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Literary Resolutions and Ethical Conflicts in Devotional Poetry

In this paper, i consider devotional poetry in Brajbhasha and Dakkhni, written in the 17th and 18th centuries in the north and south of India respectively. Though born in the ethos of idol worship, polytheism and legitimacy for social stratification, this poetry criticises the ethos through the philosophical and religious vocabulary of monism and pantheism, expressing devotion through the aesthetic mode of erotic love. Thus, the thematic s, the languages chosen and the repertoire of signification available are apparently contrary to the beliefs and practices of the poet's professed religion: hence rather than being an instrument for conflict resolution, this literature itself signals a conflict in the established belief system which it exposes through its aesthetic function. I enquire whether the configuration and economy of literature as an experiential domain is incommensurate with the domain of institutionalised religion, and whether literature as a textual practice may be treated as an ethical discourse when it resists being freighted by substantive or materialist ontologies.