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Daughters of Dharma: The Hidden Legacy of India's Women Seers

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***Abstract*-- The status of women is always looked up as object of enjoyment, the better half of husband and she was confine to the four walls and their main role was wives and mother. They were expected to take care of children and kitchen and expected to be caring gentle and passive. Despite of this many Indian women contributed to the glorious past of the nation.**

Against this backdrop this paper will focus on the contribution of female saints of the Bhakti movement in India such as the Kanhopatra, Janabai, Muktabai, Mahadevi, Ammaiyar, Andal, Ghosha, Gargi Vachaknavi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, etc. All of them played a vital role in promoting their Bhakti cults along with their groups and saints of the Bhakti movement. Teaching of Indian female saints will help in reviving values and spiritual quotient of people in general.

***Keywords*--Bhakti, Saints, Spirituality, Philosophy,**

I. Introduction

Indian philosophy and spirituality feature numerous influential women, from ancient Vedic seers like Gargi Vachaknavi and Maitreyi, known for their profound debates in the Upanishads, to Bhakti saints like Akka Mahadevi and Andal, and later figures like Anandamayi Ma, showcasing women's vital roles as philosophers, mystics, and spiritual teachers (rishikas/brahmavadinis) who challenged norms and explored ultimate reality, embodying the divine feminine (Shakti).

II. Ancient Vedic & Upanishadic Era (Rishikas/Brahmavadinis)

Gargi Vachaknavi, a prominent female sage of the Vedic era (c. 700 BCE), is celebrated as one of India's earliest and most formidable philosophers. As a **Brahmavadini**—a woman dedicated to the pursuit of *Brahma Vidya* (supreme knowledge)—she remains a pivotal figure in the **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad**, where her intellectual prowess challenged the most learned scholars of her time. Gargi was the daughter of Sage Vachaknu and a descendant of the renowned Sage Garga, from whom she derived her name. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she chose a path of lifelong celibacy and rigorous Vedic study over domestic life. Her exceptional intelligence and mastery over the four Vedas earned her a place among the "Nine Jewels" (Navaratnas) in the court of King Janaka of Videha.

Gargi's most significant contribution to Indian philosophy occurred during a grand *Brahma yajna* (philosophical congress) organized by King Janaka. The king offered a prize of 1,000 cows, each with gold-plated horns, to the most knowledgeable scholar of Brahman. While most sages were intimidated by the eminent Sage **Yajnavalkya**, Gargi fearlessly challenged him twice: Gargi utilized the metaphor of "warp and woof" (weaving) to inquire about the foundational substance of the universe. She asked: *"Since this whole world is woven back and forth on water, on what, then, is water woven back and forth?"*. In a series of rapid-fire questions, she pushed Yajnavalkya to explain the underlying realities of air, the heavens, and various celestial realms. When she pushed her inquiry to the very limits of human understanding, Yajnavalkya cautioned her that further questioning would lead to a "head-splitting" paradox, as she was probing the nature of the Unknowable (Brahman). After other male scholars failed to defeat him, Gargi rose again, comparing her questions to "deadly arrows" from a fierce warrior's bow. She asked what the space between heaven and earth was woven upon, leading Yajnavalkya to describe the **Akshara** (the Imperishable). Gargi's contributions extend beyond her famous debate: Her questions forced a systematic articulation of the nature of the soul (*Atman*) and the ultimate reality (*Brahman*). She is credited with revealing certain mantras in the **Rigveda** and contributed to the evolution of the idea that the individual self is part of the universal Brahman. Her presence in the royal court as an equal to male sages serves as a historical testament to the high status and educational access women enjoyed during the early Vedic period. Gargi Vachaknavi is remembered today as a symbol of intellectual freedom and the quintessential seeker of truth, whose voice continues to resonate as a foundation of Indian metaphysical thought.

Lopamudra is a celebrated Brahmavadini and Rishika (female seer) of the Vedic period, renowned for her intellectual depth and her pivotal role in integrating spiritual practice with domestic life. As the wife of the great Sage Agastya, her influence extends from the early Rigveda to the mystical traditions of Sri Vidya. According to the *Mahabharata*, Lopamudra's origin is divine and unusual.

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It is said that Sage Agastya, seeking a wife to satisfy his ancestral duties, created her by combining the most graceful attributes of animals and plants (such as the eyes of a deer or the slenderness of a palm tree). Her name reflects this creation; *Lopa* (loss) and *Mudra* (form/grace) signify the beauty "lost" by nature to form her perfect being. She was raised as a princess in the kingdom of Vidarbha before choosing to marry Agastya and embracing a life of rigorous austerity in his hermitage. Lopamudra is one of the few women whose hymns are preserved in the **Rigveda** (Mandala 1, Sukta 179). Her contribution is unique because it addresses the tension between asceticism and household responsibilities (*Grihastha Dharma*). In a famous dialogue-hymn, Lopamudra challenges Agastya's extreme renunciation, arguing that spiritual progress should not neglect marital duties and human companionship. Her verses suggest that even ancient sages who spoke with the gods did not abandon their worldly partners, establishing the idea that domestic love can be a path to spiritual union rather than an obstacle to it. In later spiritual traditions, particularly **Sri Vidya**, Lopamudra is revered as a powerful *sadhika* (practitioner). She is credited with visualizing and establishing the **Hadi** school of the *Panchadasi* mantra, one of the primary lineages in the Shakta tradition. Tradition holds that she was instrumental in Agastya receiving the *Lalita Sahasranama* from Lord Hayagriva. Because of her spiritual merit, the "most secret knowledge" was shared with her husband. Lopamudra is deeply revered in Southern India, where her legacy is intertwined with geography and culture: Several legends identify her with the sacred **River Kaveri**, suggesting she transformed into the river to serve the people of the South. She is credited with establishing schools for women (Tirukannigai) in South Bharat, where they were taught music and the Veena. In South Indian temples, she is often worshipped alongside Agastya, and specific mantras are dedicated to her to invoke the success and well-being of husbands.

Maitreyi is one of the most revered female philosophers of ancient India (c. 8th century BCE), celebrated for her intellectual courage and pursuit of ultimate truth. Her story, primarily recorded in the **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad**, serves as a foundational text for Advaita Vedanta philosophy. The most famous episode of Maitreyi's life occurs when her husband, the eminent sage **Yajnavalkya**, decides to renounce his householder life to become a forest recluse. He offers to divide his material wealth between his two wives: Katyayani and Maitreyi. While Katyayani accepts her portion, Maitreyi poses a transformative question: *"If this whole earth, full of riches, were mine, would I become immortal?"*.

Yajnavalkya clarifies that wealth can only provide a life of material comfort but offers no hope of immortality. Maitreyi's resolute reply—*"What shall I do with that which will not make me immortal?"*—marks her as a **Brahmavadini**, a seeker of supreme knowledge. Moved by her spiritual ambition, Yajnavalkya imparts the famous teaching on the nature of love and the Self. He explains that a husband, wife, children, or wealth are not dear for their own sake, but for the sake of the **Self (Atman)**. All love is ultimately a reflection of the soul's connection to the universal reality. He teaches that by seeing, hearing, reflecting upon, and meditating on the Self, everything else becomes known, as the Self is the ground of all existence. When Yajnavalkya suggests that after death there is no "separate awareness," Maitreyi is momentarily confused. He clarifies that in the state of total unity (*Brahman*), where the "knower" and "known" are one, individual dualistic consciousness ceases to exist—this realization is true immortality. Maitreyi's dialogues challenge the notion that spiritual liberation was reserved for men or ascetics, proving that women had full capacity for *Brahma-Vidya* (knowledge of the Absolute). Her conversation appears twice in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (Chapters 2.4 and 4.5), underscoring its central importance to Upanishadic thought. Today, she is a symbol of female intellectualism in India. Institutions like **Maitreyi College** in New Delhi are named in her honour to celebrate her legacy of inquiry and wisdom.

Ghosha, an ancient Indian **Rishika** (female seer) and philosopher of the Vedic period, is celebrated as a **Brahmavadini**—a "speaker or proclaimer of Brahman" who dedicated her life to spiritual and intellectual pursuits. Born into a lineage of profound wisdom, she was the daughter of Rishi Kakshivan and the granddaughter of Dirghatamas, both of whom were prominent contributors to the **Rigveda**. Ghosha's life was marked by a significant personal struggle that ultimately shaped her spiritual journey: From a young age, she suffered from a disfiguring skin ailment, often identified as leprosy. This condition forced her to live as a celibate maiden within her father's house for many years. Despite her suffering, Ghosha remained proficient in Vedic knowledge. She fervently meditated on the **Ashvini Kumars**, the divine twin physicians of the Vedic pantheon known for their powers of rejuvenation and healing. Legend holds that the Ashvins, pleased by her devotion, taught her **Madhu Vidya** (the Science of Secret Learning/Honey). This sacred knowledge cured her ailment, restored her youth and beauty, and eventually allowed her to marry and have a son, Suhstya, who also became a Rigvedic composer.

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Ghosha is credited with authoring two significant hymns in the **tenth Mandala** of the Rigveda (Hymns 39 and 40), each consisting of 14 verses. These hymns are categorized as: A powerful eulogy to the Ashvini Kumars, detailing their various miraculous deeds and expressing gratitude for their divine intervention. A more personal and emotive hymn where she expresses her profound desires and feelings regarding married life and companionship. As a **Mantradrika** (one well-versed in mantras), Ghosha represents the high status of women in Vedic society. Her inclusion in the sacred texts alongside male sages underscores the era's recognition of women as intellectual equals capable of "seeing" and revealing cosmic truths. Ghosha's legacy is that of a "Vedic Yogini" who successfully integrated personal human desire with rigorous spiritual practice, demonstrating that the pursuit of the divine could coexist with a deep engagement in human life.

Apala is a revered **Brahmavadini** and **Rishika** of the Vedic era, whose story is primarily recorded in the eighth Mandala of the . (Sukta 8.91). Her legacy is defined by her profound devotion to Lord Indra and her ability to manifest divine healing through sincere spiritual practice. Apala was the daughter of the great **Maharishi Atri**. Her life was marked by significant personal misfortune: She suffered from an incurable skin disease, often identified in various texts as leprosy or a condition that prevented hair growth. Due to her physical condition, she was abandoned by her husband, Krshasava. She returned to her father's hermitage, where she dedicated herself to intense penance (*tapas*) directed toward Lord Indra. The turning point in Apala's life occurred during a ritualistic discovery. While returning from a river, she accidentally found a **Soma plant** (Somalata). Knowing Indra's fondness for Soma, she began to extract the juice: Lacking proper tools, Apala crushed the Soma plant with her teeth to extract the juice. Attracted by the sound of the grinding, which he mistook for a traditional ritual, Indra appeared before her. Apala offered him the juice directly from her mouth, a gesture he accepted out of appreciation for her purity and sincerity. Pleased by her devotion, Indra offered Apala three boons. Her requests showcased both her selflessness and her desire for restoration: That he be cured of his baldness. That her father's barren fields become fertile and fruitful. That her skin be cured, and her beauty restored. Indra fulfilled all her wishes through a unique purification ritual, passing her through the "eye" of a chariot, a cart, and a yoke. This process cast off her diseased skin—which allegedly became a reptile—and left her with a radiant, "sun-like" complexion. Apala's story serves as historical evidence that women in the early Vedic period could perform independent religious offerings and rituals.

Her life demonstrates that divinity responds to sincere *sadhana* (spiritual practice) and that one can seek divine refuge for both spiritual and material well-being. She is credited with seven mantras in the Rigveda that continue to be studied as examples of transformative faith and divine intervention.

Vishvavara is a renowned Brahmavadini and Rishika (female seer) of the Rigvedic period, celebrated for her mastery of sacred rituals and her contribution to Vedic philosophy. As a member of the illustrious **Atri** family, she is primarily known as the composer of the 28th hymn in the fifth Mandala of the **Rigveda**. Vishvavara is distinguished as one of the few women in antiquity credited with both composing sacred mantras and acting as a primary officiant in Vedic sacrifices. Her hymns are dedicated to **Agni** (the sacred fire). She describes approaching the blazing sacrificial fire at dawn, facing East with deep reverence, and offering oblations of clarified butter (ghee) using a traditional ladle. Unlike ascetics who sought total renunciation, Vishvavara's philosophy emphasizes spiritual fulfilment within the framework of family life. Her prayers include invocations for **domestic bliss**, the preservation of love, and harmonious marital relations. Known as the "Repeller of sins," she used her hymns to pray for the removal of spiritual impurities and for the prosperity of her household and lineage. Vishvavara's life provides critical historical evidence of the high status and educational freedom of women in the early Vedic era. Her ability to perform independent fire sacrifices (*Agnihotra*) suggests that, in her time, women held a recognized right to perform sacred rituals that was later restricted. Beyond her role as a seer, she was reputed to be highly skilled in music, dance, astrology, and **Yoga**. She served as a prominent Guru, particularly in the kingdom of Gandhara, where she took on numerous disciples, many of whom were women from impoverished backgrounds. She instructed them in the deepest knowledge of the Vedas, raising them to the status of recognized scholars. Vishvavara remains a symbol of the **integrated spiritual life**, proving that intellectual rigour, ritualistic precision, and domestic responsibilities can coexist to achieve spiritual liberation. Her hymns continue to be studied for their unique blend of devotional intensity and practical wisdom regarding the "Dharma" of a householder.

III. Medieval Saint-Poets (Bhakti Movement)

Andal (8th–9th Century): The only female Alvar (Vaishnava saint) from Tamil Nadu. Her works, Tiruppavai and Nachiyar Tirumozhi, express intense devotional love for Lord Vishnu.

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Andal (c. 8th or 9th century CE) is the only female figure among the twelve **Alvars**, the celebrated poet-saints of the Tamil Vaishnavite tradition. Revered as an incarnation of **Bhudevi** (the Earth Goddess), her life and poetry exemplify *Madhurya Bhakti*—the path of divine love where the devotee views the deity as their beloved. Tradition holds that the saint-poet Periyalvar (Vishnuchittar) found her as an infant under a Tulsi (holy basil) plant in the temple garden of Srivilliputhur. He named her Goda ("the gift of Earth") or Kothai ("a beautiful garland"). The Garland Legend: She is famously known as Soodi Kodutha Nachiyar ("The Lady who gave what she had worn"). As a young girl, she would secretly wear the flower garlands meant for the deity to ensure they were perfect before offering them. When her father discovered this, he was horrified, but the Lord appeared in a dream, declaring he only desired the garlands worn by Kothai. Marriage to the Divine: Refusing to wed any mortal man, Andal eventually merged with Lord Ranganatha at the Srirangam temple, symbolizing the ultimate union of the soul with the divine. Andal's two primary compositions are cornerstones of Tamil literature and Vaishnava liturgy: Thiruppavai (30 verses): Composed when she was just a teenager, these verses describe a vow (Vratha) observed during the month of Margazhi (December–January). It calls upon her companions to wake up before dawn to bathe in the river and worship the Lord, serving as a metaphor for the soul's awakening toward spiritual liberation. Nachiyar Tirumozhi (143 verses): A more intense and personal work where Andal expresses her profound longing and erotic passion for Lord Krishna. One famous section, Varanam Aayiram, vividly describes her dream of a grand wedding to the Lord, which is still sung today at South Indian Hindu weddings. Andal is often viewed as a symbol of "feminine audacity" for challenging the 8th-century societal norms of marriage and expressing her spiritual and emotional desires with radical honesty. To this day, the month of Margazhi is dedicated to her. Devotees recite the Thiruppavai daily, and her birthplace, the Srivilliputhur Andal Temple, remains one of the most significant pilgrimage sites in South India. Her works have been translated into numerous languages and continue to inspire classical dance, music, and contemporary spiritual movements like the Goda Mandali.

Mahadevi's spiritual journey was defined by Madhurya Bhava (bridal mysticism), where she viewed Lord Shiva as her only true husband. The Divine Groom: She referred to Shiva as Chennamallikarjuna ("The Beautiful Lord White as Jasmine"). Legend states she was forced to marry a local king, Kaushika, but she abandoned the palace when he interfered with her devotion.

She famously declared that while mortal husbands die and decay, her divine husband was eternal. Her decision to renounce clothing was a profound philosophical and political statement. By discarding clothes, she rejected societal constructs of shame, modesty, and the objectification of the female body. She argued that if the spirit is pure, there is no need for artificial coverings. Her long hair reportedly grew to cover her body, a symbol of divine protection. She defended her lifestyle at the Anubhava Mantapa (the world's first religious parliament) before great saints like Basavanna and Allama Prabhu, who eventually honored her with the title 'Akka' (Elder Sister). Over 430 of her Vachanas survive, serving as cornerstones of Kannada literature. She used simple, colloquial language to dismantle caste and gender barriers, asserting that spiritual worth is determined by inner devotion rather than birth. Her verses advocate for a direct relationship with the divine without the mediation of male priests or relatives. with the Divine: Toward the end of her short life, she retired to the caves of Srisailam, where she is said to have attained Aikya (final union) with her Lord.

Lal Ded, also known as **Lalleshwari** or **Lalla**, was a 14th-century mystic who became the defining voice of Kashmir's spiritual and linguistic identity. Her life and *Vakhs* (poetic utterances) represent a bridge between Kashmiri Shaivism and the Sufi traditions that were then entering the valley. Lal Ded's teachings are characterized by a profound syncretism that continues to inspire communal harmony. While rooted in Hindu Shaivism, her work deeply influenced the Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism, particularly its founder, **Nund Rishi** (Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali), who viewed her as a spiritual mother. She famously preached that there is no distinction between "Shiv" and "Allah," urging seekers to look past religious labels to find the underlying truth. Like other Bhakti saints, she was a vocal critic of external shows of piety, such as idol worship, fasting, and animal sacrifice, emphasizing instead an internal journey toward the "self". She is credited with transitioning philosophical discourse from elitist Sanskrit to the **vernacular Kashmiri language**, making complex spiritual concepts accessible to everyone. Her personal history—leaving an abusive marriage to become a wandering, often unclothed, mendicant—marked her as a radical figure who rejected gendered and social constraints to seek spiritual autonomy. Today, she remains a household name in Kashmir, respected equally by Hindus (who call her *Lalla Yogeshwari*) and Muslims (who call her *Lalla Arifa*).

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Sant Janabai (c. 1270–1350 CE) was a legendary 13th-century Marathi poet-saint of the Varkari tradition, whose life and work exemplify the radical egalitarianism of the Bhakti movement. Born into a Shudra family in Gangakhed, she spent her life as a maidservant in the household of the renowned saint Namdev in Pandharpur. Janabai's most significant contribution to Indian spirituality is her "kitchen-philosophy," which suggests that divinity is not found by escaping the world but by engaging with it through service. In her Abhangas (devotional poems), Janabai depicts Lord Vitthal (a form of Vishnu) not as an unreachable deity but as a fellow laborer who helps her grind grain, fetch water, and sweep floors.

Divine Intimacy: She often addressed the Lord in feminine terms as "Vithai" or "Vithabai," reimagining God as a mother or even a co-serving maid. This feminization of the divine challenged traditional masculine hierarchies. Popular legends describe the intensity of her devotion; in one famous instance, her cow-dung cakes were said to emit the sound of "Vitthal, Vitthal," allowing a village panchayat to identify them from those of her neighbours. Despite having no formal education, Janabai composed over 300 poems that reached a level of spiritual and literary sophistication comparable to her contemporaries. She signed her poems as "Namayachi Jani" (Namdev's Jani), a signature that originally signalled her social status as a servant but evolved into a mark of spiritual authority. Her work frequently critiqued caste and gender discrimination, asserting that God does not look at lineage (kul) but only at unwavering devotion. Janabai is often credited as the first biographer of Namdev, chronicling his life and the Varkari community from an intimate perspective. Janabai remains a household name in Maharashtra, particularly among rural women. Her songs, especially those related to grinding grain, have been preserved through an oral tradition where women sing them while performing their own daily tasks. Her life has been the subject of multiple commercial movies and she is honored with temples, such as the one in Gopalpur, where she is depicted at the grinding stone with Vitthal.

Sant Kanhopatra (15th century) was a radical and deeply venerated Marathi poet-saint of the Varkari tradition who attained spiritual liberation solely through her unwavering devotion to Lord Vitthal. Her life story is a powerful testament to the Bhakti movement's ability to transcend the most rigid social barriers of profession, caste, and gender. Born in Mangalwedha to a wealthy courtesan named Shyama, Kanhopatra was expected to follow her mother's profession as a dancer and singer. Known for her legendary beauty, she reportedly vowed only to "wed" someone more beautiful than herself.

This quest ended when she first saw the image of Lord Vitthal at Pandharpur, whose "unparalleled beauty" she immediately embraced as her divine groom. She is unique among Varkari saints as she had no male guru, no traditional family backing, and no formal lineage; she attained sainthood entirely through personal faith. Kanhopatra' s life reached its philosophical peak in her confrontation with the Badshah of Bidar. Captivated by reports of her beauty, the Badshah ordered her to become his concubine. Refusing to submit, she fled to the Vithoba temple in Pandharpur. When the King's soldiers besieged the temple, she requested one last meeting with her Lord. According to tradition, she prayed fervently before the idol and then passed away, her spirit merging with the divine. In her place, a Tarati tree is said to have miraculously grown. Today, she remains the only person whose Samadhi (mausoleum) is located within the actual temple precincts of Pandharpur. Only about thirty of her Abhangas (devotional verses) survive, but they are prized for their emotional honesty and simplicity. Unlike many other saints, her poetry reflects a deep physical vulnerability and a plea to be saved from the "unbearable bondage" of her profession. Lord of the Fallen: Her most famous verse, "Patita tu pavanahe", acknowledges Vitthal as the saviour of the fallen, asserting that even those society deems "impure" are within the scope of divine love. She expressed disgust for a society that worshipped her beauty while abhorring her profession, choosing instead the dignity of devotion.

Mirabai (c. 1498–1547) stands as one of India's most iconic and beloved poet-saints. A Rajput princess who renounced the luxuries of royal life for the path of Bhakti (devotion), she became a symbol of spiritual defiance and unconditional love for Lord Krishna. Her legacy is preserved in over a thousand bhajans (devotional songs) that continue to be a cornerstone of North Indian spirituality and literature. Born in Kudki, Rajasthan, to the Rathore Rajput family, Mirabai's spiritual inclination began in childhood. According to popular legend, at age four, she saw a marriage procession and asked who her husband would be; her mother half-jokingly pointed to an idol of Krishna and said, "He is your bridegroom". Raised by her grandfather, Rao Duda, a devout Vaishnava, she was exposed to spiritual seekers and saints from a young age, deepening her detachment from worldly pleasures. In 1516, Mirabai was married to Prince Bhoj Raj, the crown prince of Mewar. This union placed her at the heart of the powerful Sisodia dynasty, yet she remained spiritually detached. She refused to perform traditional rituals for her husband's family deity and instead spent her days singing and dancing before Krishna idols in the palace.

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After the death of her husband in 1521, her in-laws (specifically her brother-in-law Vikramaditya) allegedly grew hostile toward her unconventional behavior. Legends recount several attempts to kill her—sending a basket with a cobra (which turned into a garland) and a cup of poison (which became nectar after she offered it to Krishna). Mirabai eventually abandoned the palace, choosing to live as a wandering mendicant and publicly singing and dancing in temples—a radical act that defied Rajput notions of royal feminine modesty (purdah). Mirabai's poetry, known as Padas, is celebrated for its emotional raw intensity and simple vernacular language. Her devotion followed the path of "bridal mysticism," viewing Krishna as her only true husband. Composing in Braj Bhasha and Rajasthani, she bypassed elitist Sanskrit, making complex spiritual themes accessible to common people. By identifying herself as a disciple of Sant Ravidas (a saint from a low caste), she implicitly challenged the rigid caste and gender hierarchies of the 16th century. Mirabai spent her final years in Vrindavan and Dwarka. Legend states that in 1547, at the Dwarkadhish Temple, she miraculously merged into the idol of Lord Krishna during a moment of intense devotional singing. Mirabai's influence extends far beyond religious boundaries. During the Indian independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi held her up as a symbol of "fearless" resistance and a model for women's liberation. Her life has inspired countless films, including the 1945 classic Meera starring M.S. Subbulakshmi, which popularized her bhajans across South India.

IV. Literature Review

Scholarly interest in women within Indian philosophical traditions has evolved from exploring their presence in ancient texts to analyzing their radical socio-spiritual roles as medieval poet-saints. Recent scholarship emphasizes that women in the Vedic period were not merely observers but active participants in metaphysical inquiry. Academic works like Women in the Hindu Tradition by Radha Chakravarty (2011) highlight the distinction between Brahmavadinis (lifelong philosophical seekers) and Sadyovahas (those who pursued education until marriage). The Bhakti era is viewed in literature as a "subaltern" movement where women and lower castes redefined spirituality. Scholars like Meenakshi Jha (2021) in Subaltern Saints in India argue that female Bhakti saints heralded an egalitarian order by bypassing traditional temple hierarchies. Interpreting Devotion: The Poetry and Legacy of a Female Bhakti Saint of India (2011) by Karen Pechilis. Focuses on the 6th-century Tamil saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar, examining how her poetry serves as a radical spiritual record independent of later patriarchal biographies.

The Bhakti Movement and the Status of Women (1988) by Leela Mullatti: A specialized case study on Virasaivism (Lingayatism), documenting how the movement's precepts uniquely impacted the social and religious status of women like Akka Mahadevi. Research on the Varkari saints, particularly **Janabai**, highlights the "democratization" of philosophy.

V. Research Methodology

The study uses a Hermeneutic approach, focusing on the interpretation of historical texts and the subjective experiences of female saints. It aims to understand how these women navigated patriarchal structures to establish philosophical agency. For data Collection, Primary & Secondary Sources a critical reading of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (for Gargi/Maitreyi) and the Rigveda. Poetic Liturgy. Direct analysis of Vachanas (Akka Mahadevi), Abhangas (Janabai), and Vakhs (Lal Ded) using translations by scholars like A.K. Ramanujan. Secondary Source Review such as Consulting academic monographs like Mandakranta Bose's Women in the Hindu Tradition (2010) are used. Feminist Historiography is used to "read between the lines" of male-authored histories to recover female voices and agency. Subaltern Studies applied to medieval saints (like Janabai) to analyze how "low caste" women challenged spiritual hierarchies through vernacular language. Comparative Analysis for Contrasting the asceticism of Akka Mahadevi with the domestic mysticism of Janabai to show the diversity of female paths are used. And Identifying recurring themes such as Madhurya Bhava (bridal mysticism), Vairagya (detachment), and the rejection of social shame are studies. Etymological Study is used for analyzing Sanskrit and vernacular terms (e.g., Brahmavadini) to understand how female roles were defined and redefined over a period of time.

VI. Limitations

The original work of Vedic Sanskrit or medieval vernaculars like Old Kannada and Braj Bhasha are difficult to capture in English. Important philosophical concepts often lose their cultural "weight," leading to potential over-simplification or Westernization of their indigenous meanings. This study is restricted to very few women saints due to constraint of time and money.

VII. Findings

In conclusion, the history of women in Indian philosophical traditions is not merely a chronicle of secondary figures, but a powerful narrative of intellectual and social disruption.

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From the sharp dialectics of the Vedic seers to the radical, body-renouncing mysticism of the medieval saints, women have consistently expanded the boundaries of Indian thought.

The transition from the Brahmavadinis, who sought the ultimate reality through rigorous debate, to the Bhakti saints, who found the divine in the rhythmic toil of domestic chores or the silence of wandering, reveals a profound democratization of spirituality. Figures like Akka Mahadevi and Janabai proved that enlightenment was not the exclusive property of a cloistered male elite; rather, it was accessible through the raw honesty of the female experience—be it through the rejection of societal shame or the sanctification of manual labour.

Ultimately, these women were the original architects of personal agency in India. They transformed the domestic sphere into a sacred temple and the body into a site of philosophical inquiry. Their legacy continues to inform the contemporary struggle for gender parity, reminding us that the quest for spiritual liberation (Moksha) is inseparable from the quest for social dignity. As India moves toward a future of "women-led development," the voices of these ancient and medieval philosophers remain a vital source of strength, proving that the female intellect has always been at the heart of India's spiritual and philosophical evolution.

VIII. Scope Of The Study

The Scope of the Study defines the boundaries and the depth of your inquiry, ensuring the research remains focused and academically manageable. The study spans from the Vedic Period (c. 1500 BCE) to the Late Medieval Period (c. 17th Century CE). This allows for a comparative analysis between the Institutionalized Philosophy of the ancient era (Upanishadic seers) and the Devotional Philosophy of the Bhakti movement. The research encompasses diverse regions of the Indian subcontinent to showcase the pan-Indian nature of female spirituality.

North India: Rajasthani and Braj traditions (Mirabai). South India: Kannada Lingayat traditions (Akka Mahadevi) and Tamil Vaishnavite paths (Andal). West India: Marathi Varkari traditions (Janabai). North-West: Kashmiri Shaivite and Sufi-Rishi blends (Lal Ded). The study is restricted to specific philosophical inquiries, including, How women like Gargi used logic and debate to acquire knowledge. The nature of the Self (Atman) and the Divine as expressed in female-authored poetry. The rejection of caste, gender hierarchies, and the "body-politic" as a form of spiritual rebellion. The study focuses specifically on women who diverged from traditional domestic roles to establish an independent spiritual identity. It prioritizes those whose works survived in written or oral liturgy, such as the Vachanas, Vakhs, and Abhangas. The scope integrates Philosophy, History, and Feminist Literature. It does not merely look at these women as religious figures but treats their work as legitimate philosophical texts that offer a critique of the human condition.

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