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Abstract: Bhakti in Virashaivism (E.-M. Glasbrenner, M.A., University of Munich, Germany) (Section 12, History of Religion)

In the history of Indian religion and philosophy the concept of bhakti is associated with devotion and love of god. The notion of total surrender to a personally defined deity in a relationship of individual love finds its first climax in the bhakti movement of south India, created by the Vaishnava Alvars and the Shaiva Nayanmars (7th to 9th century), followed by another blossoming between the 13th and 17th centuries in the form of Rama and Krishna cults in north and central India (Ramanand, Nimbarka, Vallabha, Caitanya, Tulsidas etc.). Also today, "bhakti" generally is considered to stand for a kind of "true religiosity", in which the individual devotes himself very emotionally to a chosen deity; this devotion, ideally, is uninterrupted and self-effacing, leads to liberation from suffering-laden samsara, in contrast to externally and objectively observable ritual culture, and usually stands in opposition to cognitive doctrines of liberation. However, the concept of bhakti in Virashaivism or Lingayatism presents itself differently. Whereas lay Lingayatism nowadays shows clear signs of bhaktification (besides the obligatory worship of the personal Shivalinga there is also the cultic worship of the founder of the religion, Basava, as well as the common singing of bhajans and vacanas, with feeling (bhaava) and bhakti as highest religious points of reference), the philosophy of early Virashaivism ascribes a special function to bhakti, which only in a limited sense is contained in the above-mentioned concept. The Sanskrit text Anubhavasutra by Mayideva (15th century CE) develops a complex cosmological system, in which the universe consists of energies that originally emanated from one primeval cosmic mass called "Shiva", are divided ever further, stand opposite each other and cause the facets of being to come into being and perish in evolution and involution. The first large dividing is the one into Shiva (subjective consciousness) and Shakti (objective energy with the power of materialization); then the first Shakti splits into two further energies, shakti and bhakti. Mayideva enumerates six different sub-bhaktis (sadbhakti, naishtikibhakti, avadhanabhakti, anubhavabhakti, anandabhakti, samarasabhakti), which, in the form of the so-called system of six stages (shatsthalasiddhanta), build a special doctrine of liberation, in which the humanly incarnated individual passes through the various stages of bhakti, from a devotion that is oriented toward a subject-object relationship to knowledge of the oneness of the individual self with the cosmic energies (shiva / shakti). Here bhakti is not merely a religious attitude, but an independent and basic cosmic energy, which reconstitutes (nivritti) primeval Shiva entity that had become an object of its own divine self-experience.