

Janabai's Bhakti and the Making of Marathi Literature

Janabai, a poet believed to have lived in the late thirteenth-early fourteenth centuries, is one of the most popular of all of the women poets of the Marathi literary tradition, yet she has been cast as a marginal figure in the modern scholarly canonization of Vitthal-bhakti as *marathi vangmaya* and as *sant sahitya*, a scholarly predisposition that goes back at least to the hagiographical writings of the eighteenth century. This essay seeks to look at bhakti through the eyes of Janabai's poetry, and in doing so, draw out the elements of the literary tradition that are shaped by and through the work of a marginalized feminine imagination and idiom. Such a reconsideration of bhakti does show that Janabai and the feminine imagination more generally are amongst bhakti's primary shapers but only because of and not in spite of their often self-proclaimed marginality.