



***Mysticism and Margins:
Saint Poetry as a Vehicle for Social Equality in India***

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Abstract

The mysticism embedded in Indian saint poetry served not merely as a spiritual expression but also as a profound medium of social reform and egalitarian resistance in medieval India. Saint poets such as Kabir, Ravidas, Tukaram, Lal Ded, and the Sufi mystics like Bulleh Shah redefined religious devotion by intertwining it with radical critiques of caste, gender, and hierarchical orthodoxy. Writing in vernacular languages and performing their poetry through song, chant, and community gathering, these poets bypassed elite religious institutions and created accessible platforms for the disenfranchised. Kabir's dohas questioned the necessity of religious identity in favor of experiential wisdom, while Ravidas's utopian vision of Begampura offered a spiritual homeland devoid of suffering and caste prejudice. Tukaram democratized bhakti through Marathi abhangas that uplifted rural and artisan life, and Lal Ded's mystical vakhs represented one of the earliest feminine articulations of spiritual autonomy. Sufi saints, meanwhile, dissolved rigid

boundaries of self and religion, emphasizing unity through divine love.

This study argues that saint poetry constituted an alternative epistemology—one that resisted institutionalized power through inward spirituality and collective expression. The use of oral performance and folk traditions created inclusive, emotionally resonant spaces that empowered the marginalized to assert their dignity. Far from being escapist, mysticism in these traditions functioned as an insurgent force against social inequality. The legacy of saint poets continues to influence modern anti-caste movements, feminist thought, and protest cultures, making them foundational figures in India's journey toward social justice. Drawing from historical, literary, and sociocultural sources, this paper positions saint poetry as a dynamic site of intersection between devotion and dissent, where mystical insight becomes a catalyst for structural change.

Keywords: Saint poetry- mysticism-social equality- Bhakti movement- anti-caste resistance, vernacular spirituality

