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THE PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES REFLECTED IN THE THOUGHT OF ANDAL

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Abstract

Bhakti - the most exquisite and difficult forms of human expression from a spiritual perspective. A person endowed with the purity of sattva, free from worldly desires, and whose only goal is emancipation, experiences the emergence of true bhakti. A passionate devotee of God seeks nothing other than God's attention or union with Him. Emotionally bhakti expressed in the form of poems or sutras in ancient Indian systems. Best examples are the literary works of Saivism and Vaisnavism etc. Especially in Vaisnavism, Nalayira Divya prabandam contains deep Bhakti of Alvars. The Nalayira Divya Prabandam contains the rich philosophical and theological concepts as presented in Vedanta. The twelve Alvars who entirely immersed them self in deep Bhakti to God Vishnu and sang the songs with Divine love of God. Each Alvar had their own unique way of worshiping the Lord Vishnu. Out of twelve Alvars, Andal was one of the most important figures, she expresses Her Madhurya Bhakti and Viraha Bhakti through her Thiruppavai and Nacchiyar Thirumoli. Both these works express the philosophical principles of Saguna Brahman and Bhakti ways of salvation, as present in the Vedanta.

Keywords: Spiritual Perspective, Emancipation, Salvation.

Introduction

Bhakti literally translates as allegiance, submission, fidelity, attachment, and devotion. Alvars and Nayanars founded the bhakti movement in south India. Lord Vishnu is worshipped by Alvars, whereas Lord Shiva is worshipped by Nayanars. The word is derived from bhakta, which means a worship emotional bhakti expressed in the form of poems or sutras in ancient Indian systems. Best examples are the literary works of Saivism and Vaisnavism etc. Especially in Vaisnavism, Nalayira Divya Prabandam contains deep Bhakti of Alvars.

The Nalayira Divya Prabandam contains the rich philosophical and theological concept as presented in Vedanta. The twelve Alvars who entirely immersed themselves in deep Bhakti to God Vishnu and sang the songs with Divine love of God. Each Alvar had their own unique way of worshiping the Lord Vishnu. ie, devotee, adorer, or faithful attendant. It also means someone who is dedicated to or loyal to someone. A bhakta is someone who offers themselves as an offering to God by sacrificing themselves on a bodily or spiritual level. A bhakta was a person who offered himself as a sacrifice to the bhokta (eater or deity). A devotee who gave himself up to God and lived a life of detachment and renunciation, executing sacrificial (desire-less) sacrifice, completely immersed in God's contemplation, is known as a bhakta.

From a spiritual standpoint, bhakti is one of the most beautiful and challenging forms of human expression. True bhakti only manifests in someone who possesses the purity of sattva, is unencumbered by material wants, and has liberation as their only goal. A dedicated follower of God is only interested in being with Him or receiving His attention.

Bhakti refers to a deep love and devotion to God in the spiritual sense. True commitment causes a person to experience the pinnacle of out-of-body and out-of-mind states, and blissful trance. True devotion frequently takes the form of a type of divine insanity and complete disregard for earthly concerns. Bhakti is therefore more than just a simple act of devotion. The soul trapped in the birth and death cycle longs desperately to be set free from the phenomenal life in which it is imprisoned. It appears as a strong emotion that is both of this world and not of this world. It appears in a mind that has been purged in the fire of virtues and heavenly attributes and is stabilized by one focused intellect. Bhakti is expressed in the form of poems or sutras in ancient Indian systems. Especially in Vaisnavism, Nalayira Divya Prabandam contains Bhakti of Alvars.

Each Alvar worshipped the Lord Vishnu in a distinctive manner, one among them is a woman named Andal. Andal's position of Bhakti comes under the bridle mysticism or Madhurya Bhakti. Which is an amalgamation named Thiruppavai and Nacchiyar Thirumoli. In the work of Thiruppavai and Nacchiyar thrumoli Andal beautifully expresses her deep love with the divine.



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Bhakti of Alvars

In the hymns does not mention about the Nirguna aspect of Brahman (God without attributes). That is why it is purely inconsistent to the Shankara's conception of Brahman. Alvars bhakti is in the form of Saguna, God with attributes. The personal God and the absolute consolidate each other in Vaisnavism.

Each devotee has his own mental attitudes and emotions towards their personal God called as bhava. There are five types of Bhava they are Dasya, Sakhya, Vatsalya, Shanta and madhurya bhavas. "As the same fish is dressed into soup, curry, or cutlet, and each man has his own choice dish of it, so the Lord of the universe, through one, manifests Himself differently according to the different likings of His worshippers, and each one of them has his own view of God which he values most. To some He is a kind master or loving father, a sweet smiling mother or a devoted friend, and to others a faithful husband or a dutiful and obliging son". (paramahansa)

Frequently saints bring emotion into Bhakti through their poetry, which results in the religious rituals. One can observe this phenomenon throughout the history. The Bhakti cults like Srivaishnavism, Chaitanya Sampradaya or Kabir pantha, Veershaivism etc are the outcome of emotional aspects of the saints.

Some Alvars handle the Dasya Bhakti to express their intense love for the Lord. 'Dasya bhava' is a course of action of association to one's God. The following hymn of Nammalvar projected the Dasya Bhakti.

"Quick, think of the fragrant Tulsi-wreathed Krishna's feet.
They who ruled over other kings who touched their feet, with great
Kettledrums rumbling in their porticos, have become
Pulverized to dust". (Bharti 487)

Some other Alvars prefer Sakhya bhava, a path to relating to God as a friend. Periyalvar refers to the relationship of Krishna with Arjuna as a sakhya in the battle field in the following hymns;

"If you are in
Search of him, there are many who saw him by Arjuna's side
Where he hid the sun with his discus, when Arjuna rained
Arrows that rolled Jayadratha's head into a pit". (Bharthi 65)

In Vatsalya bhakti, bhakta love the God as their own child in order to experience the wonder of God's 'Bal Lilas'. In Periyalvars pasurams one can trace the Vatsalya bhakti to Lord Krishna. In his Pallandu, this idea is clearly reflected.

Madhurya Bhava is another important mystical experience which is discussed in Andal's Thiruppavai and Nacchiyar Thirumoli.

Philosophical reflections in the Bhakti of Andal

Andal, an incarnation of Bhu-devi, was born at Srivilliputtur in TamilNadu. She was a God gifted child, Periyalvar found this baby girl in his basil-garden. He brought up the child with love and care. Andal grew up in a very spiritual atmosphere because of periyalvar. He was also called as Visnuchittan as he was deeply devoted to Lord Vishnu. Andal's deep love for Krishna which was rooted in Bhakti came through her foster father Periyalvar. (Chari 24)

Thiruppavai and Nacchiyar Thirumoli are the works of Andal. Thiruppavai contains thirty hymns and Nacchiyar Thirumoli contains 143 hymns. These two poetic compositions have rich philosophical insights and personal love for God. Thiruppavai as a collection of songs ultimately discovered a means to meet Lord Krishna. Andal's works have some slight differences in their approach as the entire Thiruppavai put forwards the concept of Pavai Viratham (fasting) as a means to reach Vaigundam that is the union with God. The bhakti Bhava is nurture with knowledge of Saguna Brahman as this alone is the surest means for the union of all beings with God. This is the essence of Thiruppavai. Thiruppavai expresses the aspect of Madhurya Bhakti. The Nacchiyar Thirumoli expresses the viraha-bhava as it conveys personal emotions towards Krishna by Andal as she considers herself as a wife of Lord Krishna. One can trace the major philosophical doctrine of visistadvaita through these works as Andal was a pure Saguna Bhakta and the hymns of Thiruppavai silently opposes Nirguna Brahman.

First five pasurams in Thiruppavai is an introductory part and which disclose five avatars of God such as Para, Vyahua, Vibhava, antarayami and archavatara which is mentioned in Vedas. The second pasuram of Thiruppavai is given below.



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“O People-of-the –world, pray hear about the vows we undertake.
 Singing the praise of the lord who sleeps in the Ocean of Milk,
 we shall abstain from milk and Ghee, and bathe before dawn.
 We shall not line our eyes with collyrium, nor adorn our hair with flowers.
 Refraining from forbidden acts, avoiding evil tales,
 we shall give alms and charity in full measure, and pray for the elevation of spirit.
 Let us rejoice.” (Bharati 93)
 These hymns Pavai indicate the philosophy of Dharma for self purification and self control.
 “Praise him who measured the three worlds in two strides;
 Our winter’s vow will bring joy to us.
 The monsoons shall not fail this fertile land,
 But bring forth golden heads of paddy.
 In the still waters where seedlings are planted,
 tiny fish will jump and dance enchanted.
 Lotus buds will sway and rock the dreamy bees to sleep.
 The udders of our cows so grand shall scarce be held in our milking hand.
 Abiding wealth shall be ours, come!” (Bharati 94)

The third pasuram mentioned about gives information of bhakti as the surest path to moksha.

“The more usual Vaisnava position in the lesser life- goals (eg. The pastoral concerns of verses 3 and 4) are not in themselves evils; they are rather good and valuable. Yet what is needed above all is the vision of everything in life utterly dependent upon the grace the Lord... God’s gracious aid is essential, therefore (we are) to move from one level of life-goal to this highest level in which all the lesser goals eventually become included. To use more traditional language, sadhana- (means of worship) Bhakti needs to be transposed into sadhya- (that which is the goal of worship) Bhakti; God as upaya (means is to be experienced as final Upeya”. (Andal 39)

To the close observation of Andal’s Thiruppavai one can assimilate Madhyrya bhakti which is similar to, the experience of the prakrti, Jivatma and paramtma merging together.

In Naaciyar Thirumoli, Andal is eagerly desiring for a spiritual union with God and imagines various situations in a mystic level. In Nacciyar Thirumoli the opening song, Andal appeal to the Kama –Deva (God of Love) for the spiritual union with Lord Krishna and for that she does fasting. Here the one important thing to notice that, Andal put forwards a unique way of approach to reach the Lord Krishna which is distinct from other Alvars ie., in Sri-Vaishnava tradition Vishnu as supreme God and no one can worship other deities but Andal in his Nacciyar Thirumoli prays Kama-Deva for getting union with Lord Vishnu. It can be seen that she had an intense urge to merge with God in any possible way.

In the “Varnamayirm” of Nacchiyar Thirumoli, Andal dreams of her wedding with Lord Krishna. This song of Varnamayirm is played at the time of marriage in Tamilnadu. These hymns are;

“I had a dream O Sister! The town was decked
 with festoons and golden urns.
 Surrounded by a thousand caparisoned elephants
 Our lord Narayana came walking towards me”. (Bharti 112)

Through this song Andal shares her deep love with God, so it is the experience of Bhakti.

In the last portion of Nacchiyar Thirumoli, Andal crave for the union with saguna barman for which she consciously transcends to the realm of God whom she is in love with.

She is perhaps aware that such union with God leads to the uninterrupted divine service which is disembodied and reaches the transcendental abode of God. Her ardent craving for it has reached such a stage that her beloved Lord cannot remain passive without responding to the prayer of His own consort. Love has two-sided relation. Just as the soul is deeply in love with God, the latter too loves the former. God who is asrita-sulabha, easily accessible to those who seek Him with love and asritavatsala, one who has a loving disposition towards the devotees, cannot remain fore, readily condescends to come down and reveal Himself in His full splendor to fulfil



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the cherished desire of Andal. The concluding portion of Nacciya Tirumoli indicates that Andal was blessed by Lord Krishna with God-experience.

Conclusion

In Andal's Thiruppavai and Nacciya Tirumoli, one can trace the unique style of Mysticism in it and her divine love of God and her urge to reach Lord Krishna which emphasizes the philosophical position of merging the individual soul with God. Andal's philosophical and theological thoughts are discussed in the modern period. And potentially feminist approach of Andal leads to many feminist studies later. In Sri Vaishnava tradition moksha or the highest knowledge of Brahman is possible to women and shudras through the way of 'Tamil Veda'. It indicates moksha is attainable for anyone without any discrimination such as gender, cast, creed as one is liberated through the unlimited Surrender or Prapatti to the God. But in the orthodox Brahminical Hinduism, mukti is only possible through the path of Vedic knowledge which women and sutras are not entitled to. Andals Pasurams fills the listener with the spark of divine experience.

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