



Divine Love as Bhakti: Studying Narad Bhakti Sutra in reference to the poems of Brahmanand

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Abstract

Bhakti has remained integral to India since ancient times that was nurtured by the creation of several texts. The language used in the narration of these texts was largely Sanskrit, a language that could only be comprehended by literates. Countering it, there arose a movement in sixth century and continued until the seventeenth century that witnessed emergence of several poets who molded complex notions of bhakti in vernaculars. Based on their way of perceiving God, scholars classified them into two broad categories. These poets moved beyond the common notion of perceiving bhakti as the adoration of a personal God. Some scholars equated bhakti with love while others associated it to personal relationship with god. This love found its way in multimodal relationships that a poet had with the Divine.

Present paper evaluates the definition of bhakti as provided in Narad Bhakti Sutra and will also take resort to Śrīmad Bhāgavata and Bhagvad Gita. The paper will not only establish relation between bhakti and love but will also enhance its understanding by terming it as 'Divine Love'. The paper argues that Divine love manifests at the end of process. Towards the end, paper will posit that each action performed by a devotee is filled with bhakti (devotion) and since bhakti is compared with love, actions of poet originate out of love. To analyze love as described in Narad Bhakti Sutra, the paper will take into consideration poems of Brahmanand, chief poet-saint under study belonging to nineteenth century Indian state of Gujarat.

Keywords – Bhakti, Narad Bhakti Sutra, Brahmanand, Divine Love, *Nirgun*, *Sagun*.

Introduction

Bhakti has remained integral to India since ancient times. It was nurtured by the creation of several texts that helped people gain a better understanding of bhakti as they defined it, discussed ideal practices to be followed by a devotee along with its outcomes. The language used in the narration of these texts was largely Sanskrit, a language that could only be comprehended by literates (Hawley, 2015; Ramanujan, 1992).



To facilitate common men with the complex notions of bhakti, there arose a movement in the middle of first millennium and continued until the latter part of second millennium (Pandey & Tyagi, 2001; Martin, 2003; Chandra, 2007; Saha, 2007; Frazier, 2013; Hawley, 2015; Jaydas, 2022). A 'galaxy of bhakti poets' who emerged during this millennium catered the concepts of bhakti in regional languages by travelling throughout India (Hawley, 2015). Purushottam Aggrawal uses the term 'Network of Bhaktas' to group the rising bhakti poets (2019). The poets, both *saguni and nirguni*, borrowed concepts from Sanskrit text, molded it in a comprehensible language and made it available for laymen. The collection of these poems in various regional languages made bhakti a genre which served as an immense resource in the cause of national integration.

The production of similar literature in different languages attracted the attention of modern scholars worldwide. To have an in-depth study of this literature, it was essential for them to understand the concept of bhakti which formed a base for it. As they studied this literature in greater detail, they realized bhakti to be much more than just 'the adoration of a personal God' (Chandra, 2007; Lorenzen, 2004). Some scholars equated bhakti with love while others associated it to personal relationship with god. This relationship, as A.K. Ramanujan mentions, moved away from the conventional norms of perceiving god as master and instead tied a familial bond with god (1992).

Present paper evaluates the definition of bhakti as provided in Narad Bhakti Sutra. To understand the act of love as an act of devotion (bhakti), the paper will take resort to Śrīmad Bhāgavata and Bhagvad Gita. Further, paper will not only establish relation between bhakti and love but will also enhance its understanding by terming it as 'Divine Love'. The paper argues that Divine love manifests as a result of specified process that includes four major steps:



establishment of love, nurturing of love, participation of poet as well as the Divine and ultimately celebrating the attained love. Towards the end, paper will posit that each action performed by a devotee is filled with bhakti (devotion) and since bhakti is compared with love, actions of poet originate out of love – the Divine Love. In order to understand love, paper will primarily focus on the poems of Brahmanand, a poet-saint belonging to nineteenth century Gujarat, along with poets pertaining to medieval bhakti tradition of India.

Bhakti Raises as a Movement

Bhakti has persisted in India from Vedic times but modern scholarship emphasizes its development in middle of the common era when it began flourishing in south (Prentiss, 1999). The scholars might not have intended consciously to negate the Vedic bhakti in its totality but the creation of abundant literature in regional languages might have led them in ensuring the rise of bhakti as a movement in medieval India. Moreover, this should not imply that no literature existed during earlier times as the texts written then were majorly in Sanskrit and limited only to the higher social class.

The emergence of poet-saints in sixth century south India certainly confirmed the beginning of bhakti movement but it evolved as a complete movement with the appearance of similar poets in north India by sixteenth century. They seemed to be divided geographically but were tied with the thread of devotion; in other words, the poems composed by them had a common theme of bhakti running through it. At times poet either prayed to almighty or described life-events of god while at others addressed the deity as a family member.

The *Nirgun-Sagun* Distinction



Although the poet-saints were identified as a homogenous community of bhakti poets, they were differentiated into *nirguni* and *saguni* poets. The use of this distinction by a scholar of Hindi literature in 1920s initiated its formal discussion in academia¹. Initially, these terms were used to classify the poems of Hindi saints but later, as Karen Pechilis mentions, they were used to ‘group the bhakti literatures in regional languages’ (1999). However, these terminologies demarcated the bhakti poets based on their ways of perceiving the Divine.

The poets who believed in formless god, a god that is ‘without attributes’ were known as *nirguni* poets (Hawley, 2015). These poets did not venerate god in physical form but were rather involved in composing poems that were more philosophical in nature or as Ramchandra Shukla mentions, the poems of such poets were majorly ‘rooted in knowledge’ (1929). For them, the god was not limited to a humanized figure installed in temples but instead was present in the nature in its original form. The image of god was formed on the basis of words that they used in their poems implying that the god possessed indefinite form for them.

Saguni poets, on other hand, considered god to be ‘with attributes’, god with a certain form (Hawley, 2015). Instead of providing a form to the almighty, they described the actual form of god as observed by them. The form of god which they portrayed did not necessarily have to manifest before the poets but as their imagination could not transcend the boundaries of human world, they rendered a human form to god. The humanization of god allowed *saguni* poets to pour human emotions while portraying his image.

¹ It was used by Ramchandra Shukla in his text ‘*Hindi Śabda Sāgara*’ for the first time.



From amongst a spectrum of emotions, poems of *saguni* poets were ‘rooted in love’ (Shukla, 1929). The love, here, should not be approached in its commonsensical meaning. Love, when taken independently, connotes erotic and sensual meaning suggesting it to be a notion of this world. David Haberman terms this love as ‘Universal love’ – love that is endured by each one of us – which he argues is a ‘noble notion’ (2019). While viewing love in such manner, one often connects it with lovers who engage themselves in a romantic relationship. But when contemplating on love comprehensively, one should also consider the love that exists between parents and child as well as amongst friends. However, regardless of the relation in which it prevails, worldly love is based on self-interest where one strives continuously for obtaining due care and consideration from each other; which if not provided sufficiently, results into lack of trust.

This was not the kind of love that the *saguni* poets represented in their poems. As opposed to the materialistic love which dealt with humans, love of these poets was for ‘some embodied form of divinity’ (Haberman, 2019). The Divine, for them, was ‘gloriously manifest in the world’ to which they had ‘sensory access’ (Hawley, 2019). Even though the god is personified as human, he ultimately remains divine. Just as the receiver of love remains divine, love does not remain humanly but turns out to be ‘Divine Love’.

What is Divine Love?

Divine love² is not merely an emotion but as it is directed towards God, it becomes an act of devotion (bhakti). In other words, an individual who carries out any act lovingly for the almighty, that particular action of his becomes an act of devotion (bhakti). Even simply loving the divine turns out to be an act of devotion (bhakti). Although love is a materialistic concept, when the same love is oriented towards god, it takes a form of bhakti. Ultimately, love becomes

² From here onwards, ‘Divine Love’ will be replaced with ‘Love’.



synonymous to bhakti for the poet. Similar sentiments are echoed in the first canto of Śrīmad Bhāgavata (SB) where it is said that:

āmāyo yaś ca bhūtānām, jāyate yena suvrata;
tad eva hy āmayam dravyam, na punāti cikitsitam.
evam nṛṇām kriyā-yogāḥ, sarve saṁsṛti-hetavaḥ;
ta evātma-vināśāya, kalpante kalpitāḥ pare (SB 1/5/33-34).

Since loving god now works as a form of offering devotion (bhakti) to the almighty, it becomes imperative to understand the nature of bhakti in relation with love. Mentioning about it in his Narad Bhakti Sutra, sage Narad says that the ‘nature of bhakti’ is ‘supreme love’ (Narad, 1957; Bryant, 2017). Here, bhakti is characterized as supreme love. The love for god can triumph other emotions only when it is ‘free of all self-interest’ (Narad, 1957; Bryant, 2017). The only interest that an individual has now is to please God by composing poems that either adores His *murti*³ or praise Him or glorifies their relationship. The selfish love of humans transforms into selfless love. The object of focus for the poet shifts solely to his lord, thereby forming a firm relationship ‘between the divine “object” of love...and the worshipful “vessel” of love’ (Haberman, 2019). Just as a beloved occupies central place for her lover, similarly, God lays at the center of devotee’s life. Consequently, love for divine transcends other emotions and secures a supreme position.

Establishment of Divine Love

To cultivate such love demands patience on the part of poet which manifests as a part of a gradual process. The love ‘establishes, nurtures, participates in, and celebrates an ultimate relationship’ between mortal humans and transcendental god (Haberman, 2019). Haberman

³ According to Britannica Encyclopedia, *Murti*, in Hinduism, is used to describe a sacred image or depiction of deity. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/murti>.



does not classify the above statement as a process of Divine Love but instead summarizes it as bhakti which is love. But looking at it carefully enables us to view it as a definition of the process of manifestation of Divine Love.

Love is all about uniting with the ‘ultimate’ where the love is ‘about relationships’ – a relationship that will lead one towards liberation (Holdrege, 2015). When one associates with the God, love is ‘nurture(d)’ with the participation of both the devotee and the Divine and terminates eventually in commemorating the attainment of Divine.

In order to ‘establish’ a bond of love, it is inevitable that the receiver is also a human. When one thinks of the Divine love, the recipient of love is Divine – He does not belong to the world of mortals but is transcendental. So, it becomes difficult on the part of a poet to ‘establish’ the relation of love. Lord Krishna also voices this predicament of humans in twelfth chapter of Bhagvad Gita (BG), saying that ‘it is difficult for embodied beings to obtain the unmanifest goal’ (BG 12.5). The difficulty faced by humans was first articulated by Lord Krishna which was then supported by scholars of modern times. If the words of Lord Krishna were to be put in the words of modern-day scholars, for associating with the Divine, ‘mortal men need a concrete and easily conceptualized object of devotion’ (Lorenzen, 2004). While interviewing Shrivatsa Goswami, a priest of famous Radharaman temple in Vrindavan, David Haberman notes similar issue raised by Goswami who says ‘Our predicament is that we are in human form, so for us the most familiar form is human, and that’s what we connect with most intimately’ (Haberman, 2019).

A common impediment that humans faced right from the age of Lord Krishna to the recent times is that as humans we cannot develop affinity with someone who is not human. And so



only the concept of ‘divine descent’ of God was widely accepted where it is believed that the Divine ‘assumes corporeal form in a human body’ (Holdrege, 2015). Here, it is important to analyze the use of word ‘divine’ as a prefix to ‘descent’ by Barbara Holdrege. She uses it to explain the concept of God’s divine descend to material world, a concept accepted by most Hindu traditions. Nevertheless, it could be further extended to mean that as the ‘divine’ has descended on this earth, He would incorporate both divine as well as human qualities.

The god has now become personal from the ‘non-personal Brahman of Upanishads’ and so only does his ‘feelings, personalities, characters’ are all identical with humans (Ramanujan, 1981). Every emotion, be it love or anger or hunger, portrayed by God in his actions are similar to human beings. Although being a human, god ultimately remains divine and so the feelings demonstrated by Him also continue to remain divine.

Identifying Divinity of the Divine

However, as God behaves in a humanly manner, it is necessary to identify divinity in the Divine to get connected with the Divine. His actions might seem common to people around but for *saguni* poets, each action had an element of divinity in it. Finding divinity implies determining divine qualities of the god, which could be subjective. Some might agree upon a particular attribute as a characteristic of divinity while some others might disagree on it. Moreover, they might accept several commonly accepted traits that define the divinity.

Let’s take an example of a celebrated Hindu deity, Krishna. The emotion of love portrayed by Krishna led many to think of an amorous relation developing between Him and Gopis, substantiating their claim with the famous *raas* played by Krishna with Gopis in Vrindavan.



Some also consider Krishna having an affair with maid women. Those who made such allegations neglected divine qualities of Krishna and instead viewed Him just as a human. However, *saguni* poets like Narsinh Mehta and Mirabai identified this very action of Krishna to be divine and included it in their devotional poems.

They view it to be a *līlā* of God, giving it a divine appearance. Neelima Shukla-Bhatt defines *līlā* in her acclaimed essay ‘Performance as Translation: Mīrā in Gujarat’ as ‘divine sporting’ (2007, 2015). To describe *līlā*, Leela Samson uses a different but similar word where she says it to be a ‘divine play’ (Samson, 2020). Both agree on *līlā* to be a divine act of the God. Combining both the definitions, a new definition that can be put forward for the word *līlā* can be the ‘dance of divine love’ (Patel, 2024).

When divinity of the Divine gets confirmed, a permanent relationship of love is established between a poet and the Divine. The love thus affirmed does not fluctuate and remains steady. Perceiving Krishna’s such behavior to be divine, Narsinh Mehta writes in one of his devotional poems thus:

‘Līlā mānhē lālāvatō, kṛṣṇa kāminīnē saṅgē
Vṛndāvana mānhē malapantō, vādyō mahārāsa raṅgē’ (N. Mehta, 1913)

‘Krishna’s *līlā* enchants me,
He dwells in Vrindavan,
As he plays maharaas gayfully with Gopis’.⁴

Love gets Established: A view of Nineteenth Century Gujarati Bhakti-Poet

⁴ Translation is author’s own.



Just as such love was exemplified by *saguni* poets like Narsinh Mehta and Mirabai in medieval bhakti tradition, achievement of such love in modern bhakti tradition was best exemplified by Brahmanand (1772-1832), a nineteenth century poet-saint under study. He was born as Ladudan Barot in Khan village near Mount Abu, in the present Indian state of Rajasthan (Jhaveri, 1914; Ratnu, 1960; Brahmbhatt, 1966; Swami, 2010; Amrutvijaydas, 2014; Rajpurohit, 2016; Gor & Modi, 2022; Bhatt, n.d.). In nineteenth century, some areas of modern Rajasthan were included in Gujarat as its boundaries extended in north to ‘the mainland between Mount Abu and the river Mahi’, in south to the ‘island of Salsette and Bombay’ and in west to ‘the peninsula of Saurashtra; and Kaccha’ (Munshi, 1954; Bhattacharya, 1989; Bhayani, 1973). Looking at the then contemporary geography, it could certainly be claimed that Brahmanand belonged to Gujarat.

Born in the community of a *cāraṇa* or the tradition of bards, he had acquired the skills of singing and performing in hereditary (M. Mehta, 1986). To formally acquaint himself with the poetics, he moved to Braj Bhasha Pathshala (School of Vraj Language) at Bhuj, Kutch (Mallison, 2011; Rajpurohit, 2015, 2016; Vyas, 2014; Bhatt, n.d.). Along with learning the poetics, Brahmanand was also now adept in four languages: Marwadi, the language of his hometown; Vraj, the language of education; Kacchi, the language of interaction with people where he studied and Gujarati, the language of interaction with people of mainland Gujarat.

After acquiring formal education, Brahmanand tactfully used poetics and language in composition of beautiful devotional poems. During his courtly visits, Brahmanand had also penned several prayers of Krishna and Shiva, two chief deities worshipped majorly in nineteenth century Gujarat (Ratnu, 1960). These poems remain unconventional as on one hand



it prayed to the almighty while on the other, it also lovingly portrayed humanized form of both the deities.

As Brahmanand was journeying through the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, he heard about a particular community of people worshipping Swaminarayan, also better known as Sahajanand Swami, as the manifest form of god (Ratnu, 1960; Shahstri, 1997; Trivedi, 2015; Kalani, 1976). To ascertain divinity of the Divine, he travelled to Gadhada, a small town near Bhavnagar where the Divine resided.

Meanwhile, based on the scriptural knowledge⁵ that he had acquired, Brahmanand had known omniscience to be an attribute of the Divine's divinity. In order to verify it, he agreed upon several self-made conditions⁶ by himself which would then work as pre-determined standards for Brahmanand 'to measure Swaminarayan's divinity' (Trivedi, 2015). Brahmanand had decided to believe Him as the Divine only if He fulfills all the pre-decided conditions.

As soon as Brahmanand reaches Gadhada, he witnesses all his pre-defined wishes coming to fruition. The trait of divine as supposed by him has now been confirmed which allowed the formation of a permanent relationship between a poet and the Divine. He considers this moment of union as blessed and believes that all his miseries have now ended. Expressing his joy, he extemporaneously sang a poem:

‘Ājnī ghaḍī re, dhanya ājnī ghāḍī;

⁵ While studying at Braj Bhasha Pathshala, Brahmanand had also undergone a study of ancient Indian scriptures.

⁶ Wish 1: He should call me by name and recount my life story.

Wish 2: He should have sixteen signs of God on his feet.

Wish 3: He should welcome with garland of roses, though it not being the season of roses.

Wish 4: He should be reading Shrimad Bhagvat, with the scripture wrapped in a black cloth.



Me nīrakhyā Sahajānand, dhanya ājnī ghaḍī'

(Shahstri, 1997)

'Blessed is this hour, blessed it is indeed;

I have seen Sahajananda, blessed is this hour'

(Parekh, 1936)

'Antar harishu ektā re, dubdhā ḍūr paḍī re

Lāḍu Sahajānand nihāḷtā, ṭharī ānkhaḍī re'

(Shahstri, 1997)

'But now that I am united with the Lord,

all my misery is at an end;

O, Ladu, seeing Sahajanand,

thy eyes have found their desires.'

(Parekh, 1936)

A bond that was formed between poet and the Divine was not depended on sayings of people but was established on the foundation of self-verification. Brahmanand had identified divinity of the Divine based on several parameters fixed by him. His love for the Divine was 'revealed' when he found 'a worthy vessel' (Bryant, 2017; Narad, 1957). With finding the divine and forming a relation with Him, Brahmanand achieved the first step in the process of manifesting love.

Love Strengthens Further



Before moving to the second step in the process of divine love, it is significant to note that the means of establishing the bond of love speaks volumes in regard to its retention. As Brahmanand has verified about the divine qualities by himself, the bond developed remains firm and grows even stronger.

To strengthen the bond does not necessarily mean to nurture already established connection but instead it means to remain determined towards the Divine. As one is determined towards God, he becomes steadfast in his decision of not abandoning the God or to put it in a different manner the bond of love established between them never suffers separation. Surdas, a prominent poet from medieval bhakti tradition, had explained it through a metaphor of cakaī bird where he asks the bird to fly to a lake that sees no separation in love. Interestingly, he uses the word 'lake' for God which signifies that the 'vessel' of love never drains and remains filled with love. He writes thus:

‘Cakīrī cala caraṇa sarovara, jahān nahi prema viyogu.

Jahān bhrama niśā hota nahi kabahuṃ so sāyara sukhayoga’

(Hawley, 2006)

‘O cakai bird, flee to those feet, that lake

where love never suffers separation

And the dark, aimless night never comes –

That ocean of joy of union.’ (Hawley, 2006)



From amongst the myriad ways of remaining determined to the God, Narad Bhakti Sutra agrees on a single way saying that ‘It comes from renouncing sense objects and renouncing attachments’ (Narad, 1957; Bryant, 2017). By renouncing objects and the relations, Surdas says that if one hopes for the sea that is if one hopes for the ultimate then the existing pleasures will also seem dry saying that it will also become insignificant:

‘Jahan śhrī sahit sahaja nit krīḍā praṇamat sūrij dās

ab na suhāi viṣai ban chīlar vā samudra kī āsa’ (Hawley, 2006)

‘This puddle of existence, with its pleasures, seems so dry

when one could hope instead for the sea.’ (Hawley, 2006)

However, two major things need to be clarified over here: first, Narad Bhakti Sutra states the above statement in respect with bhakti. But as it defines the nature of bhakti to be supreme love in its opening aphorism and as the paper also discussed in its earlier section that love can be linked with bhakti, it could certainly be argued over here that the way proposed by Narad Bhakti Sutra works as a technique in remaining firm towards the Divine.

Another point that needs clarification is that love is about association with the Divine. It is about connecting oneself with tangible form of the Divine. At a given point of time, a poet has to perform two activities simultaneously: attach with the Divine and detach from worldly relations. When one abandons the mundane relationships, God becomes sole focus for a poet. In stark contrast with the materialistic love where there are multiple recipients of love and the expectations are ever increasing, divine love is about submitting one’s entire being to God. When the poet has lost his identity into the Divine, his expectations from the receiver are



lowered and gradually diminishes. When the poet surrenders in such a manner, the bond of love that was established earlier gets enhanced.

Love has already originated in the heart of Brahmanand for the Divine. Their first meeting had left a greater impact on him. When he was singing in the royal courts of Gujarat as a *cāraṇa*, he earned the titles of *śīghrakavi* or talent of composing poems spontaneously and *mahāmahopādhyāya* or supreme preceptor. Also, he was honoured with large amount of cash prizes. (Brahmbhatt, 1966; Ratnu, 1960; Travadi, 1863; Rajpurohit, 2016; Charan Samagam 2016). But the bond established was such that these material accomplishments held no significance for him neither did any of his worldly relations. This intensified bond itself led him in renouncing the material gains and initiating him into an ascetic order. Ladudan now turned to Brahmanand – a court poet now transformed into a poet-saint. The only relation that now existed for him was between him and the Divine. Mentioning about this firm relationship of his, Brahmanand writes in a poem:

‘Vā’lā lāgo chho vishva ādhār re, sagṇ tam sāthe;

Me to sarve melyo (chhe) sansār re’ (Shahstri, 1997)

‘O, Loved one! Since I have surrendered to you,

By renouncing the world,

You are the entire world for me’⁷

While looking at the above stanza from the poem of Brahmanand, it is necessary to look at the word that he uses in vernacular to describe his betrothal to God. Brahmanand uses ‘*sagṇ*’ to

⁷ All the translation of this poet is author’s own unless mentioned otherwise.



explain his bond with the Divine. When looked into the online English-Gujarati dictionary ShabdKosh, sagpaṇ can have multiple meanings ranging from the relation that is shared by two individuals or the affinity that one possesses for others⁸. Various interpretations of sagpaṇ agree on a single point: it is a relation between two individuals. Brahmanand also uses this word to showcase his relation with the Divine.

However, Brahmanand inserts a cultural meaning to the word. According to the dictionary of BhagvadGoMandal, sagpaṇ means engagement⁹. He uses this word intentionally in order to illustrate his association with the Divine. In the nineteenth century Gujarat when Brahmanand had composed this poem, engagement would mean association of two individuals who pledge to remain together for rest of their lives. It also meant that each partner will remain loyal to other irrespective of the situation.

So, when Brahmanand uses the word ‘sagpaṇ’ in his poem, he intends to mean that he has now engaged with the Divine by renouncing all the mundane relations and gains. As Brahmanand has now detached from all mundane relations, he further affirms Swaminarayan in his poem that he will remain loyal to him. Renouncing ‘sense objects’ serve as a primary reason for Brahmanand to engage with the Divine. But he also provides another reason in being faithful to God saying that He has occupied his thoughts:

‘Mārā manmā vasyā chho āvī Shyām re;

Tam sāru tajyā dhan dhām re.

⁸<https://www.shabdKosh.com/dictionary/gujaratienglish/%E0%AA%B8%E0%AA%97%E0%AA%AA%E0%AA%A3/%E0%AA%B8%E0%AA%97%E0%AA%AA%E0%AA%A3-meaning-in-english>.

⁹ Bhagwad-Go-Mandal is a dictionary containing meanings of rare accepted Gujarati words compiled in about nine volumes. <https://www.bhagavadgomandalonline.com/bhagavadgomandal.html>.



Māru maṇḍu lobhāṇu tam pās re;

Mune nathī bījānī āsh re.

Māre māthe dhaṇī chho tame ek re (Shahstri, 1997)

‘O, Lord! As you have occupied my thoughts;

I have renounced material wealth and relations.

Since I am attracted towards you;

I do not expect anything from anyone.

You are only everything for me’

Looking at select stanzas from the poem composed by Brahmanand, it could certainly be asserted that Brahmanand was resolute in his love for the Divine. Since the love has now been established and is unwavering, it allows us to make a way forward in achieving the Divine Love.

Nurturing Love through Participation

The second step in the process of love is to ‘nurture’ the relationship that has been established. Nurturing of love helps in maintaining the same love for the Divine that existed at its inception. It becomes inevitable to nurture this love or else it would diminish over time. So, it is important to sustain the established love.

Up until the establishment of love, role of a poet remains significant. But by entering into the second step of love, it becomes the responsibility of both poet as well as the Divine to further the established love. In the second part of the process, the Divine is also endowed with a



particular role which will help in fostering love. To put it simply, the nurturing of love is possible only with the participation of both poet and the God. When there is equal affinity between poet and the Divine then and only then can the established love be nurtured. So, the responsibility of nurturing love does not rely solely on the poet but God also plays an equal part in fostering it.

Since love is to be nurtured by both humans and the Divine, involvement of both the entities is equally required. For it, poet chooses to extend the relationship of love that exists amongst people surrounding him. It is not necessary that there is total absence of love in worldly relationships but rather it is grounded in self-interest. But when the same love with similar relationships is used in describing relation with the Divine, the self-interest turns into selflessness and so only does a poet use worldly relations to describe his relationship with the almighty.

Besides, there could be two major reasons for poets using these types of relations to explain their relationship with the Divine. The first reason being that as a poet belongs to the materialistic world, he could not think of any other relations that might exist beyond this physical world. Another reason for it could be that the God, who originally belongs to the transcendental world, has now incarnated on earth in a human body. As discussed in earlier sections of the paper, the bond of love that is established is with the human form of God and so the relations that are used by a poet in describing his relationship with the Divine are amongst the relations that are maintained within the humankind.

When the Divine participates in nurturing the love and when He is given a particular role to perform, a 'complex and multidimensional relationship' is formed 'between human and divine'



(Martin, 2003). In this relationship, there is ‘partaking of every form of love possible between human beings’ (Martin, 2003). Taking into consideration the poems of Narsinh Mehta and the possible relations that exist amongst human beings, Sachin Ketkar, the Professor of English at a university in Gujarat and an expert on translation studies as well as Indian Literature, mentions regarding these relations in his doctoral thesis. He mentions two types of relations that could possibly exist between a poet and the Divine: ‘the love of a friend for a friend ... or the love of a mother for her child’ (2001). Classifying the latter as ‘parental love’, Nancy Martin adds another category to the already existent group – the love ‘of lovers’ (Martin, 2003)

From the above mentioned three categories, only two will be taken into consideration for the purpose of this paper. It will aid in enhancing our understanding of the relations that is between a poet and the Divine. The first classification that will be focused is the relation that they share as a friend. The relationship shared with the Divine as a friend is so close that the poet shares every single thing that happens in his life with the Divine. It is because, as discussed earlier, the poet has detached from the worldly relations and only relative that he has is his God. So, no one else than God can know the poet well.

Love as a Friend

In another of his poem, Surdas exemplifies friendly relation shared by Lord Krishna with Sudama, a poor friend that he had. Poem is from the point of view of Sudama, who considers himself to be fortunate as the ‘Yadav king’ had admitted to his friendship:

‘Aisī mohi aur kaun pehichāne

suni sundar vā dīnabandhu binu kaun’ (Hawley, 2006)



‘Who else is there that knows me as he does?’

Who, my dear, but that kinsman to the wretched

would even admit to being my friend?’ (Hawley, 2006)

Further, the bond of friendship that they shared moved beyond the social status that either of them held. This very fact is a testament to the fact that love is beyond self-interest as being rich or poor did not matter for them. The scenario in which Sudama is positioned by Surdas is that of a poor when he used to live away from his home and in such a condition, Lord Krishna has admitted to his friendship. The bond shared by them was so strong that Sudama had to confessed of getting equal treatment by Lord Krishna that He provided to Arjun. Surdas writes thus:

‘Kahṃ hīṃ krīpan kuchīl kudarsan kahṃ vai jādaurāi;

lio uṭhāi anka bhari bhetyo Arjun kī sī nāi.

uṭh āsan dīnau ādar kari nij kar charan padhār;

pūchī kusal bāt tab ghar kī sab sankoc nivāre.

pūrab prīti bichāri sūr prabhu guru grih base akele’ (Hawley, 2006)

‘Here I am lowly, ragged, ugly,

and there he is the Yadav king,

Yet he raised me up as he did with Arjun

and took me to his chest in an embrace.

He rose from his throne, sat me there in honor

washed my feet with his very own hands,



As he thought. Sur's Lord. of the love he had for me
when we lived away from home in our teacher's house' (Hawley, 2006)

Love as a Mother

The second type of love agreed by scholars is that of 'parental love'. From two parents, the poems composed by *saguni* poets mostly addressed the Divine as mother or wrote from a perspective of God addressing His mother or God's mother complaining about her child. In the case of Brahmanand, he used the earlier technique of addressing Swaminarayan as his mother. The case with Brahmanand was something different. Before he could address Swaminarayan as his mother, the Divine took the responsibility of being a mother for him. It was when Brahmanand turned into ascetic order that Swaminarayan assured his mother that He will take up the role of his mother (Amrutvijaydas, 2014). Remembering this promise of Swaminarayan, Brahmanand wrote in his poem that as you have already accepted me as your son in an assembly and so it is incumbent that you call me with love by disregarding all my faults¹⁰:

‘Bhari sabhāmā Bhūdharjī tame,

Thayā chho māḍi mārī re;

Beṭāne hete bolāvo,

Avguṇiyā visārī re’ (Shahstri, 1997)

‘In an assembly, you resolved

¹⁰ The history of this poem is as follows: Brahmanand was asked by Swaminarayan to build a temple in the town of Vartal, near Anand city in central Gujarat. After the temple was built, Swaminarayan ordered him to leave Vartal and compose devotional poems. Enroute Gadhada, a town near Bhavnagar in Saurashtra region of Gujarat, he composed this poem (Amrutvijaydas, 2014).



to be my mother,
So, by overlooking the faults,
call me with love.'

In the poem further, he enlists several faults that are common to a child and then requests Swaminarayan disregard all those faults:

‘Jevo tevo (toy) putra tamāro,
Aṅsamju ahamkāri re;
Peṭ padyo te avashya pālvo,
Vā’lam juone vichārī re.’ (Shahstri, 1997)

‘However, I may be,
ignorant or egoistic,
I have become yours
and so, you have to
Look after me’

Further, Brahmanand tells Swaminarayan that now since he has accepted him as His child, it becomes His responsibility to take care of him. Brahmanand asks Him to protect from all the possible threats and evils just as a mother protects her child from any possible dangers. He exemplifies this relationship of a mother and child by saying that if a child mistakenly touches fire or a snake, his mother immediately pulls her child away:

‘Anaḷ ahi jo grahe ajāṇe,
To chhodāve rovārī re;



Bāḷakne janānī sam bīju,
Nahi jagmā hitkāri re.’ (Shahstri,1997)

‘If a child unknowingly grabs a snake;
or put hands on fire,
(Mother) immediately pulls it away;
So, no one cares, unlike mother.’

So, the child remains unafraid of the fears with his mother around her; similarly, Brahmanand seeks Swaminarayan to surround him so that he can remain fearless. Towards the end, Brahmanand asks Him to keep him by His side just as a mother never lets her child loose. Also, he prays Him to safeguard him in all the difficulties:

‘Brahmānandnī ej vinantī,
Man dhārīe Murārī re;
Prīt sahit darshan parsādī,
Joye sāj savārī re’
(Shahstri,1997)

‘Brahmanand requests that whenever I
ask lovingly give darshan and prasadi.’

Either it be love of a friend or as a parent, the love with the Divine gets nurtured. As Brahmanand loves the Divine as a parent and as the Divine also has similar affinity with the



poet-saint, it could be asserted that Brahmanand has now reached towards the last step in the process of achieving the Divine love.

Before celebrating the attained love, let us have a quick look at the state of person who has accomplished the first three steps in the process as described in Narad Bhakti Sutra. When the love is nurtured, the love between them is ‘ever increasing’ (Narad, 1957; Bryant, 2017). While explaining the situation of a poet who has nurtured the established love with the Divine, Narad Bhakti Sutra mentions that such a person ‘hears only about Bhagavān, speaks only about Bhagavān, and thinks only about Bhagavān’ (Narad, 1957; Bryant, 2017). The term that sage Narad uses of addressing the Divine is Bhagavān which in the indigenous vernacular means the almighty.

Brahmanand, having attained this particular state, now sees God in all his actions. Each and every act of the Divine now attracts Brahmanand. He now sees the God, thinks of God and speaks about God. As a part of seeing, he minutely observes ornaments worn by God. Not only that but he also takes minutest of details of God in his poems. He writes:

‘Kāne kuṇḍal nautam dhariyā re;

Bhāre nang vaḷī rang bharīyā re;

Āvī antarmā ūṇḍā gariyā.

‘O Lord! The new earrings;

Worn by you;

With pearls etched in it;

Looks so captivating.’



‘Dīṭhu mukhḍu chandā kere ḍoḷe re,

Til dakshīṇ gāur kapoḷe re;

Brahmānand kahe muni tene khoḷe’ (Shahstri, 1997)

‘Your face looks like a moon;

On whose left cheek is a mole,

That Brahmanand adores.’

Celebrating the Divine Love

With the love being established and nurtured with the help of participation, the last step is to celebrate the love. At the completion of this step, the love gets manifested. The love obviously existed in previous steps but in this step, the love acquires a supreme position for the poet. He remains least concerned about the worldly fears and instead remains in joy forever. As Brahmanand is now at the last step in the process of love, he was in such a state. Now the only reason for him to survive is his beloved God. While mentioning about such a state, Brahmanand writes:

‘Bhāvē bhēṭī rē bhāvē bhēṭī,

ati ānanda aṅga, māṅḍu rahyu chē mōhinē rē’ (Shahstri, 1997)

‘As I met you;

I am full of joy,

My mind always dwells in you’

‘Brahmānandnā re, Brahmānandnā re;



Vahālā laherī tarang, jīvu chhu tujne joīne re’ (Shahstri, 1997)

‘For Brahmanand, you are only one;

Whom I long to see’

Conclusion

In conclusion, love became instrumental for *saguni* bhakti poets in offering devotion (bhakti) to the almighty. As the Divine was present in human form before these poets, the affinity between them could be established. This allowed the poets to apply materialistic relations to describe their relationship with the Divine. The poets viewed the transcendental being either as a friend or as a mother. Having such a relationship with the God, where there was also a participation of the Divine, nurtured the already established love by the poet. After passing through these steps when love for the Divine peaked, the poets celebrated their relationship with the Divine. At this stage, poets did not see the Divine by connecting them with earlier materialistic relations but instead viewed their relationship independently. Brahmanand developed similar love for Swaminarayan and offered his devotion (bhakti) to the Divine.



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