhere,
Anchors me thus by seating himself in my mind,
Swerves me not by gracing me in his service alone,
Krishna’s wish is my wish, my pleasure, my glory.

In the above song-poem, Nammalwar sings happily with a joyful heart about his
dedication. He says the god has made the poet to serve the god in every time and
everywhere. He dares to say that the lord makes him not to worry about anything and the
lord himself is settled in his mind. So he has no worries about the material world. Finally
the poet says that whatever the way the lord shows to him he accepts it by living as a real
devotee. The poets feel that serving and living with the god’s love is pleasure and glory.

Till to the present day the poems written by the legendary-poets like Nammalwar and
Andal in Tamil oral literature are sung at social occasions and at temples as wake up
songs to the lord. It’s the greatness of their poetic-songs that they are still sung and
performed.
After reading several features and examples of devotional poem-songs in Tamil song cultures, we could understand the tectonic shift taken place in the devotion and social sphere in the 6th to the 10th century. Both the Alwars and Nayanmars used songs, dance and music as the primary medium of preaching. The lives of the poet-singers would help us to understand the social and political system and the life styles of the people of their times. All of them come from various castes and classes of the society and they always annulled caste and class, and preached equality before their devotional outpourings. The life of Sundarar who married a lower caste woman shows us that they were not afraid to practice what they sing of for the society and within the society they come from.

The woman poets have been discussed in the song cultures of Tamil to understand the social struggles of the woman from the ages. The space for the woman even today is still there and the women are one of the major themes of the present contemporary song cultures of Telugu, which we study in the later chapters of the thesis. Gaddar and Venkanna are the most famous song composers who give a major space to make the women strong and educate them through their songs. The role of ‘woman’ is clearly represented in their songs.

A.K. Ramanujan in his book *Hymns for the drowning* claims that, the saint poets wandered all over the Tamil countryside, inspiring and converting kings Brahmins and peasant, affirming in poetry the holiness of hundreds of Tamil places dedicated to Vishnu.
or Siva. Their pilgrimages, their legends and their hymns which they sang by thousands, literally mapped a sacred geography of the Tamil regions and fashioned a communal self image that cut across class and caste. They composed the most important early Bhakti devotional texts in any Indian language. The two rival movements despite differences in myth and ritual created and shared a special idiom, a stock of attitudes and themes and a common heritage alive to this day. AK Ramanujan is among the foremost scholars, critics and translators who worked on the song cultures of Tamil and Kannada in the modern times.

*Speaking of Siva* which is perhaps the most widely read of his works, introduced readers to the song cultures of India, while *Hymns for the Drowning* offered brilliant translations of poems to the lord Vishnu by the 9th century poet Nammalwar. *The Collected Essays* published in 2000 are nothing short of a dazzling demonstration of Ramanujan’s wide reading in Indian song cultures. Throughout his translations he tells us that the study of oral literature or the folklore studies are his first love with his score of essays and two collections *Folklore From India: A Selection Of Oral Tales From Twenty-Two Language.*

A.K. Ramanujan himself was born into Tamil family. He also wrote some poetry in Kannada which is another south Indian language. The title of the book, with its play on the meaning of Alvar, the saint who is drowned in God and reader’s own condition,

32 Ibid, P. 09.
suggests the complexity and subtlety of the poems. Eighty three poem-songs have been taken for the translation in this collection. All of the poem-songs are short and almost all possessed a lyrical beauty and artistic charm in them. In addition to those poem-songs Ramanujan had provided some background about the diction or the writing style of the saint-poet Nammalwar. And in his afterword contains even some more useful about the poem-songs analysis. There are also some notes commenting directly on the individual poems. In fact, the introduction, the afterword and the notes take up more space than the text of the poems.

The poems though well translated, are not easy to sing as songs. The first one “the Paradigm” suggests their challenging nature. All of them are rooted in Vaishnava tradition, and almost all of them celebrate the exploits and attributes of the Lord Vishnu, which an uneducated one takes some more time to understand. Since the song-poems were sung, they were understandable to the common people, and it was one of the reasons why the song cultures of various periods in India are owned by the common people of the region. The book of Ramanujan’s translation is a demanding book but well worth the effort. There are few odd things that I noticed which can be discussed here. While writing on his own native field, Ramanujan turns to Western sources for education of Indian ideas of song cultures in Tamil language; and when he does use an Indian source, he does not check the accuracy of the information. Thus he blindly reproduced comments from the sources. Though the book is well translated and worth reading to know about the history or the meaning of the song-poems composed by one of the
Alwars named Nayanmars, Ramanujan’s translations make one read them rather than sing; he turns them into poems and deprives them of their song-qualities. Finally Ramanujan has not given any source of the knowledge of the singing for Nammalwar and discussed the caste or Jati background of the saint-poet.

After a close analysis of song cultures in Tamil, what is observed is that the contemporary society of Tamilnadu did not call this body of literature as the part of the literature. The scholars in the modern times have named the body of oral poetry composed and sung by the two groups, Alwars and Nayanmars bhakti literature. They did not give any importance to the other features of the song. They did not consider singing as one of the components of the song cultures. As pointed out earlier, no attempt is done to trace out the correlation between the Jati and song cultures. And they did not consider the reasons behind its liveliness in pre-modern times.
2.1 Song Cultures in Kannada

In India, each culture of each region carries a unique poetic pattern. Karnataka is one among the states where we can find haunting fascinating song-poetry. Kannada is one of the most spoken language today in the south Indian state of Mysore by nearly 20 million people. Of the four major languages, Kannada is second to Tamil in antiquity of literary tradition. There is evidence for at least fifteen centuries of literary work in Kannada. Yet in all the length and variety of this literature, there is no body of lyrics more strikingly original and impassioned than the Vachanas of the medieval saints. They all speak of Siva and speak to Siva. The literary genres in Kannada language are Bhakti poetry, Vachana sahithya, and Haridasa sahithya. The common features in most of the poems composed in Vachana sahithya, by famous Vachanakaras are that they can be sung in every social context. So the song and singing are the common features in Kannada song cultures. In the period between 12th and 18th centuries, Hinduism had a great influence on Kannada language and poetic culture. The other major poets of the Kannada Vachana literature are Devara Dasimayya, Basavanna, Allamaprabhu and Akkamahadevi. The Vachanakara song culture has developed in 11th and 12th centuries.

In general, song culture is categorically an upshot of oral communication in a civilization. The birth of any song cultures further would provide a base for cultural and traditional production of that civilization. Song cultures are the expressions of the natives and their

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cultures and traditions. Sources of song cultures are innate experiences of human beings since time immemorial. The modern critics are of opinion that the written literature is superior to song cultures in modern times. The people from ancient times to the modern day use songs as the primary source of entertainment and education in rural areas where people work in the agricultural fields. Song cultures are given the highest priority and statue in the history of Kannada language and literature. Song culture in Kannada is quite ancient with its wide ranging variety. In the history of Kannada song cultures Vachana song forms have a unique status and they are sung in temples and other religious occasions even today. It influenced many other oral song forms in many other languages like Telugu and Hindi during 12th century. Devara Dasimayya was the foremost poet-singer of the Vachana song cultures and was followed by other Vachanakara in the later periods. The form of Vachana in Kannada song cultures of the 12th century remained a magnificent milestone in the History of Kannada song cultures.

The saint-poets of 12th century in Karnataka created revolution in the field of life. It was a socio-religious revolution through the songs of Vachanakaras. The form of song cultures was produced beyond the purpose of singing and composing and it was an outcome of a thought process over the problems of life. It has a unique quality of poetic values and nobility of thoughts. The composers and singers of Vachana were proponents of many innovative concepts and system. The saint-poets in Kannada conceived world and ultimate reality differently. They try to visualize different meaning to their life experiences and their realities of life. Vachana means a small saying. It is composed in
four lines. It is an independent and unique form of singing in song cultures of Kannada. The form and size of the Vachanas make a typical literary genre of song-poems. They do not resemble the quality of verse nor prose; even it does not resemble the quality of any parlance during the 12th century. So it seems that the form of composing and singing was not borrowed from any other song-forms of the world. And the culture of singing Vachanas was not influenced by any other forms of the oral traditions. It is a product of seer’s experiences of the song-poets belonging to the Vachanakara. It is a metaphysical lyric composed and sung in Kanada language. The form of Vachana song cultures in Kannada are termed as cryptic saying or musings. They also are described as pithy sayings couched in thought and actions, sublime, emotions and experiences of the divine. So rather than saying that the Vachanas are formless it is better to say that the forms of these song-poems are unique and sung in bygone days. It is unique of its own sense. It is a combination of voice and oral text. It is normal idiom given to the collective resurgence, spiritual renaissance, economic reforms and spiritual understanding culminated in their theology by a group of common and poor saint-poets of 12th century.

The poem-songs in Vachana culture, call men to give up the desire for worldly wealth and ease, to live lives of temperance and detachment from the world and to turn to God for refuge. The major themes found in Vachana song-poems are in strong opposition to superstitions, self introspection, experiences of a common man, and honest-earning and so on. In the later years, other Vachanakaras such as Basavanna, Allama Prabhu and Akkamahadevi added more fame to this poetic-genre.
The *Vachanas* appear like small song-poems about 4-10 lines. The most attention-grabbing characteristic of the *Vachanakara* poetry is that all of the *Vachanakaras* had a special ending line in their poems. The last line of each *Vachana* calls the lord's name. Basavanna ends his every *Vachana* with a line *Kudala Sangama Devara*. Allamaprabhu ends his poem with *Guheshwara*. Akkamahadevi’s *Vachanas* end with calling the God with a special name called Channa Mallikarjuna. These saintly legends sufficiently explain the devotional spirit by which these statuettes are animated.

The spirit of Bhakti, the simple, child like faith which finds full and complete satisfaction of all worldly desires in worship and service of god, is perfectly expressed in the rapt face, the unstudied reverential attitude, and in the deliberate exclusion of all petty technical details which might divert attention from the all absorbing motif. It is an art, with perfect control of technical methods, which is from its intense sincerity and depth of religious conviction makes no parade of virtuosity; it aims straight for truth, and hits the mark with effortless ease. The personality of the artist is merged in his own creation. Vachanas are a body of work and a form of writing in Kannada that are usually recognized as a part of movement called Vachana or Veerashiva or Lingayat movement of the 12th century. This body of work has come to be treated in the 20th century as the most important body of literature produced in Kannada. Among the many reasons for the contemporary popularity of the Vachanas, the most prominent one is that they come to be

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regarded as one of the earliest indigenous expressions of subaltern revolt against the caste system. This interpretation, dating back to the colonial period, has been dominant in modern Lingayat studies. Vachanas in the present society are transformed into music of different kinds and sung in various social situations such as marriages, social gatherings, and other religious contexts. The most important themes of the Vachana song cultures are social issues such as equality among men and man and woman. Another important theme is to convey the relationship between man and God. The internal fight between the inner soul and man is one of the important themes of the Kannada song cultures. Thus the main aim of the Vachana song poetry is to teach moral values to the common man, how to behave in society, human relationships between man and woman. Vachanas convey the relation between man and god, and the dignity of labour. The saint-poets of Vachana literature covered most of the contemporary problems of the social structure such as caste discrimination and inequality. Vachana composers had understood the impenetrable nature of the caste system. Therefore, rather than holding to the implausible ideal of eradication the whole system, they worked towards reducing the inequality between the different castes as they found out soon, an easy way to break up a system is to break up the symbols. Brahman was the symbol of the caste system. Vachana composers therefore undertook various methods to break up the caste system. The summary of the arguments as Daunkin Jalki quotes from the arguments of Chidananda Moorthy is as follows:

1. Vachana-composers denied the famous dictum that a Brahman is the guru of all Varnas.

2. They preached the equality of the Brahmans and the untouchables.

3. They proclaimed that human beings are all equal and that there is no space for a distinction such as caste distinction amongst them.

4. The repeatedly proclaimed that the status of Holeya who becomes a Bhakta is higher than the status of a Brahman.

5. In traditional Lingayat writing, Lord Siva comes to the house of lower caste Vachana-composers, such as Madara chennayya, to dine with them. Through such portrayals, Vachana composers conveyed a sense that god himself has demonstrated the greatness of Holeya Bhaktas.

6. Vachana composers repeatedly showed the different meaning attached to the term Brahman. They thus helped people shed the wrong conceptions that the ample of Urilinga Peddi’s Vachanas, which often try to demonstrate that Brahman is not simply a term that indicates caste.

7. Furthermore, the Vachanas assert that people do not become holeya or Brahmans by birth. A wicked person is a holeya and a good persona is the one who belongs to a good caste. In a sense that the Vachanakaras tried to teach the people

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36 Ibid. P. 79.
that the caste and good qualities of person is not decided by birth but by the lifestyle and good qualities determine the levels of the people.

These Vachanas gained instant popularity due to its unique and appealing quality. They were exciting in their themes and use of simple and native language used by the people of its society. The saint-poets of Karnataka have presented their astonishing talent through their trouble-free and alluring Vachanas. They are ever unforgettable in the cultural history of songs. Their Vachanas carry collective values. They are produced out of expressing the values rather than genre of oral literature. Later this form is popularized by the revolutionary mystic, philosopher Basavanna, Allama and Akkamahadevi and other. Basavanna established the *anubav Mantap* to eradicate all the veils of the society. He cultivated and enriched the form of Vachanakara song cultures.

2.1.1 Basavanna

Basaveshwara is also known as Basavanna, who is one of the famous figures in Kannada language and oral poetry. He was born at a small village in Karnataka in 1134. He is a well-know poet among the *Vachanakaras* in Kannada poetry. A significant story of the Lingayat movement founder member Basava and his many progressive actions, such as, for instance, his protest against his *upanayana* (initiation ritual) or a marriage he had organized against caste rules.
Basava is thus seen as a founder of progressive protest movement and it is popularly known as Vachana movement in Karnataka. He was not only good at composing poetry in Vachana literature and also renowned for his social and political reformation activities in his times. He worked as a prime minister under the king named King Bijjala. He fought against the caste system and social order. Basavanna was the leader of the medieval religious movement, Virasivism, of which the Kannada Vachanas are the most important texts. The major themes that Basavanna deals in his poetry are devotional and universal because he is not addressing a particular person but the human society. A few of the famous vachanas written by Basavanna in Kannada language are:

The rich will make temples for lord Siva
What shall I a poor man do?
My legs are pillars
The body the shrine
The head a cupola of god
Listen, o lord Kudala sangama devara,
Things standing will fall
But the moving ever shall stay.

If one were to choose a single poem to represent the whole extraordinary body of religious lyrics called the Vachanas, one cannot do better than choosing the above poem

37 Ibid.


39 Ibid., p. 20.
of Basavanna. It dramatizes several of the themes and oppositions characteristic of the protest or the protestant’ movement called Virasivism. For instance: Indian temples are traditionally built in the image of human body. The ritual for building a temple begins with digging in the earth, and planting a pot of seed. The temple is said to rise from the implanted seed, like a human. The different parts of the temple are named after body parts. The two sides are called the hands or wings, the hasta; a pilla is called a foot, pada. The top of the temple is the head, the sikhara. The shrine, the innermost and the darkest sanctum of the temple, is gharbhagra, the womb-house. The temple thus carries out in brick and stone the primordial blueprint of the human body.\textsuperscript{40} In the poem, Basavanna is sharing his feelings about the world. He conveys that the concrete and artificial world is not eternal except the human soul which preaches the lord with all the soul. The buildings built by human will fall after some time but the moving temple of human soul is eternal. It cannot be destroyed by anyone. He says that his two legs and two hands are the pillars of a moving temple for the Lord. The poet adds that the real devotee’s body itself is a holy place for the Lord Siva. The head of the real devotee is the sikhara for the lord’s temple. Thus Basavanna symbolizes the human body as a moving temple in the above Vachanas.

\begin{quote}
The power of knowledge destroy ignorance
The power of light dissipates darkness
The power of truth is foe of all untruths
The sharanas experience of god is the sole of worldliness
Lord Kudala sangama devara.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p.21.
In the Vachanas, the poet is talking about the universal knowledge. He is appreciating one’s knowledge which can devastate the unawareness in human. He says that the god is the enemy of all illusions. Only the true devotees can see the god as the worldliness.

Don’t rob, don’t kill, never ever lie
Don’t get angry; don’t think negative about others,
Don’t self describe, don’t tease others
This is the way of self respect, this is the to get
Respected by the world
This is the way of impressing
My lord kudala sangama devara

This is one of the best Vachanas composed by Basavanna. Here the poet is teaching the man how to behave with other fellow creatures. Here the poet is talking about the dignity of labour and hard work. He is educating the common people how to respect others in the society. He says through his poem that the all humans are equal to the god. He conveys that respecting fellow beings, being honest is the real self respect.
2.1.2 Allamaprabhu

Look here
The legs are two wheels
The body is a wagon
Full of things
Five men drive
The wagon
And one man is not
Like another
Unless you ride it
In full knowledge of its ways
The axle will break
O lord of caves.
To a flowing stream
All the body is legs
To a burning fire
All he body is tongues
To a blowing wind
All the body is hands
Oh! Guheshwara,
To your sharana
The whole body is Linga!

Allamaprabhu is one of the contemporaries of Basavanna. He is another literary giant of Vachana poetry. He was born into a family, his family members were performers in a temple in Karnataka region in India. His father was a dance teacher. Professionally
Allamaprabhu used to play drums in local temples on religious activities. His Vachanas express his personal and devotional experience about the society and the god. His Vachanas made him unique among the Vachanakaras of Kannada literature. The poetry of Allama is very beautiful and simple to understand by a common man. He criticized the artificial ritual worship and caste based culture. He gave importance to moral values and love of mankind in his Vachanas. The ending line that he used to address the god is *Guheswara*. The line represents the localness in his poetry. Allamaprabhu as the other vachanakaras in Kannada literature covered a whole range of themes in his poetry such as commitment to the devotion. Moreover he adds in his poetry that death is nothing but it is the unification with the god. Most of the *vachanakara* poetry teaches the man to lose the material relationship with the world which is artificial and conveys that nothing is going to be with the man except God.

2.1.3 Akka Mahadevi

The buffalo has one worry,
The cobbler has another;
The righteous one has one worry,
The evil-doer has another;
I have my own worry,
You have the worry of your desires!
I am worried that
Chennamallikarjuna, jasmine-tender,
Akka Mahadevi was the most popular saint poetess of the Veerashiva poetic movement of the 12th century. She was born in 1105 at Udutandi, North Karnataka. She was the most important poetess in the 12th century. She composed 315 Vachanas in Kannada language. Through her Vachanas, Akkamahadevi talks about her great love for her lord of the white Jasmine - Cennamallikarjuna.

Akkamahadevi, even when she was a young child, showed her poetic proclivities. She was one of the paragon of beauty and the princess of the lyrical poetry in Kannada song cultures. Her Vachanas or sayings are poetic testaments of her mind’s reaction to the wonder and awe of existence. Though the same conjecture of the poetry is there in her sayings, yet they are deepened and widened by the calm of meditation. Keen spiritual longings shift the emphasis from the wonder of the outside universe to the significance of the self within. The quest for the god, her favourite Chennamallikarjuna, rekindled the emotional exuberance of early poetic genius and compelled her inwards to explore the infinite depths of the soul in which the central principal of creation or God is reflected.

When I did not know myself
Where were you, tell me?

Like the colour in gold,
You were in me.
Though you were in me
I saw you as different,
O Chennamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender!42

A more human approach to the God lies through pure love and unselfish love which withdraws the most of the obstacles that the ego interposed between the divine and the devotee. The Vachanakara movement in Kannada language broke the traditions of the court poetry and opened avenues to one and all who aspired to express his/her inner soul. The Vachanas even to this day have become the common man’s literature43. Akkamahadevi Vachanas have a lyrical quality and direct personal appeal with her rare poetic elements.

Kama the god of desire does not know;
He was burnt to ashes.
Time, who is death, does not know;
He was trampled down.
Brahma the creator does not know;


43 Ibid., p. 15
His head was plucked off.

Listen, O mother, listen:

Vishnu the preserver does not know;

He had to tend to cattle.

The three worlds do not know;

They were burnt by the eye in the forehead.

Therefore, Chennamallikarjuna, Jasmine-tender, is my husband,

What shall I describe of his greatness?

Beyond birth and death,

O mother?  

The *Vachanakaras*, however, did use stock phrases, proverbs, and religious commonplaces of the time. This stock is shared by the southern and northern saints. They also travelled within and across regions, claimed kindred saints of the other regions in the genealogical tree of gurus. Thus the *Virasiva* saints named the 63 Tamil saints among their forebears. *Saivism* knits faraway Kashmir with south India, and within though India the saints of Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu. Both Kabir of the Hindi region, and Caitanya of Bengal, were inspired by southern precedents. Chronologically from the seventh century on, century after century, Bhakti movements have arisen in different region and languages, spanning the whole Indian sub-continent, in Tamil, Kannada, Marathi,

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Gujarathi, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, and Punjabi and roughly in that order. The idiosyncratic qualities or features have been discussed in the earlier part of this section.

The Vachanas’ thought started in the beginning of 11th century have been composed till 18th century and by the later saint-poets of Vachana song cultures and sung in the present times. The literary scholars like A.K Ramanujan have brought out much new significance to these Vachanas with their own perceptive and attention. Since then it has been the profession of several scholars whose perseverance and academic hunt and curiosity have succeeded to a great extent in providing them an influential positions in the world of song cultures. The forms of song cultures of 11th and 12th centuries did not lose their implication and importance to our age. They visualized and practically lived a caste less and egalitarian life. In spite of the strong willed efforts of Dasimayya, Basavanna, and other saint-poets of this song cultures tried their best to reach the goals of caste less, classless, democratic and highly humanistic society- it is still a distant goal to achieve this.

*Speaking of Siva* is one of the better productions of A.K.Ramanujan in recent times. This book is about the fascinating song-poems by four saint-poets of Kannada song cultures, who devoted to the god Siva, translated from Kannada language. I am in no position to judge the accuracy of the translation, but they read very well. I should point out that they


were not learned writers but oral singers who worshipped god through their song-poems in the form of Siva. In his book A.K. Ramanujan translates the songs of the four famous song-poets of Kannada who are Dasimayya, Basavanna, Allama Prabhu and Akkamahadevi. What A.K. Ramanujan in a whole sense talks about the saint-poets in song cultures of Kannada is that they are the great poets of the 10th to 12th centuries of the Kannada. They wrote short poems called Vachanas. According to Ramanujan they are the greatest song composers in that tradition. A.K. Ramanujan does not call them singers he named them poets, whereas they are not poets but perhaps singers who sing the song-poems composed by them and visited temples in surrounding places. The poetry that is translated by A.K. Ramanujan is the selected version of Vachanakaras and he does not refer any other poem-songs, though, there are hundreds of more poems.

This book makes available some material which is rather hard to find elsewhere. The poems themselves though they reflect the broad background of Hindu religious life, nevertheless can have in many respects a universal appeal for those devoted to the lord. A.K. Ramanujan says that the four song composers were devoted to Siva and generally addressed their Vachanas to him. They all give particular titles to their universal lord connected with their personal experiential memory. Three of them use titles connected to particular places where they had their conversion experiences. Basavanna addressed his poem to the lord of the meeting rivers and Allama addressed his poems to lord of the caves and Akkamahadevi addressed her poems to the lord of Cennamallikarjuna apparently all the names are used in the temples in their places.
What is missing in A.K. Ramanujan's book is that the translator did not give any importance to the culture of singing, where singing itself is one of the greatest feature of the song cultures of the world in particular in India. The translator calls the song composers poets whereas they completely used their poetry for singing and moving to the other places. He not only gave no importance to the feature of singing but also he did not recognize the song-poems as songs and also his translation made the songs to be read as literary poem of writing cultures where the songs are meant to be sung melodiously. He also forgot to talk about the role of the body of the singer and his memory. He did not give the details of the caste of the song composers Vachana song cultures in India. So the final results out of the book did not turn up properly and also they transferred the song cultures into reading cultures.
2.2 Song Cultures in Hindi

Hindi is the most spoken language in India. Nearly 180 million people speak Hindi as their mother tongue. The main regions where Hindi is spoken as a first language are Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Bombay. Even most of the people in Telangana converse in Hindi in specific social contexts. We can find some Hindi words in Telangana song cultures that are because of the rulers whose mother tongue was Urdu.

Religious literature in medieval India was song culture and the literature was composed to be sung by the poet-singers and the people of the nation. It spread across the country like wildfire on the lips of devotees and wandering ascetics who walked from region to region or met in conventions of “holy men” on the banks of some sacred river, where a chief activity was Bhajan, or devotional singing. This oral tradition is still flourishing today, so that one can move among monks and ascetics or group of singers in villages and transcribe songs by Kabir- at least versions of songs that have been passed over the centuries, across mountains and deserts, through dialectical alteration, and sometimes in and out of printed version as well. Oral poetry is the first form of composition in Hindi language and literature. Later the prose form has been developed. Hindi has been derived from the Sanskrit language as all other Aryan languages of India. Friedhelm Hardy, in his

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thesis argued that the bhakti tradition in Hinduism should be divided into two broad strands which he designated as 'intellectual' and 'emotional'. Hindi poetic-culture also was marked by the influence of Bhakti movement as we have seen in Tamil and Kannada literature. Hindi literature is a very expressive with its poem-songs. The song composers in Hindi song cultures use simple and understandable language and sung songs with their emotional relation to the god they love and believe. In the song-poems, it is found that they used local speaking words to make the people understand the theme and meaning of an oral poem. In Hindi song cultures Kabir, Guru Nanak, Surdas, and Meera Bai were famous. Their poetry has singing as its main feature. The poetry is still being used as songs by the people in various regions of India.

2.2.1 Kabir: An Illiterate Singer in Hindi Song Cultures

Where do you search for me?
I am with you
Not in pilgrimage, nor in icons
Neither in solitudes
Not in temples, nor in mosques
Neither in kamba nor in Kailasa
I am with you o man
I am with you

Not in prayers, nor in meditation,
Neither in fasting
Nor in yogic exercises
Neither in renunciation
Neither in the vital force nor in the body
Not even in breadth of the breadth
Seek earnestly and discover
In but moment of search
Says Kabir, Listen with care
Where your faith is, I am there

The poem song is one of the most excellent philosophical verses composed and sung by Kabir in his times. In the song he signifies that the god is not there in the temples and other religious icons in India. The saint-poet wants the people to realize the truth about the existence of the God. He says that god is not even seen in the pilgrimages and in solitudes. He says that we cannot see god with our meditation and yogic exercise and fasting. We cannot find god in Kaba or Kailasa. He also adds that man should be sincere in searching for the god. Kabir says that God is nowhere except with the man who lives in reality. Kabir suggests the people that god is there with the good faith.

Isaac Ezekiel in his book ‘Kabir the great Mystic’ argues that Kabir’s songs seek nobody’s appreciation. They seek no sanction, ask for no approval, search for no popularity, invite no commendation, crave no compliment; they stand independent of this consideration, and they constitute the most uninhibited literature, the freest of free writing
Kabir belongs to the small group of supreme mystics-amongst who have achieved that which we might call the synthetic vision of God. These have resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the divine nature; between the absolute of philosophy and the sure true friend of devotional religion. They have done this, not by taking these apparently incompatible concepts one after the other; but by ascending to a height of spiritual intuitions. The major change that the poets like Kabir, in the Hindi song cultures have brought into the whole range of devotional song cultures, is that the idol worship (which was in Tamil and Kannada devotional poetry) had been eradicated and replaced by a formless devotion. Kabir was an illiterate poet in Hindi literature.

Kabir would have not been loved and adored so much as he is but for this intense humanness that brightens up every line of his verse: pain, doubt, anger, love, tenderness, submission: no human emotion is out of his range.

Kabir was one of the major devotional poet-philosophers in Hindi song cultures. Kabir was born in 1440 and passed away in 1518. He was one of the major figures in Hindi song cultures. There is no information available as to where he was born and to which community he belongs. There is some information that he was brought up in a Muslim

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49 Ibid. P. 20.


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family. Weaving was the occupation of the family. He did not belong to any devotional community. But the verses of Kabir show that he perhaps was influenced by the *bhakti* movement and socio-cultural philosophy. He is considered the founder of Kabir Panth, a religious community. Though he does not know reading and writing he composed his poetry in oral form. He added some fame with his oral poetry to the oral song culture in Hindi language. Tagore describes in his great language and long sentences about the greatness of Kabir's poem-songs thus: Kabir was a great religious reformer, the founder of a sect to which nearly a million northern Hindus still belong, it is yet supremely as a musical poet that Kabir lives for us.

Kabir's fate has been that of many revealers of reality; he was, a hater of religion's exclusivism, and sought above all things to initiate men into the liberty of the children of God, his followers have honored his memory by re-erecting in a new place of barriers which he labored to caste down. But his wonderful songs survive in the spontaneous expressions of his vision and his love; and it is by these, not by the didactic teaching associated with his name, that makes his immortal appeal to the heart.

In these same poems a wide range of mystical emotion is brought into play: from the loftiest abstractions, the most otherworldly passion for the infinite, to the most intimate and personal realization of God, expressed in homely metaphors and religious symbols drawn indifferently from Hindu and Mohammadan belief. It is impossible today their author that he was Brahmin or Sufi, Vedantist or Vaishnavite he says of himself at once as the child of Allah and Ram, that supreme spirit whom he knew and adored, and to whose joyous friendship he sought to induct other men, he included all metaphysical
categories, all creedal definitions in his song-poems; yet each contributed something to the descriptions of that infinite and simple totality who revealed himself, according to their measure, to the faithful lover of all creeds. His poetry was a direct attack on the false preaching and immoral practices in the society. He also composed two-line poems and they are called *dohas*.

It is needless to ask of a saint
the caste that he belongs
for the priest, the warrior.
the tradesman and
all the thirty six castes, alike are seeking for God.
it is but folly to ask what the caste of a saint may be;
the barber has sought God,
the washerwoman,
and the carpenter,
even the Raidas was a seeker after God.
the Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste.
Hindus and Muslims alike have achieved that end,
where remains no mark of distinction.

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52 Ibid. P. 33.
Kabir’s message is essentially to know the self, the eternal spirit that is the core of our being. We are emanations of the divine, but we do not realize it. It is our religious/spiritual duty to know who we really are, and remove ourselves from doubt and delusions. Kabir did not tolerate false piety, hypocrisy, superstitions, and the externalities of religious. He exhilarated us to awaken to self-knowledge in this life and be free. We need to realize that we are never separate from the god. He taught the equality of all, universal love and brotherhood, regardless of religious, caste or social status.

In his poem-songs we will note that he is always addressing the audience from a point of authority, yet he had no formal education. He spoke of what he realized. Great teaching such as Kabir’s is treasures for our development. They are like a torch lighting the way so we do not stumble on our journey. Kabir’s poems are like that torch, showing us the path and it is up to us to pay attention. Kabir is one of the most famous mystic saints of the devotional song cultures in Hindi language in India. His teaching has become important for the people of all religions and all regions because he preached the ‘impartiality’ through his poem-songs. Kabir writes and sings as a woman and the creator is her beloved, in the song and searched for himself...

I went searching for
The beautiful colour of my beloved,
And then discovered the colour manifesting everywhere.
Even as I searched for it,

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I too had been coloured by its beautiful hue\textsuperscript{54}.

Kabir's influence on the development of the religious life of the people of India is quite substantial. He has been hailed the father of Hindi poetry. Prior to Kabir, scriptural teachings were generally in Sanskrit, a language confined to scholars and the priesthood and not understood by people at large. Kabir conveyed his poems in spoken languages so everyone could understand him. For this reason, his couplets and songs are still sung by people all over India as well as abroad\textsuperscript{55}. Among some his most telling influences, Kabir refined and clarifies the devotional movement of Indian spirituality known as Bhakti. He founded \textit{Nirguna Bhakti}, the practice of loving devotion to the formless divine. Prior to Kabir, Bhakti had been practiced and understood through the lens of \textit{Sadguna Bhakti} or devotion to the multiple physical forms that the divine took\textsuperscript{56}. Now we could understand that the Hindi song cultures had reached into an advancement to fight against the class and caste dogmas in Indian society.

As Linda Hess in her book 'The Bijak of Kabir' says that, Kabir was an amazing saint-poet, singer whose songs have been harmonic and enumerated by millions of people in the world from five hundred years ago. Though he is an illiterate and he preached an

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. P. 15.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. P. 7.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. P. 16.
abrasive, sometimes shocking, and always uncompromising communication that encouraged his listeners to shed their visions, pretentions. When an academician wants to read the history of the significance of song cultures in Hindi language, he might normally expect a good meaning and better interpretation of songs and their context or the writer's capability in sending the message he wanted to.

But what happens in this kind of translation is that the writers divide the books into several parts and describe some normal qualities of the poet-singers and translate some of the songs and leave all behind without talking. And the translators in the modern context or in the modern period did not even attempt to understand or find out the relation between the caste and song cultures. They do not even try to call them the oral poetry songs. They call it oral poetry and conclude their discussion at the same point.

Linda Hess in her book entitled The Bijak of Kabir is one of the most interesting translators of the saint-poets in India. In this book Hess presents an atypical illustration of criticism as imitating rather than merely offering a description. Half of the introduction of forty pages is spent to describe that the saint-poet Kabir is one of the famous poets of 15th century and it is worth translating because of the simplicity and bluntness that the songs of Kabir carry. She adds that Kabir is one of the most touching saint-poets of all

the ages of devotional song cultures. The saint-poet maintains a personal message through his songs. She claims that Kabir sings his poetry with lots of intimacy and the structure of the songs and diction is bursting and touches the listeners or the audience of his song-poems. Leaving aside the major issues about the memory, body and articulation or singing the songs she fails to recognize the importance of memory in oral song cultures and addressing the issues related to the mnemocultures.

Throughout the small introduction, Linda Hess seems to me that she is devastatingly uninformed of the importance of song cultures and how song plays an important role in Indian regions. She also was unable to point out that how memory is making the song cultures alive in the public domain in the Indian context. The memory in Indian song cultures plays an important role. The poet-singers of India from pre-modern stages to the contemporary times sing their song-poem by recollecting the lyrics of the song-poems from their memory.

2.2.2 Surdas

Yasoda lulling Hari to sleep,

Shaking the cradles, cuddling and fondling

Singing to him a song,

My darling is sleepy,

Why doesn’t sleep come along?
Come sleep, come quickly
Kanna for you does long
Sometimes he closes his eyes
Sometimes his lips are aflutter,
Thinking he fallen asleep
Yashoda stops her singing
Awake still, he is up suddenly,
Enjoying Yasoda’s song
Such joy as Yasoda feels
Is unattainable to the Gods\(^{58}\)

The poem is outstanding in showing the flexibility that the poets and writers have in literature. In this song the poet transformed himself into Yashoda, who is basically a mother. The poet states in the last line that even the gods cannot achieve the place and joy of a mother. Surdas in the song sings of the joy of mother (Yashoda) at different levels while she makes her child (Krishna) sleep. Thus a poet in literature and song cultures can

turn into a mother, lover, child and devotee. In addition to that the poets express the emotions such as ache, bliss, sorrow, mournfulness through a poem or a song.

No simple set of conventions provides definitive guidance about how the 16th century Sursagar should be presented to readers of English living five centuries later. The Sursagar is not really a text but a collection of texts-manuscripts versions of poems that would most likely have been performed independently of one another- and these in turn record a band of utterance that was primarily oral, not written. Surdas was a born blind singer-poet in Hindi song cultures. He was a devotee of lord Krishna. He was born in 1492 in a village called Faridabad district near Delhi. He lived over hundred years. He came from a very poor background. His parents were not even capable of taking care of him. So he went and joined in the group of wandering saint-singers to fill his tummy. Thus he developed singing and composing songs orally. The whole compositions of Surdas are called Sursagar. The famous collection of his songs contained 100,000 songs. Surdas's poetry reflects the social and cultural situations of his times. He added some reputation to the dialect called Brij Bhasha by composing poetry in Brij Bhasha. He composed imaginary poems on Krishna and Radha.

He composed wake-up song for Krishna. He composed lullabies to lord Krishna. The Krishna they know as the subject of classic poetry is apt to come from quite another source: Hindi poet-singers of the early modern period and the greatest of these is Surdas. Like Homer, he is remembered as having been blind. Like Shakespeare, he has infused a tradition of living performances. And the Krishna whom he sings of is largely the good of love rather than the key to life’s other battles. Why then is Surdas still so little known outside his homeland? It has to do with the definitions of classic. As a Western canon of Indian literature began to emerge, work like Kalidasa’s Sakunthala, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavata Purana and the Upanishads led the way. These were classics no doubt, and Sanskrit was certainly a learned language, but for many centuries it had ceased to anyone’s mother tongue—if ever it was. Sanskrit means refinement, and a significant part of its vocation had always been to ride above the unruly rhythms of ordinary, local speech. In order to understand the language of the poem-songs of Surdas and his poetry, let us look at a song by Surdas on Krishna.

Now I am blind; I have shunned Hari’s name.

My hair has turned white with illusions and delusions

That have wrung me through till nothing makes sense.

Skin shriveled, posture bent, teeth gone;

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60 Ibid. P. 4.
My eyes emit a stream of tears;
My friends, a stream of blame.

Those eyes once ranged a free as a cat’s,
but failed to measure the play of time

Like a false-eyed scarecrow failing to scatter

The deer from the field of the mind

Surdas says, to live without a song for the lord

Is courting death; his sledge stands poised?

Above your waiting head\(^{61}\)

In the song Surdas means to the blindness in a physical sense and something more spiritual. The disparity is at the heart of the most influential biographical traditions associated with Surdas, the one maintained in the devotional sampradaya (tradition). The flexibility that the oral poets have is, an oral poet can become a lover and beloved and mother and sister and brother in his songs as the theme of the song demands.

\(^{61}\) Ibid. 13.
2.3 Conclusion

The song-poets of Tamil, Kannada, Hindi wandered from one place to another singing their songs in various temples and social occasions. When the song-poets sing the songs, they recall the lyrics of the songs from their mind and memory. Thus the song cultures are spread to the other regions of India. Therefore, composition of songs and singing has continued by the song-poets of the other regions and other periods like Andhra Pradesh. In addition to the song cultures in Tamil, Kannada and Hindi languages, there are very good number of song-poets in Telugu language too. Palkurki Somanadhudu, Annamayya and others have composed song-poems on the theme of devotion as the song-poets of the above languages. In the following chapter I would deal with questions such as how the song cultures of the above languages reached the land of Telugu? Are there any changes in themes of the songs? How the song composers like Annamayya and Kshetrayya of 16th century have treated the god with the songs? And the kinds of song-poems they have composed on the gods.