

Rewriting Romanticism: Bhakti Women Saints and Indigenous Poetic Imagination

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Abstract

This paper critically rethinks Romanticism by placing it in dialogue with the poetic traditions of Bhakti women saints in India. While Romanticism privileges interiority, individual emotion, and the sovereign lyric self, Bhakti poetry—particularly as articulated by women saints such as Akka Mahadevi, Mirabai, and Lal Ded—offers an alternative genealogy of poetic imagination grounded in embodiment, relational affect, and ethical resistance. Drawing upon indigenous aesthetic frameworks such as *bhāva-rasa*, the paper argues that Bhakti does not aestheticise emotion as private feeling but transforms it into a shared, performative, and politically charged experience. Through devotional utterance, Bhakti women saints reconfigure love as dissent, suffering as transformation, and devotion as a mode of insurgent agency that challenges patriarchal, caste-based, and ritual orthodoxies. Rather than anticipating European Romanticism, Bhakti poetry actively rewrites its assumptions by producing porous, relational selves embedded within communal and cosmic networks. The paper thus positions Bhakti women's poetry as a living archive of indigenous poetic imagination—one that expands feminist, postcolonial, and affect-theoretical understandings of lyric expression and reclaims poetry as an ethical practice of becoming.

Keywords

Affect and resistance, Bhakti poetry, Indian women saints, indigenous aesthetics.