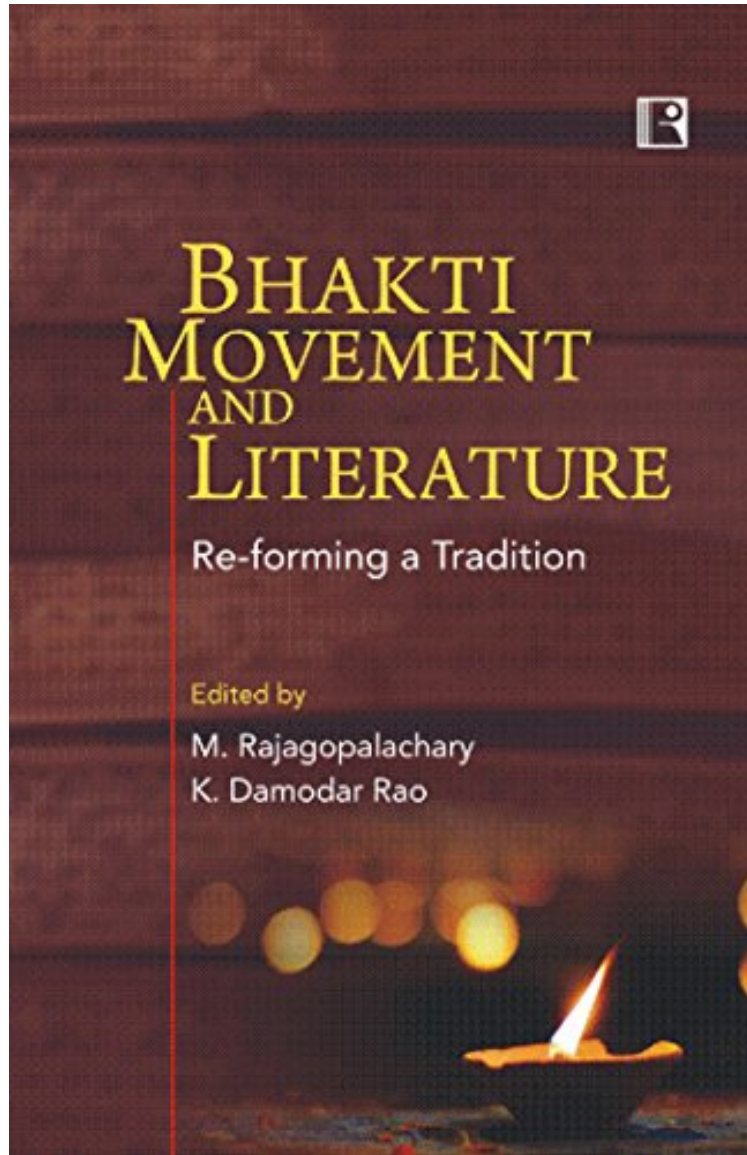


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## Bhakti Movement and Literature: Re-forming a Tradition

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Bhakti movement had been an energizing phenomenon that provided a concrete shape and an identifiable face to the

abstractions of Sanskrit scriptures. As counterculture, it embraced into its fold all sections of people breaking the barriers of caste, class, community and gender. It added an inclusive dimension to the hitherto privileged, exclusivist, Upanishadic tradition. A primal instinct for unmitigated attachment, total surrender and craving for freedom are at the root of the bhakti tradition. From within, it performed a subversive, reformatory function that changed the dynamics of worship at religious level and challenged the hierarchies at social level. Bhakti literature was marked by spontaneity and ecstasy and hence it produced a rich body of verse born of the heart. The bhasa poets from different castes, regions and religions created a bountiful corpus of literature since eighth century AD in the form of metrical compositions, poems, songs, vachanas, bhajans, keertanas and padams. A heterogeneous group, they are distinguished by non-sectarian attitude, vernacular idiom, faith in divinity, dismissal of rituals and caste, and affinity with the underprivileged sections. Rooted in the age and the soil their literature is unique in that each of them bears his/her unique stamp of a distinct idiom in their dialogue with God who is like any other human being as He exchanged the roles of a lover, beloved, companion, benefactor and guide. Bhakti is as exciting as ever in that it attracts critics into its atmospheric zone over and again, and they come up with multiple interpretations and commentaries. The twenty seven articles in this volume trace the beginnings and growth of bhakti movement and literature as propagated by a number of poet-saints across India up to the twentieth century. The poet-saints discussed in the volume include Andal, Kanakadasa, Mirabai, Kabir, Vemana, Pothana, Annamayya and others. [Subject: Literature, India Studies]