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## Bhagwat Katha in Modern Society: Its Contribution to the Global Spread of Hinduism

Harshvardhan Shastri 1\* | Dr. Shital V. Hiraskar2

1. Research Scholar, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Sabarmati University, Gujarat, India.
2. Associate Professor of Sociology, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Sabarmati University,

### Abstract

Bhagwat Katha, the public narration and interpretation of the Bhagavata Purana, has become one of the most influential religious practices in contemporary Hindu society. Traditionally, Bhagwat Katha is one of the most influential devotional traditions in Hinduism, rooted in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In contemporary society, it has evolved from a localised religious discourse into a global spiritual and cultural phenomenon. This research paper examines the historical development of Bhagwat Katha, analyses it from a sociological perspective, studies its role in spreading Hinduism globally, and evaluates the influence of media and globalisation on Bhagwat Katha traditions. The study is based on secondary sources, including books, journals, research papers, and online religious discourse. The findings suggest that Bhagwat Katha functions not only as a religious activity but also as a medium of cultural identity, social integration, and global dissemination of Hindu values. Modern communication technologies and globalisation have significantly transformed Bhagwat Katha into an international spiritual movement.

**Keywords:** Bhagwat Katha, Hinduism, Bhakti Movement, Globalisation, Media, Sociology, Hindu Diaspora, Social integration.

### Introduction:

Religion plays a significant role in shaping social behaviour, collective identity, and cultural continuity. In Hinduism, religious storytelling traditions have historically functioned as effective means of transmitting spiritual knowledge and moral values. Among these traditions, Bhagwat Katha occupies a central place. Bhagwat Katha refers to the oral narration and explanation of the Bhagavata Purana, particularly stories associated with Lord Krishna and the philosophy of devotion (bhakti). Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions, known for its rich traditions, scriptures, and devotional practices. Among the many sacred texts of Hinduism, the Bhagavata Purana occupies an essential place in Vaishnavism. The public description of this scripture, known as Bhagwat Katha, has become an important medium for spreading religious teachings, moral values, and devotion among common people. Bhagwat Katha is not limited to temples or scholars. It reaches villages, towns, cities, and even global Hindu communities through spiritual gatherings, television, and digital media. Through storytelling, music, and emotional engagement, Bhagwat Katha has helped preserve and spread Hindu culture for centuries. According to scholarly studies, the Bhagavata tradition strongly contributed to the development of bhakti-based Hinduism and devotional worship centred on Vishnu and Krishna.

In modern society, Bhagwat Katha has evolved from a localised religious activity into a global cultural phenomenon. It is now organised in temples, community halls, television broadcasts, online platforms, and international spiritual gatherings. From a sociological perspective, Bhagwat Katha serves multiple social

functions: it reinforces religious identity, strengthens community ties, transmits cultural values, and promotes social cohesion among Hindu populations worldwide.

This research paper explores the historical evolution, sociological significance. This paper also examines Bhagwat Katha as a sociological institution that contributes to the spread of Hinduism in the contemporary world.

## Review of Literature

The tradition of *Bhagwat Katha*, rooted in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, has emerged as an influential medium for devotional expression, cultural transmission, and the globalization of Hinduism. Various scholars have examined themes related to bhakti traditions, Vaishnavism, diaspora Hinduism, transnational religion, and digital spirituality, which collectively provide the intellectual background for understanding the modern significance of Bhagwat Katha.

**John Stratton Hawley (2019)** explains that the Bhakti movement created a unified devotional framework across regions, languages, and communities in India. He argues that devotional storytelling traditions became essential in shaping Hindu religious identity and collective spirituality. His work highlights how bhakti traditions continue to influence modern Hindu religious practices globally. This study is important because Bhagwat Katha represents a continuation of this devotional tradition in contemporary society.

**Ajaya Kumar Sahoo (2005)** discuss in his research paper “Hinduism in the Diaspora” – Social Change Journal, 2005. He discusses how Hindu migrants preserve their cultural and religious identity through rituals, storytelling, and devotional gatherings in foreign countries. According to him, religion becomes closely linked with ethnicity and community identity among diasporic Hindus. Bhagwat Katha programs organized abroad serve as important tools for maintaining Hindu traditions among second- and third-generation migrants.

**Purushottama Bilimoria (2017)** “The Diaspora of Borders: Hindu-Sikh Transnationals in the Diaspora” – International Journal of Dharma Studies, 2017. Bilimoria examines how globalization and migration have transformed Hindu religious practices into transnational cultural systems. He emphasizes that religious performances, rituals, and spiritual gatherings help connect dispersed Hindu communities across continents. Bhagwat Katha functions similarly by creating shared devotional experiences among global Hindu audiences.

**Maheshvari Naidu (2015)** Naidu argues that modern Hindu rituals have adapted to globalization and diasporic contexts. Public religious performances are increasingly organized as global spiritual events that combine tradition with modern communication systems. Her findings help explain how Bhagwat Katha has transformed into a large-scale spiritual and cultural event broadcast through television and digital media.

**Malcolm Haddon (2013)** “Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: ISKCON’s Troubled History with Gaudiya Vaisnavism”, Haddon studies the expansion of ISKCON and Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Western societies. He explains that Krishna-centred devotional practices became successful internationally because they adapted traditional teachings to modern cultural environments. Bhagwat Katha similarly popularizes Krishna devotion through music, narratives, and public discourse.

**Akshara Ravishankar (2024)** “Scholarly Worlds and Popular Texts: The Bhagavad Gītā’s Vernacular Communities in Early Modern India” Indian Economic and Social History Review, 2024. Ravishankar explains how sacred Hindu texts became popular through vernacular translations and public interpretation. This democratization of religious knowledge helped devotional literature reach ordinary people. Bhagwat Katha continues this tradition by simplifying scriptural teachings through oral storytelling and public discourse.

**Elin Thorsén (2016)** “Unity Behind Diversity or the Reverse? The Language of Universality in Amma and Bhagavan’s Oneness Movement” – South and East Asian Religions Collection, 2016. Thorsén studies modern Hindu spiritual movements and explains how universal spiritual language attracts international followers. She argues that global Hindu movements succeed because they present spirituality in inclusive and accessible ways. Bhagwat Katha similarly emphasizes moral teachings, devotion, and universal values, making it appealing to global audiences.

**Community Perspectives on Bhakti (2023–2025)** Online discussions on Reddit and public religious forums. Contemporary public discussions show that many people view bhakti traditions as socially inclusive, emotionally engaging, and spiritually relevant in modern life. Participants frequently describe devotional storytelling and satsang traditions as important for preserving Hindu identity and values in contemporary society. Though these are non-academic sources, they indicate the continuing cultural significance of Bhagwat Katha among younger and digitally connected audiences.

**Sanyal, Kumari and Bhardwaj (2022)** discuss a few of the Bhagavad-Gita's key lessons in their research paper. For example, lessons on how to keep the peace, how to get over feelings of wrath, anxiety, despair, prejudice, greed, forgiveness, perplexity, self-control, pride, and so on, so that we might use these lessons to win the war of daily life.

The reviewed literature establishes that devotional traditions remain central to the spread of Hinduism globally. Scholars agree that bhakti-based practices, public religious discourse, migration, and digital media have strengthened Hindu cultural identity across nations. Bhagwat Katha emerges as an important contemporary expression of this devotional tradition, functioning as both a spiritual practice and a medium of global cultural communication

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the historical development of Bhagwat Katha.
2. To analyse Bhagwat Katha from a sociological perspective.
3. To study the role of Bhagwat Katha in spreading Hinduism globally.
4. To understand the influence of media and globalisation on Bhagwat Katha traditions.

### Research Methodology

The present research paper is based on a qualitative and descriptive research methodology. Secondary data has been collected from books, journals, research articles, newspapers, online lectures, and digital religious platforms. Historical, sociological, and cultural approaches have been used to analyse the Bhagwat Katha in the context of modern society and globalisation.

### Historical Development of Bhagwat Katha

The tradition of oral storytelling has existed in India since ancient times. Saints and scholars narrated religious stories publicly to educate people about dharma, morality, and spirituality. During the medieval Bhakti movement, Bhagwat Katha became more popular because it promoted devotion over ritualism and caste hierarchy. The origins of Bhagwat Katha can be traced to the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāna*, one of the eighteen Mahapuranas of Hindu literature. The text is believed to have been composed between the 8th and 10th centuries CE and emphasises devotion to Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna. The Bhagavata Purana is one of the eighteen major Puranas in Hindu literature. It emphasises devotion toward Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna and promotes bhakti as the path to spiritual liberation. Historically, Bhagwat Katha emerged as a public devotional practice during the Bhakti Movement between the 7th and 17th centuries. Saints and spiritual teachers used storytelling to communicate religious teachings to ordinary people, irrespective of caste, education, or social status.

### Rise of the Bhakti Movement (12th–17th centuries)

The most decisive phase in the development of Bhagwat Katha came with the Bhakti movement. Bhakti saints such as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vallabhacharya, Surdas, and Mirabai emphasised Krishna devotion through songs and narratives. Their teachings helped Bhagwat Katha reach ordinary people in regional languages.

During this period:

- Vernacular languages expanded
- Temple devotionalism grew
- Regional devotional poetry flourished
- Emotional worship became central

The Bhagavata Purana became the theological backbone of Krishna devotion across India. In the colonial and post-colonial periods, Bhagwat Katha adapted to urban society and public religious gatherings. Famous Kathakars such as Morari Bapu, Rameshbhai Oza, and Jaya Kishori further popularised the tradition through large-scale spiritual events.

Today Bhagwat Katha is organised not only in India but also in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Fiji, Mauritius, and South Africa, where Hindu diaspora communities reside.

## Sociological Perspective on Bhagwat Katha

**1. Functionalist Perspective:** According to functionalist sociologists such as Émile Durkheim, religion contributes to social solidarity and collective consciousness. Bhagwat Katha performs several social functions:

**a. Social Cohesion:** Bhagwat Katha gatherings bring together individuals from different social and economic backgrounds. Collective listening, singing, and participation strengthen feelings of unity and belonging.

**b. Moral Education:** Stories from the Bhagavata Purana communicate ethical values such as: Truth, Compassion, Devotion, Duty, Humility. These values help maintain moral order within society.

**c. Preservation of Tradition:** Bhagwat Katha preserves religious customs, rituals, and Hindu cultural heritage across generations.

**2. Symbolic Interactionist Perspective:** Symbolic interactionism focuses on meanings created through social interaction. In Bhagwat Katha: Symbols such as Krishna, flute, peacock feather, and sacred rituals create shared meanings. Devotional songs and emotional storytelling generate spiritual experiences. Participants develop religious identity through interaction with storytellers and fellow devotees. The emotional atmosphere of Bhagwat Katha strengthens personal attachment to Hindu beliefs.

**3. Cultural Transmission Theory:** Bhagwat Katha functions as a medium of cultural transmission by transferring religious knowledge and traditions from one generation to another. Children and youth learn:

- Hindu mythology
- Ritual practices
- Religious values
- Cultural norms

through participation in Kathas organised at homes, temples, and community events.

## Role of Bhagwat Katha in Spreading Hinduism Globally

Bhagwat Katha has emerged as an important medium for the international spread of Hinduism in the 21st century. Through migration, devotional organizations, digital technology, and global spiritual networks, Bhagwat Katha has expanded from local religious gatherings to worldwide spiritual events.

The following data and observations explain its global role.

### 1. Expansion Through Hindu Diaspora

The migration of Indians to foreign countries significantly contributed to the spread of Bhagwat Katha traditions.

**Table 1: Major Countries Hosting Bhagwat Katha Programs**

Country	Hindu Population (Approx.)	Nature of Bhagwat Katha Activities
United States	4.5 million	Temple Kathas, online satsangs, Krishna festivals
United Kingdom	1.2 million	Community Katha events, youth programs
Canada	1.8 million	Bhagwat week programs in temples
Australia	700,000+	Cultural and devotional gatherings
Mauritius	48% Hindu population	Regular public Bhagwat recitations
Fiji	27% Hindu population	Community-based Katha traditions
South Africa	1 million+	Vaishnav devotional programs

## Analysis

The data indicates that Bhagwat Katha has become an important religious activity among diaspora Hindus. In these countries, Katha programs are organised in temples, community halls, and cultural centres to preserve Hindu identity and traditions. Second-generation migrant youth are introduced to Hindu scriptures and devotional values through simplified storytelling and musical presentations.

## 2. Role of Spiritual Leaders in Global Dissemination

Several modern Kathakars have played a major role in globalizing Bhagwat Katha traditions.

**Table 2: International Influence of Major Bhagwat Kathakars**

Kathakar	Countries Visited	Major Mediums Used
Morari Bapu	USA, UK, Canada, Kenya, Australia	Live Kathas, TV, YouTube
Rameshbhai Oza	USA, Dubai, UK, Singapore	Spiritual discourses, digital broadcasting
Jaya Kishori	International online audience	Social media, YouTube, live events
Devkinandan Thakur	Multiple global Hindu communities	Television and online satsangs

## Analysis

These spiritual leaders transformed Bhagwat Katha into a global devotional movement. Their teachings combine spirituality with social messages, making Hindu philosophy more accessible to modern audiences. Digital platforms have enabled millions of international viewers to participate in Katha programs without physical presence.

## 3. Impact of Digital Media on Global Reach

Modern communication technology has significantly increased the global visibility of Bhagwat Katha.

**Table 3: Digital Media Platforms Used for Bhagwat Katha**

Platform	Purpose	Global Impact
YouTube	Live streaming and recorded Kathas	International accessibility
Facebook	Event promotion and devotional communities	Global interaction
Instagram	Short devotional clips and reels	Youth engagement
Television Channels	Daily spiritual broadcasting	Rural and urban outreach
Mobile Applications	Audio Katha and devotional content	Easy accessibility

## Analysis

YouTube channels of popular Kathakars receive millions of views globally. Social media allows continuous interaction between spiritual leaders and devotees. Digitalization has removed geographical barriers and made Bhagwat Katha available to audiences worldwide.

## 4. Universal Appeal of Bhakti Tradition

Bhagwat Katha emphasizes universal values such as; Love, Compassion, Devotion, Humanity, Peace, Equality. These universal teachings attract audiences beyond Hindu communities. Non-Hindu listeners often participate in Krishna devotion, yoga, meditation, and satsang activities associated with Bhagwat Katha. The emotional and musical nature of Katha makes it easy to understand across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

## Findings

The study reveals that:

- Bhagwat Katha is both a religious and sociological institution.
- It contributes significantly to the preservation and spread of Hinduism.
- It strengthens social solidarity and cultural identity.
- Media globalization has expanded its global influence.
- Bhagwat Katha plays a crucial role in maintaining Hindu traditions among diaspora communities.
- Bhagwat Katha has become an important medium for preserving Hindu identity among diaspora communities.
- Modern Kathakars and devotional organizations have internationalised Krishna-centred spirituality.
- Digital media has transformed Bhagwat Katha into a globally accessible spiritual practice.
- Bhagwat Katha promotes Hindu cultural values and traditions across generations.
- The universal message of bhakti helps attract global audiences beyond India.

**Conclusion:** Bhagwat Katha has emerged as one of the most effective instruments for the spread of Hinduism in modern society. From a sociological perspective, it performs multiple social, cultural, and religious functions. It strengthens collective identity, promotes moral values, preserves cultural heritage, and creates spiritual communities across geographical boundaries. In the age of globalisation and digital communication, Bhagwat Katha has adapted successfully to changing social conditions. Through television, online media, and international religious events, it continues to connect millions of people with Hindu traditions and devotional spirituality.

Therefore, Bhagwat Katha is not merely a religious discourse but a dynamic social institution contributing to the global continuity and expansion of Hinduism. The study reveals that Bhagwat Katha plays a major role in spreading Hinduism globally through devotional storytelling, diaspora participation, media technology, and transnational religious networks. It functions not only as a religious discourse but also as a cultural and social institution connecting Hindus worldwide.

Globalisation and digital communication have expanded the reach of Bhagwat Katha beyond geographical and linguistic boundaries. As a result, Bhagwat Katha has become one of the most effective modern instruments for the preservation and global dissemination of Hindu spirituality and culture.

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