

## A Comparative Study of Mahaprabhu's Idea of Bhakti

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### Abstract

*Bhakti, as a religious movement had its far reaching impact on the political and cultural changes in India. It was a movement as well as a religious reformation which first took place in Tamil Nadu and began to spread to the north during the late medieval ages when north India was under Islamic rule. There is a mark of resemblance between the Bhakti movement and the movement of American Transcendentalism. Transcendentalism in America was not only a philosophical or literary movement but as F. I. Carpenter has observed "American Transcendentalism was primarily religious rather than philosophical." Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was not only an exponent of this Bhakti Movement but considered to be the incarnation of Lord Sri Krishna. Apart from this there are a number of similarities in the philosophy of lord Chaitanya and the basic Ideas of Transcendentalism. Lord Chaitanya believed that the human souls are in a fallen state and it is only through the "Bhakti Marg" or true devotion that the human soul can achieve God's grace and end up the "Karma Chakra" or soul's transmigration. He rather preferred "Bhakti Marg" than "Mukti Marg".*

**Keywords:** Bhakti, Medieval age etc.

### Introduction

Bhakti, as a religious movement had its far reaching impact on the political and cultural changes in India. It was a movement as well as a religious reformation which first took place in Tamil Nadu and began to spread to the north during the late medieval ages when north India was under Islamic rule. Even the main traits of Bhakti were not well organized and differ from one saint to another.

But the main purpose was quite same among them, they taught people to cast aside the heavy burdens of ritual and caste, and the subtle complexities of philosophy, and simply express their overwhelming love for God. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was not only an exponent of this Bhakti Movement but considered to be the incarnation of Lord Sri Krishna.

There is a mark of resemblance between the Bhakti movement and the movement of American Transcendentalism. Transcendentalism in America was not only a philosophical or literary movement but as F. I. Carpenter has observed "American Transcendentalism was primarily religious rather than philosophical." Transcendentalism in America was inspired by dissatisfaction with the emotional and spiritual sterility of

Unitarianism, a sterility attributed to the Unitarian acceptance of Lockean "sensationalism". The Bhakti Movement in India too was inspired by a kind of orthodoxy in religious believes. So in both the movements a need for the reformation of the religion was on the central issue.

Apart from this there are a number of similarities in the philosophy of lord Chaitanya and the basic Ideas of Transcendentalism. Lord Chaitanya believed that the human souls are in a fallen state and it is only through the "Bhakti Marg" or true devotion that the human soul can achieve God's grace and end up the "Karma Chakra" or soul's transmigration. He rather preferred "Bhakti Marg" than "Mukti Marg". To him salvation is not to be desired because the desire for mukti leads in losing faith in God. The basic assumption of Transcendentalism lies in the intuitive faculty instead of the rational. This intuition is the conscious union of the individual psyche (*Ātman*) with world psyche (*Brahman*). Therefore there is a certain tendency of Mukti in American Transcendentalism as it desires for unification with world psyche or *Brahman*. So, can Bhakti be considered as transcendence? Sri Chaitanya preferred the Bhakti Marg but did not totally reject the Mukti Marg. So, the fact remains that certain transcendental quality was there too in Mahaprabhu's ideas. Besides Transcendentalism is not the direct

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manifestation of God or Oversoul but it is only through the self-knowledge of the individual that transcendence can be possible. This "chaitanya" or self-knowledge too becomes the key ideas of Bhakti. Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya believed that the "Jiva" souls are the marginal or intermediate discrete parts of the Supreme Being or Lord Sri Krishna. So self-knowledge or "chaitanya" is nothing but the knowledge of the Supreme Being and this knowledge of the Supreme Creator can truly inspire us to follow the way of Bhakti. To Lord Chaitanya this Suddha Bhakti or unalloyed devotion, is the external function of all Jiva souls, is the only means of attaining Divine love, the summum bonum of human existence.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was very much concerned on the Bhakti Marg and to him only this unalloyed devotion can attain God's Grace. The Namsankirtan for the Supreme God Sri Krishna i.e. "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare." has the power to end up all the sin committed by the Jiva Soul in the previous birth. These resemblances in the philosophies can now be identified now. It is now clear from studies of their journals and letters that the Concord circles of Transcendentalists like Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott were all influenced in a very deep and thoroughgoing way by the philosophies conveyed in Asian religious texts.

Emerson eagerly sought out the newest publications from his Paris and London booksellers for their "revelations" drawn from "The East," and Thoreau revealed his excited consideration of their ideas in his journals and letters. It is now clear that the transcendental philosophy is largely drawn from Eastern religious texts like *Bhagavad Gita*. So what we know as transcendental elements in Western religious and literary beliefs is none but derived from Indian philosophy and as Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's philosophies are mostly drawn from Hindu religious texts like *Bhagavad Gita*, therefore, this assumption of Transcendental quality in Mahaprabhu's ideas can be substantiated.

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