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The *Bhakti* Movement in India: A Critical Introduction*

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THE ARTICLES in this collection have two aims: to appreciate the contemporary meaning of *bhakti* literature and to examine the contemporary significance of *bhakti* practice. These aims arise out of a larger concern about the future and significance of tradition in a world undergoing rapid change, particularly the countries of the Third World. Specifically, the authors are at least implicitly concerned about the role of *bhakti* in the process of modernization.

The view of modernization and of tradition which emerges from these articles is substantially different from those prevailing in both the East and the West. In the Western literature on the subject, the two words tradition and modernity are seen as a dichotomy or a continuum. A more realistic viewer may try to identify some specific elements of a given tradition as "modern", implying thereby that they could be put to use to reduce and destroy the other elements which are seen as obstacles. These attitudes arise from the experience of the West with its own tradition. The rise of capitalism and science-technology saw the totality of the old order break down. Elements of tradition, or world views and beliefs, were reinterpreted and transformed into a new system with which also came a new institutional order. Thinkers who witnessed and understood this critical break from the past were overwhelmed by it. They expressed it in dichotomous terms such as: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, mechanical and organic solidarity, culture and civilization, traditional and bureaucratic authority, sacred and secular associations, status and class, and so on. Modern sociology has inherited these. It has gone further and universalized them as abstract concepts applicable to all societies, as in the case of Talcott Parsons' "Pattern Variables" (Habermas, 1970). Men like Max Weber had to understand the break from tradition as a unique and particular process, as a rationalization of the past within an artificially bisected conception of rationality. Struck by its inevitability, they anticipated its movement with serious misgivings. With the subsequent prevalence of purposive rationality and of a technocratic consciousness, that pathos of passage has been forgotten. With the fall of the colonial empires, interest in the

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"modernisation" of Third World societies has grown. For most Western scholars it simply means a detailed programme for a break from tradition similar to that experienced by the West. The most prevalent Western view now advocates an instrumental use of tradition for its own destruction. Technocratic plans include such considerations in policies and attempt to use tradition to manipulate masses into modernity. In India, for example, the West-oriented intellectuals share this enthusiasm for modernization. At the same time, they also hold a somewhat different view of their tradition.

Western scholars, many of them missionaries or colonial administrators, had begun studies of Indian culture long before the post colonial technocratic orientation had emerged. They were enamoured by the philosophical abstractions of Hinduism and appalled by the social practice. They denounced the practice of rituals, superstition and social hierarchy and could not understand its relationship to the philosophy they studied. These attitudes, as well as those of post-colonial social science, had a peculiar impact on Indian intellectuals. First, as servants of the *raj*, they had to act as intermediaries of an alien regime and justify it to the people and to themselves. Since the regime was determined to bring about substantial changes in the social order, to make it compatible with the interests of the metropolis, the subaltern intellectuals had to develop reasons for them, to justify and legitimize them. To accomplish this and to accommodate the ruler's view of their tradition, they developed a theory of history. It projected the social life of Vedic Aryans as pure, innocent and joyful and claimed for it a tolerant, all-inclusive, universalistic world-view. Such a world-view was offered as the cause of the subsequent wholesale incorporation of barbaric practice which was attributed to the tribal populations who were conquered and subjugated by the wandering Aryans. These practices included human sacrifice, statecraft, icon worship and magic. The conquered tribes, it was argued, were not destroyed or enslaved, but were humanely absorbed as lower castes (Bedekar, 1969). This theory allowed the subaltern intellectuals to be proud of their tradition and to advocate substantial social reforms at the same time. In the subsequent struggle for national independence and in the establishment of the post-independence political order, this theory proved equally valuable (Lele, 1978).

These perspectives on tradition have had an impact on the understanding of *bhakti* movements. Indian and Western intellectuals have for a long time ignored *bhakti*. To them it is not a fundamental tenet of Indian philosophy (Dhavamony, 1971). They see *bhakti* as a path of devotion, especially developed and eminently suited for practice by the lower classes: *shudras* and women. Only an elite capable of comprehending the subtleties of Vedic philosophy can see the universalism of its message. That message, that the world is an illusion (*maya*) and that truth lies in the unity of the particular or the individual (*atman*) with the totality of all existence (*brahman*) is worthy of consideration. It is discussed, debated and evaluated in intellectually sterilised discourses. It refuses to find any kinship with devotion, with the worship of humanized divinity.

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Ironically, *bhakti* was explicitly a revolt against this dichotomous view which had upheld the duality of existence of those engaged in debating sterilized abstractions and those practising mindless rituals. Unaware of this, modern intellectuals are ready to dismiss it as an aspect of the latter, just as some of them declare the irrelevance of abstract Indian philosophy as well for the tasks of modernization. No more caught in the middle of alien rulers and their own people, contemporary intellectuals in India can be proud or contemptuous of their tradition at will and still claim the right to stand above the masses, to control them and to try to change what is to the common man still a living tradition (Rege, 1978).

While modernization in this sense is not absent from the minds of the authors of this collection, they take a substantially more mature view of tradition and *bhakti*. Ishwaran, Zelliot and Gokhale-Turner refer explicitly to models of modernization in relation to *bhakti*. Ishwaran identifies the two transitory phases of ethnocentrism and realism in modernization theory and hopes for the emergence of a third phase of more lasting models. He offers *Lingayatism* as one such model because it rests, according to him, on the universal values of freedom, equality and rationality to be pursued within a corresponding community. He analyses Basavanna's philosophy and practice and shows how these values were either explicitly propagated or implicitly practised. Ishwaran's analysis gives rise to a number of questions. For example, what is the general dynamics of the rise, decline and reassertion of universal values? Why did they come to find a unique manifestation in the preaching and practice of Virasaivism? Ishwaran speaks of a period of decline followed by a revival in the 19th century. We wonder about the reason for the decline. We also wonder in what way the renewal was affected by the forces which first caused the decline. What other social forces were associated with the revival? Furthermore, since the contemporary internal practice of the *Lingayats* is, presumably, still guided by these universal values, what is the relation of modern *Lingayats* to the surrounding, interacting world? How will the contemporary pursuit of these values by *Lingayats* move from its local existence into a truly universal practice of the entire society?

These are not idle questions. Their thrust is to suggest that Basavanna's critical revolutionary impulse should not be viewed as an accidental, isolated outburst of an unparalleled critical genius. It was, in fact, a unique moment in the ongoing dynamics of Indian tradition. Only as an isolated event can it be juxtaposed to *bhakti*. The claims that they share a common impulse can be rejected and thus it alone can be shown to qualify as a revolutionary movement. Ishwaran focuses on its organized practice and on its theory of society. He claims that such organization alone delivers tangible results. It leads to lasting changes in the social order. From this he draws the conclusion that *bhakti* movements merely upheld the old order and made it palatable while Basava's organized revolt produced a lasting model for universal emulation. This is an eminent, functionalist argument. It moves from an outcome to the source and finds it on terms set by the outcome itself. It generates questions

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which are unanswerable within the limits of such a framework; questions of which I gave a sample in the last paragraph. As Nemade suggests in his article, the choice of organization and its effectiveness in a social revolt may themselves be conditioned by the prior social position of the participants. Ishwaran does not tell us what impact the prior social position of the adherents of *Lingayatism* had on its practice. Perhaps we can find some indication of this in the later revival of *Lingayatism*. James Manor claims, for example, that "By 1945, *Lingayats*—the dominant landed group in Bombay Karnataka—had ousted the numerically and economically weak Brahmans from nearly all positions in the Congress which was the only important political force there" (Manor, 1979, p. 189). If this is so, then the revival of *Lingayatism* would seem to fit the pattern of a nation-wide reassertion of hegemony by traditionally dominant rural middle classes on the eve of independence (Lele, 1980).

The creative, critical impulse behind Virasaivism is not in doubt. Its functionalist isolation as a model of modernization raises questions. To try to seek direct practical advice from Basavanna or Nanak for contemporary revolutionary practice will be as counterproductive as the blind emulation of the quietistic withdrawal and political apathy of the *Warkaris*. Ishwaran's insight into the universal values propagated by Basavanna is, for us, a crucial starting point—provided we are willing to set aside externally imposed, empiricist classificatory frameworks of social movements. Instead, we should attempt a rational reconstruction of the dynamics of these values in the Indian tradition as a whole. Their specific theoretical and practical manifestations should be placed in that context. Some recent scholarship may be helpful. It traces the origin of the notions of *bhagavan, bhakta* and *bhakti* in the material basis of the communal, tribal life. Such life preceded and coexisted with the ancient civilizations and with the subsequent Vedic-Aryan transformation. In the transition from communal-tribal life to kingdoms and civilizations rose the first legitimate leadership and hierarchy in society (Godelier, 1978). The shift from *bhagavan* as the custodian-owner of a community's wealth and *bhakta* as his co-producer, sharer and consumer, to *bhagavan* as the divine universality, as god, and *bhakta* as his supplicant devotee, was also a corresponding transition (Jaiswal, 1967). During this transition, probably, there arose not only the legitimate kingships, but also a class of conductors of a community's symbolic sacrifices (*purohits*) and their protectors (*kshatriyas*). The logic and dynamics of the unity of *Vedic* philosophical abstractions and of associated and emergent hierarchical social practice was not broken during this transition. It broke only subsequently, and became the basis for the legitimation of an oppressive social order. The institution of *yajna*, probably, stands at the cross-roads of the transition from a classless, naturalistic tribal community to a class society (Bedekar, 1977).

These and similar speculative considerations about the origin of *bhakti* need not be treated as an exercise in romanticism. The natural limits of the tribal community were so overwhelming that the subsequent journey through a continuous and fierce intra-communal bloodshed for dynasties, property and

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racial superiority, seems to have been inevitable for the survival of that very community. The paradox of human development begins with this primal state. The human community moved away from natural repression only by replacing it with social repression. This in itself was a creative act. Social repression and hierarchy were, in the initial stage, necessary and hence legitimate. At the same time, the creative, productive activity of man within this transformed community must have rendered the specific forms of repression progressively unnecessary. Those who were to benefit from continued repression sought to legitimize it and had to do so in the name of that community. No longer the legitimate leaders of the community, they became its rulers. I speak of this paradox in my article on Jnanesvar as the tension between potential and actual community. To me, the image of the development of Indian tradition as a naturalistic, linear progression, incorporating and amalgamating any and all practices and beliefs, does not make sense. It fails to answer some basic questions about the relation between theory and practice. I see tradition as growing out of a tension between the creative potential of man in his nascent community and its sometimes necessary repressive negation in everyday social life. In that very social life which is creatively productive even under a counterfactual community, the potential for actualising such a community is inevitably nurtured. This occurs in social labour as man's productive social activity in relationship to nature. As the activity of that body-mind unity of human social beings, it is also a reflexive activity. Through it, man in society creates "products" and meanings at the same time. In this activity of active producers, oppression is reflected upon continuously as a contradictory life experience. The standard for such reflexion is that same principle on which the legitimization of oppression also rests. The values of rationality, freedom and equality are inherent in the notion of a potential community. They originate in an unmediated fashion in the essentially social and natural condition of the human species (Habermas, 1979). The way to grasp the dynamics of tradition is to unravel the paradoxical unity of its symbolic structures. What appear as paradoxes of theory and practice, of the sacred and the profane, of this world and the other world, all contain the essential paradox of potentiality. Man's rational sense for what is universally possible—but cannot be—in the particularity of a given situation-specific life practice (actuality), expresses itself through his symbolic ordering of the world. His sense for the possible is rational (rather than Utopian) because it stems from a consciousness, a recognition, of the rootedness of his unique particularity in the universal human condition. Hospital sees this in his article as a paradox between the unlimitedness of human imagination and the particularity of human existence. This paradox at times congeals into—and at other times explodes out of—the same symbolic universe. These are the hegemonic and liberating moments of tradition. Valued symbols, myths, beliefs and rituals of a tradition bear in them, as meanings, the actuality of everyday experience and the imaginative or creative potentiality of its transition. Symbols have dual meanings which allow an understanding of particular individual experience, as well as its re-interpreta-

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tion within the universality of a living tradition. This universality is, at another level, a paradox of liberation and hegemonic appropriation, of the legitimacy of a social order and its legitimation, of the moments of necessary and unnecessary oppression. In this understanding of tradition, the classificatory dichotomies of revolutionary and reformist movements, of radical and system-supportive *sampradayas*, and of traditional and modern societies, are brought into doubt. Polar concepts capture the essential paradox of symbolic life only statically. In fact, they are dialectical moments in the ongoing developmental logic of tradition.

The widespread belief, which is based on a functionalist view of outcome determining the source of action, is that *bhakti* was a quietistic, system-supportive movement in all its manifestations. I suggest that it would be a mistake to reject or to accept the modernity of *bhakti* on the basis of our immediate sense of its symbols and practices. Most often we see them from the perspective we inherited from colonial and neo-colonial contexts. We tend to focus on the hegemonic moment, the legitimizing function of tradition. We remain rooted only in our own world as we see it in its particularity. It is, of course, correct to be suspicious of these meanings, of the interpretations which sustain and uphold an oppressive social order. At the same time, we must search for the liberating moments hidden behind ideologies. If outcome is our only criterion, then we will be hard-pressed to find any truly successful revolutions. As Nemade points out, the militant Mahanubhav critique of oppressive social practice, which was pursued in opposition to the material base of productive social life, became an isolationist countercultural effort. It was easily quarantined and crushed by those in control. Successful revolts are not necessarily revolutionary since they often turn out to be reassertions of declining hegemony by the dominant classes. Ishwaran makes this point indirectly when he ignores the hierarchy and inequality among *Lingayats* and concentrates on the universality of Basavanna's message. Zelliot and Gokhale-Turner, who examine *bhakti* in terms of providing models for emulation, show how *dalits* reject *bhakti* as irrelevant to their struggle because of its totally subservient incorporation into Brahmanic order. Indirectly, they show the poverty of colonial and post-colonial liberal thought, *savarna* as well as *dalit*, with respect to a radical reappropriation of the communal and critical impulses of *bhakti*. Zelliot shows how Eknath, a versatile Brahmin *Warkari* poet, became, because of his reformist practice and preaching, a model for the liberal-reformists of colonial and post-colonial India. Her perceptive analysis from a liberal-reformist perspective gives a good indication of how and why *dalits* will remain alienated from the radical message of the Warkari saints. The mediated meanings of *bhakti* perpetuated by liberal intellectuals come to light in her essay through such things as commentaries by historians on M. G. Ranade's thesis on *bhakti* and films on the lives of poet-saints. The contrast is provided by young *dalit* critics whose vibrant poetry, based on liberal Brahmanic interpretations of *bhakti*, rejects both the liberal-reformist theory and the quietistic practice of today's *Warkaris*. It is not surprising, as Gokhale-Turner points out,

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that Indian tradition has become totally irrelevant for their critical-revolutionary efforts. The models they hold dear are those of world-revolutionary Marxism and of a one-time revolutionary Buddhism.

Dalit intellectuals in Maharashtra, not unlike their *savarna* counterparts, are, it seems to me, exercising two faculties at the same time but in isolation from each other. They are correctly suspicious and critical of *bhakti*. They see Chokhamela as well as his followers of today as being taken for a ride by the hegemonic classes, and perhaps rightly so. But they also fail to examine the source of potency of the *Warkari* message and practice for most non-Mahar *dalits*. In this, they act out of an arrogant elitism which makes them indistinguishable from *savarna* intellectuals whose hegemony they reject. While they show a willingness to suspect the legitimacy of *Warkari* symbolism—for it has done nothing but legitimize oppression—they also show a willingness to listen without suspicion to the symbolism of Marxism or Buddhism. Marxism and Buddhism are often portrayed as models of rational demystification and of ideology-critique, i.e. of willingness to suspect (Ricoeur, 1970).

Gokhale shows in his article that as far as Buddhism is concerned, such a view is one-sided. He explores the origins of *bhakti* in Buddhism and attributes it to the class of laymen and laywomen who were, in my view, its real backbone. While the order of monks expounded its rational metaphysics, the *upasaks*, the supportive direct producers, provided the ascetics with their necessary material sustenance. The *upasaks* eventuallly transformed Buddhism into a system of personal devotion. In Buddha and in his *sangha*, they saw the ideals of community being actualised. Their daily life-practice was only its denial. The usual distinction between popular worship and higher philosophy is inadequate; we must explore the dynamic relation between the two. Buddhism was a creative response to the oppressive social practice and its ritualistic legitimation in Vedic Hinduism. The unity of its logical and incisive critique with the emerging practice which emphasized intuitive experience was a unity of interdependence between spiritual and material life. Buddhism was, only in its totality of monks and *upasaks*, a complete critique. It was a way of practising the art of suspicion and listening at the same time. Gokhale describes *bhakti* as devotion to an exalted being. Buddha's exaltation was as *lokanath, purisuttama, saranatham* or *sattavaha*. He was portrayed as one who does not rule but leads. His most salient attributes were *panna* and *karuna*. There was a strong sense of communal leadership in this exaltation.

This notion of *purushottama* takes us back to the speculations about the pre-Vedic tribal origin of *bhakti* in the emerging legitimate leadership of tribal communities. The exaltation of Buddha was as the best of the charioteers, as the caravan leader, and as a *mahapurush* who is like or even better than God. Above all he was human and thus capable of symbolising the collective entity of man, the human community. Buddha, like Narayana in *Satphatha-Brahmana*, was a *bhagavan* to his community of *bhaktas*. Even if we table the speculation about the tribal origins of *bhakti*, as Gokhale suggests, we find in Buddhism the necessary evidence for the urge for, and exaltation of, community and legitimate com-

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munal leadership. It seems to hark back to the unrealised community of a primitive commune. The unity of theory and practice, differentiated empirically into monks and *upasaks* and under transformed conditions of social oppression, was prone, from the outset, to its own negation through hegemonic appropriation. Initially, the two provided each other with spiritual and material shelter. In the process, the community of active producers, the *upasaks*, transformed Buddhism so as to make sense of their own oppressively routine life experience. They brought the ascetically alienated doctrine to life and made it revelant. Thus arose *bhakti* in Buddhism. *Saddha* was for them both faith and strength. In it they exalted the potential community and they unreflexively produced a critique of oppression, of the actual community of everyday life. With the rising support of the state and the hegemonic classes for the monks, the cutting edge of this practical critique was progressively blunted. *Sangha*, the vanguard of a potential community, and Buddha, its legitimate leader, made less and less sense. The focus shifted from the *panna* and *karuna* of Buddha to his skills as a miracle worker. From one Buddha, the cult produced several *avatars* to legitimize the increasing disparity between the pomp and ceremony of Buddhist establishments and the drudgery in the everyday life of the *upasaks* (Kosambi, 1969). Buddhist doctrine became, once again, the monopolized knowledge of the select, while the laymen and laywomen were left with the ritualised worship of a deified Buddha. The unity of theory and practice was ideologically destroyed. Thus, the original *bhakti* in Buddhism was transformed into its opposite: the mindless adoration of the person of Buddha. The place of the laity in Buddhism as well as in Jainism has not been explored except through the conventional dichotomy of intellectual philosophy and popular worship. I have tried to show that the two are always organically linked. In establishing an artificial, ideologically-guided separation between the two, professional intellectuals play a crucial role. In justifying the appropriation of productive surplus by the rulers, they produce meanings to make that appropriation "sensible". These meanings are produced out of the symbols from which productive activity arises and on which it rests. Contradictory life experience is interpreted through symbols. Intellectuals, in interpreting these symbols and their local meanings, universalise them, raise them to a higher level of abstraction and thus increase their shareability. At the same time, however, in the name of social cohesion and through their use as ideology, the symbols are uprooted from their original sense in a particular context. The task of a critical intellectual—as opposed to a professional intellectual—therefore, is to grasp fully this paradox, this tension. From this necessity arises my advocacy of the art of suspecting and listening to the symbols simultaneously. Zelliot and Gokhale-Turner indirectly do this when they explore the contemporary relevance of *bhakti* for the *dalits*. Gokhale and Ishwaran do it more explicitly with respect to *Buddhism* and *Lingayatism*. Given my own preoccupation with the dialectics of the development of tradition, I suggest that they do not go far enough.

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Hawley's article addresses itself to the contradiction between the universality of ultimate meaning and the particularity of meanings in everyday life through the *darsan* poetry of Sur Das. Through a detailed structural analysis, he demonstrates what Ricoeur has called the willingness to listen to the symbols (1970). He explores the butter thief symbolism in terms of the transcendence of paradoxes, tensions and contradictions which are encountered unexplainably in everyday life. In Sur Das, working men and women, symbolised by the *gopi*s and the poet, overcome alienating distances and reconcile opposites. They see the enmities and negations dissolved in the play of the child-god who is a thief and not a thief at the same time. The effect of seeing this child at play on those from whose life the naivete of such play has been snatched away by toil and turmoil, is that of liquification of the heart and of transformation beyond an alienating and stressful existence. This actually may only pacify them, but it is an experience potentially capable of transformative social action, since such a transformation is embedded in the symbols which may merely pacify at one moment. For those capable of seeing the aesthetically appealing sight of a child's guile without malice or hearing accusations which are also expressions of intense love, for those who can experience a transcendence in the unity of black and white, Radha and Krishna, or Balaram and Krishna, for those who can understand Yashoda's actions as self-interested and selfless at the same time, the liquification of the heart is also the liquification of an existence which is infested with hypocrisy, false pride, wilful and anti-social deception, and exploitation. It is a celebration, in negation, of everyday life, of "the particulars of this world—its common gifts, even one's own progeny—(but) by looking at them intensely". Their dissolution of self is a dissolution of ego-focality which is antithetical to truth, truthfulness and justice (Habermas, 1979). Hawley captures this dimension when he points to the essential dynamic of Indian tradition as one which values beauty as much as it values truth. It is not an accident that the word *darsan* means intense gazing, or experience of the sight of something with transcendental qualities, and also philosophical explorations or discovery of truth. Hawley points to the symbolism of liquification with Krishna as the ocean. This ocean is not the creation of a miracle worker or a faith healer, nor is it a sea of metaphysical nothingness. It stands for purity, compassion, love and, above all, for happiness. To be rendered speechless in such a union is to reach total understanding (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 158-159). The subjectivity of one's alienated existence is transcended into a community with other subjects. It is a community of shared meanings, of perfect understanding. Gopis and Krishna, heaven and earth, day and night, black and white, the lotus and the moon, unite in an aesthetic, true and truthful unity of pure joy. In everyday life such an experience is only momentary. Here, seeing is believing. It is a temporary suspension of disbelief in a life from which eros has been eliminated. In it remain encrusted the basic claims of freedom, truth and justice, which produce on the surface the momentary ecstatic experience. Hawley demonstrates in his article why one must listen to these symbols and practices, and not merely

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criticise them. What seems to an uncritical modernist an act of mindless ritualism of the unreflecting masses, contains within it a sense for the paradox of life and an intention to overcome it. A modernist alienates himself from this sense through his self-imposed elitism.

O'Connell follows Ricoeur's advice to listen even more explicitly. Following W. C. Smith, he places the human subject at the centre of his exploration. Hence, his concern with what he calls preconceptual symbols, or the symbolism of the particularity of everyday life, the quotidian. He finds little discussion of the experience of deliverance in the conceptual symbolism of the philosophical abstractions of *Gaudiya Vaishnavas*, even though it encompasses the entire gamut of language, prayer, story and gesture in the everyday activity of common *Vaisnavas*. O'Connell points to the communal aspect of these symbols in their double structure of coherence and subjective pursuasiveness. While structural coherence points to the necessity for the inter-subjective shareability of meanings, such meanings must, at the same time, remain rooted in everyday experience, which is, of necessity, subjective. Thus, the entreaty poems he analyses simultaneously convey information and make an appeal. They bring into focus the basic quality of all speech acts (Searle, 1969). They vividly combine the realistic awareness of the objective, material eventfulness of life, with an imaginative consciousness of its potential transcendence as deliverance. An entreaty for deliverance is also a surrender, or liquification of the self. It begins with self-deprecation, is carried out in public, and ends in the experience of deliverance. The publicness of this action is quite striking. It is undertaken in the presence of—and is addressed to—the community of godly *Vaisnavas*. Thus, the liquification of self, of a certain kind of self, is into the community and involves the overwhelming mercy (*krupa*) of the *Vaisnavas*. This is a common theme in all *bhakti* literature. One always seeks access to a community of *bhaktas* with which the actuality of daily social relations is contrasted. Self deprecation, therefore, symbolises ego-focality in all its asocial manifestations of lust, greed, anger, pretense, falsehood and confusion. The community of saints is characterized by compassion, kindness, mercy and truth. The nascent potential community materialises in the lives of the saints. It is to them that one appeals for deliverance. When the entreaty poet describes himself as miserable (*deena*) and defective (*heena*), he implies that his misery or oppression is the basis for his defectiveness. It is the symbolism of *dalits*, of the downtrodden for whom deliverance is being lifted up from the joylessness of *samsara*, the quotidian. Sensual indulgence in this world of deceit and hypocrisy is condemned because it has no authenticity. Aesthetic sensuality has disappeared from it only to find itself rejuvenated, vicariously, in the playful eros of the child-god. Since the community of saints is the potential community, it is not surprising that for the entreaty poets the worst offence is that committed against the *Vaisnavas*. Neither O'Connell nor I suggest that today's *Gaudiya Vaishnavas* in fact constitute a materialised potential community. Nor do they themselves believe this to be the case. In contemporary practice, the dissolution through full-scale public condemnation of ego-focality is no more than a

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pacifying experience. It carries no immediate message for revolutionary practice. But the truth of that message remains ideologically encrusted. If the deliverance is to be into a community of true *Vaishnavas*, then deliverance for one cannot come without deliverance for all. In order to come to this conclusion, it is not enough for practising *Vaisnavas* to listen—they must also learn to suspect their own symbols.

The particularity of ordinary human existence and the presumed unlimitedness of human imagination is a paradox to which Hospital's article also gives special attention. The particularity of everyday life and the reality of an oppressive, alienated existence, is incessantly commented on in *bhakti* poetry. Therein lies the authenticity of its expression. We hear about a life of deceit, hypocrisy and sheer fatigue (*sranti*) from which genuine sensuality has disappeared. For a *bhakta* it only reappears in the beauty and deeds of Krishna, a child-god. Hospital analyses the implicit contrasts and contradictions in *Krishnakarnamrita*. The focus on *lila*, the child at play, brings to mind Marx's reflexions on Greek art (1973, p. 111).

> "A man cannot be a child again or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naivete, and must he not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm? There are unruly children and precocious children. Many of the old peoples belong to this category. The Greeks were normal children..."

The child-god of *bhakti* poetry is both a normal child and a symbol of the childhood of humanity. In the language of everyday life he is a sinner, but as a sinner-god he restores the authenticity and the eros of the simple, ordinary joys of life, which the symbolism of sin and the associated hypocrisy of social order snatch away. A surreptitious restoration, through poetic contrasts of the will to gratification denied by the dominant logic of a hierarchical social order (Marcuse, 1966), perhaps accomplishes nothing more than a momentary release from drudgery. It may be only an effective strategy of creating an emotional state of enchantment, delight and unmediated devotion. However, the progression of the myth of sinner-god suggests something more than that to Hospital. It suggests an increasing distance between philosophically abstracted, passionless paths to *moksa* and *bhakti*. I wonder if we are witnessing in this transition a movement towards an ideologically-motivated separation of high and low tradition. Hospital seeks help from Mary Douglas' structural analysis of symbols to explore the tension between a central structure and discrepant symbols. He goes a step further to suggest that discrepant symbols may have the function not only of creative input-makers or anti-structures, but may become, at times, counterstructures which seek to transform, replace or negate, and transcend the central structure. This leads him to the reinterpretation of the *Bali* myth in Kerala. Hospital does not see fit to link the notion of *Bali* with the rise of sacrificial kingships in transition from classless to class societies. He interprets the potency of *Bali* as a nostalgic myth. The nostalgia, in this case, is for a community devoid of lying, cheating, theft and sudden

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death. As the celebration of Onam as the mythical return of *Bali* to his people, the paradox of the actual and the potential is re-enacted. *Bali* stands here as a symbol of both nobility and naivete, while Vamana represents trickery (Bedekar, 1967). And yet, in the official version of the myth, *Bali* is turned into a powerful demon-king and Vamana into the hero of the threatened gods (Jaiswal, 1967). Analysis of this symbolism calls for a more detailed exercise of listening and critique which is outside of the scope of this introduction. Namboodripad's critical appropriation of the myth is an example of this exercise. For him, *Bali's* people have always waited, through this myth, for an eventual actualisation of the potential community.

The dilemma of potential and actual community appears as a contradiction between inherent and inherited duty in Kinsley's article. The contrast presented is as in the interpretation of *bhakti* itself. To Kinsley, *Gita* serves to undergird social duty and legitimate caste roles and occupations. It demands that a *bhakta* perform social tasks and uphold the world as a sacrifice to Vishnu and make daily life a religious ritual. This, indeed, is the interpretation of *Gita* as found in Brahmanic literature. When *dharma* is understood in this way, it speaks only as an oppressive moment, as a duty from which the joy of performance has been stolen. If we probe Kinsley's notion of inherent duty a little further, what do we find as its main spring? When does this duty become so compelling as to require a rebellious posture vis-à-vis the social order? It becomes clear, when we understand the position of women poet-saints in medieval society, that the dilemma of duties is not simply between performance of social duties and their renunciation, but of renunciation of that world and those duties from which unblemished joy has been eliminated. Where else can we find this dilemma occurring graphically than in the life of a communally-exchanged young bride who finds herself in an alien patriarchal-patrilocal family? The poignancy of an oppressive social practice is perhaps nowhere more vivid than in this incarceration of a young woman in an often hostile household.

A sensitive woman who, under conditions of oppression, looks upon god as an alternative to her husband, does not, I think, look upon the former as a mere alternative, but rather as a determinate negation of that very being which a husband is not but should be. The tension between the two potential masters: the god and the husband, is not a question of choosing between options. Like O'Connell's *Gaudiya Vaisnavas*, god to them is a unique master because he looks forward to an autonomous and equal relationship with his servant, beloved or *bhakta*. The worldly husband symbolizes the lure, the bondage, the oppressive reality of family life, while the god as husband or lover signifies liberation, liquification or deliverance. The choice made by Mahadevyakka or Mirabai was not renunciation. Their involvement with the lord was an all-consuming affair. It was a consummation of the will to gratification which is unattainable in the quotidian. They rejected repressive marriage and not marriage, oppressive sex and not love-making. Like Radha, their love for Krishna transcended the prison-gates of legitimized duty, false modesty, enforced honour and oppressive kinship.

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In coming to terms with the contradiction between inherent and inherited duty, Kinsley invokes an opposition between the Radha-Krishna and the Arjuna-Krishna relationship. This opposition cannot contain the more universal message of *bhakti* which emanates from both relationships. For the sensitive women poets, devotion symbolizes the overcoming of the alien and inauthentic manifestations of duty, and the affirmation of inherent duty as duty which is authentic and pleasurable, erotic and joyful. Love for god is joyful because it is a determinate negation of an oppressive social order symbolised by actual marriage. They celebrate the same aspect of duty which Partha discovers as true consciousness in dialogue (*samvad*) with Krishna. It is no less authentic than that of Mahadeviyakka or Mirabai, who attain it as erotic union with the lord. Kinsley's contrast does make sense if we are critically examining the hegemonic interpretations of *bhakti*. *Gita*, described as an uncompromising eirenicon, comes across as an example of hegemonic reappropriation of *bhakti* when it is interpreted as a justification of an oppressive social order. In suspecting the message of *Gita*, therefore, Kinsley is essentially correct. Jnanesvar, who I think suspects and listens at the same time, reappropriates the encrusted liberating message of *Gita*. For him, the Partha-Krishna relation is a teacher-student relation. Their discourse is like a lamp igniting another lamp. Jnanesvar's Krishna wants Arjuna to retain his subjective identity and to restore joy and sensuous pleasure to duty by eliminating rage and rancor. The dynamics of *gitatatva*, says Jnanesvar, is like the beauty of Siva's beloved: it is eternally new. He speaks of tradition as a whole, and not only of *Gita*. The straight-jacket of static structural dichotomies only reduces our ability to grasp the dynamic of tradition with its eternal newness. It seems to me that during all epochs, *bhakti* has had its hegemonic and liberating moments. It is always a critique of an oppressive social order, but never of the social order itself. It remained susceptible to legitimizing incorporation at the hands of ideologues, and thus often became its own opposition. The transcendental expression of sensuous love for god was also quarantined as divine deviance. Thus, in the official view, it became a mere source of titillation or pacification. Similarly, the message of *Gita* was turned into a justification of the Brahmanic social order.

The question of the revolutionary potential of tradition, of its contemporariness, should not be raised in terms of its immediate availability as a model for modernization. Such attempts produce a linear view of modernization and of tradition. In his otherwise sensitive article, Klostermaier chooses to remain at this level, and thus avoids coming to terms with the dialectics of Western as well as Indian tradition. He accepts the dichotomies of the heart and the intellect, and of the masses and the select. For him, Krishna *bhakti*, as a revolt of the masses, was an assertion of emotion over intellect. This is ironical, given his perceptive view of the place of consciousness in Indian tradition. My own conclusion from his analysis would be that *bhakti*, as a revolt of active producers, stood against abstractors and appropriators of their sense. It was a revolt against the separation of the heart from the intellect because such a

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dichotomy allowed the official intellectuals, as intermediaries, to turn the symbols of liberation into ones of legitimation. Klostermaier argues that India has much to offer to the West in terms of an exchange between two types of underdevelopment: material and religious. His earlier criticism of Christianity—for bypassing the European consciousness movement—opens a possible access to the wider context of the abridgement of reason during the critical break from tradition. The real source of strength in a living tradition, such as the Indian, is revealed when it is contrasted to the dualistically estranged Western tradition. The *Hare-Krishna* movement, as long as it remains fanatically attached to a selectively transplanted alien tradition, will continue to generate hostility. Most people will treat the anachronistic exhaltation of rural virtues and the unreflected criticism of modern science as faddish. They will have solid logical and material grounds for doing so. What Indian tradition should offer to the West is, perhaps, not its own cheap imitation, but rather an ability for immanent critique by which the Western youth will rediscover its own. There is as much to learn from listening to, as there is from suspecting, the message of Christianity (Bloch, 1972).

Klostermaier is correct in believing that Krishna consciousness is unlikely to take over in North America. In fact, its deviant aggressiveness and its rejection of science and modern society are reminiscent of the radicalism of the Mahanubhavas on which Nemade comments. He makes an important point about the counterproductiveness of countercultures. By revolting against a hierarchical social order without securing a material basis for such action, the Mahanubhavas became an easy prey for attacks by the hegemonic classes. They were forced into hiding, in order to protect themselves. Through their cultish practices they became isolated, and were only tolerated as permissible deviants. The *Warkari sampradaya* also arose as a serious critique of the socio-religious order. It challenged the religious hegemony of the Brahmins and came to the point of threatening the medieval Brahmin-Kshatriya hegemony. In response to Ishwaran's accusation that the lack of organization was the cause of the ineffectiveness of the Warkaris, we may point to Nemade's suggestion that it was a consequence of the political powerlessness of the masses. Nemade rediscovers the basic principles of Buddhism and Jainism in Warkari poetry. After those two faiths failed socially, as a result of a takeover by the ruling classes, the Warkari poet-saints critically appropriated for their own times their authentic liberating impulse. Nemade is far more aware than many other critics of *bhakti* of the inability of the thinking and reflecting masses to revolt openly under unripe social conditions. He rests his case here, however, and refuses to explore the contemporary significance of *bhakti* any further. He labels it conservative reformism. A comprehensive effort for exploring the modernity of *bhakti* should not be so limited. It must emanate from a sense for the dialectics of the development of tradition. We must approach it with a willingness to listen and to suspect.

The articles in this collection give an indication of what such a willingness implies, even though, in terms of my own preoccupations, some show greater

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willingness to listen than to suspect, and others to suspect than to listen. In contrast, most Indian intellectuals and their Western counterparts have, by and large, lost any ability to listen. Where they show some contrary indication, it is only by dividing the Little tradition from the Great. To the Indian masses, on the other hand, that little tradition with which *bhakti* becomes associated is a way of life. It is a living tradition. They merely listen to it while the intellectuals merely suspect it. I hope that this critical introduction and the articles from which it derives its argument will be seen as a beginning towards bridging that gap. If an authentic, conscious upsurge towards the attainment of communal ideals is to engulf the masses, it is unlikely to come from the transplants of symbols of alien or dead traditions. Symbols of liberation will have to be rediscovered from within, by those who will carry the burden of revolutionary action. These symbols, while common to both sterilised philosophical abstractions and ritualised everyday practice, cannot be rediscovered in either of these isolated settings. That has always been the message of *bhakti*. Therein lies its modernity.

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