CHAPTER XIV

MIRABAI: A PROTESTANT MISTREL OF MEDIAEVAL INDIA
India has a great tradition of worshipping the creator of the universe attributing Him in human form from time immemorial. The Vaishnavism is nothing but the worshipping of Visnu, the protector of the universe in the anthropomorphic form in the different personal names like Narayana, Visnu, Rama and Krsna in non-violent manner. "In trying to visualize the unknown, the imagination must clothe it attributes analogous to the known". 1 The worshipping of the Lord of the universe was in two different processes, one in attributing Him devoting His qualities which is called Nirguna in the Sanskrit term; another was full of humanly qualities which is under the psychic control of the common people. "There cannot be any doubt that the supreme Reality cannot be 'Saguna' in its ultimate form, for that would limit it. On this point there is no confusion in the Indian mind. 2 Swami Yatiswarananda writes in his adventures

2. (The) Shagavata Bakti Cult - Ramnarayan Vyas, Delhi, 1977 p 5
in Vedanta: "The universal form of the Lord was overwhelming to the devotee (Arjuna). He longed for a humanized form with which he could establish a loving human relationship, regarding the Lord as father, mother, friend or beloved. Krishna manifested himself as teacher. This is what every devotee seeks at first. But as he becomes established in divine love, the Lord, the supreme Guru reveals to him, in due course, His manifold forms, His universal forms, His and also His transcendent aspect beyond all name and form." 3

There were two distinct groups of Vaisnavite schools of thoughts, those who worshipped Saguna Isvara (Lord attributing with form and qualities) in Rama and Krishna. They have their separate entitles with an interlinked approach. The ways of worshipping the Lord of the universe in the non-violent means practically missed during the rising hours of Buddhism and Jainism but regained social confident after advent of Ramanujacarya in South India in the twelfth century. Ramananda regenerated Vaisnavite thought and revitalized the ways and means of a true Vaisnavite dedicated life.

Without the application of religion on social sphere, it is meaningless. Ramananda made the Vaisanavite thought meaningful. His thoughts on the religious concept gained tremendous impact on the social causes for the downtrodden people of economically poor class of lowly strata. The pollens of his thoughts spread all over India through his teachings of devotionalism like a wildfire even during his life time of 111 years and after his physical demise and made a religious renaissance in Indian Soil. According to Max Arthur Macauliffe Ramananda was born in 1017 A.D. 4, but to Dr. Grierson Ramananda was born in 1299 A.D. and passed away in the year 1410 A.D. "Ramananda was the fountainhead of the Hindu religious revival in North-India, his message of Simple devotion and social equality spread all over North-India, mainly through the songs of Kabir". 5.

4. (The) Sikh religion - M. A. Macauliffe - New Delhi, 1978 Vol. 6, p 94.
5. Meditation and spiritual life - Swami Yatiswrnananada, Bangalore, 1979 p 629
The songs of Mirabai also bear testimony to the teachings of Ramananda. She was a Krsnavite Vaisnava. But she was the disciple of his son's disciple Ravidasa. There is much uncertainty about her exact year of birth. But it is true that she was a historical figure and she had her physical existence during the reign of Akbar, the Great. She was the scion of an orthodox royal family of Rajputana and also married to a royal family in the same state but she was the first lady who delinked the relation with high royal family and mixed with the common masses as a roving mendicant.

Mira was a great poetess. She was the daughter of Raja Ratan Singh Rathor, second son of Duda and grandson of Rao Jadha founder of Jodhpur.

According to A. J. Alstan:

'Mira was born about 1498 A.D. as the only daughter of Ratan Singh, a Rajput noble of the house of Ratan. Her birth took place in a village in the neighbourhood of Merta, a small fortress-city some forty to fifty miles north-end of the city of Ajmeer'.

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Historians are different in their opinion about her year of birth. Her biography has a leaning with her hagiography. However one learned writer 'Anna' in his pseudonym puts the life of Mirabai in his pen:

"Mira Bai born in 1547 A.D. was the daughter of Raja Ratan Singh of Khruki in Mewar, 40 miles east of Jodhpur. When she was a child of three, one day, she took a smooth pebble and asked her mother, who was busy her household work, 'Mother, what is this?' The mother replied, "a stone". She threw it away. A little later she brought another pebble and asked the same question and the mother gave the same reply. Mira threw it away. Bringing yet another pebble, she repeated the question to her mother, and in her annoyance the mother said, "It is your husband". Mira accepted the statement and began to treat the pebble as her beloved and to worship to it.

A little later, a sannyasin came to her house with an image of Giridhar Krishna. Mira thought her wishes were fulfilled by the arrival of that image in her own house, she wanted to have it and to worship it."
But Sannyasin hesitated to part with it. She began to weep and refused to take her food. The stranger then gave it to her and blessed her. Henceforth, she became greatly absorbed in the worship of Giridhar Krishna. When she was a child of five, she witnessed a marriage profession and asked her mother, "Where is my bridegroom?" The Mother said, "Why, have you not already got your bridegroom in Giridhara whom you worship?" Mira felt convinced that Giridhara was her Lord and thereupon her prayers were intensified. She cried, "These eyes of mine demand to see your beauty, pray appear before them. Now that your sweet face is ever the subject of any thought how can I live if you deny me sight of your?" In one of her songs she says, "I have lost my sleep. The whole night I passed waiting for the beloved without sight of him. My heart is restless. My body is emaciated and I am without peace, yet the name of the dear one is on my lips. Like fish pinning for water Mira longs her beloved."

However she was married to Kanwar Bhojraj a short-lived son of Rana Sanga in the year 1510 A.C. 8. This marriage proved unhappy. After marriage ceremony was over she refused to go with her husband Bhojraj to her father-in-law's house without idol of Giridhar Lal. She wept so much for the idol, that she lost her sensual perception and finally she obtained permission to have her idol with her.

"On arriving at her new home, her mother-in-law, the Rani, had hardly paid her the rites of hospitality, when she asked her to worship Durga, a goddess of a totally different temper from the playful Krishna. Mira Bai replied that she had devoted her body to Giridhar Lal, she would bow her head to none but to him".—9.

The royal house of Rana pressed her much to accept the ideals of their family tradition but Mira refused to bow down her head to the pressure and persecution. Her mother-in-law reported to the Rana against her:

9. Ibid. p 344.
"This daughter-in-law of ours is worthless, for on the very day of her arrival she refuseth to obey me and putteth me to shame. It is clear what our future relations are to be". 10

The Rana himself was irritated against his daughter-in-law and determined to punish her but the queen resisted him for the sake of family and allowed to stay there in a separate apartment. Regaining her confidence in her deity, usually she began to spend her time in worshipping Gopala Krishna and composing songs in praising the Giridhara Gopala, casually she used to meet saints of different sects particularly of the devotional school. She pointed her picture of persecution by the relatives in one of her composed hymn:

'O my friend, my mind is attached to Krishan; I shall not be restrained from loving him. If any one give me a reproach, I will give a hundred thousand in return.

My mother-in-law is severe, my sister-in-law obstinate; how can I endure this misery?

10. Ibid. pp 344 - 345.
Mira for the sake of the lord Giridhar would endure the obloquy of the world. 11. 

She was the first Indian Lady from the royal family of an orthodox Hindu family in the mediaeval India, who broke the shackles of social bondage and took her teachings from lowly born saints. It is said that she was initiated by Ravidasa, a cobbler saint. Ravidasa's spiritual teacher was kamal, son of Kabirdasa. It is also suggested that she benefitted from Sri Tulasidas, a mystic saint of Banaras and Sri Rupa Goswami, a direct disciple of Sri Chaitanya. But modern historians disapprove this including her association with Akbar the great. 12.

"She moved freely in the company of holy men, not deterred in the least by unmerited criticism for it". 13.

11. Ibid. pp 344 - 345. 
13. Ibid. p 328
Thus She sang:

Now none else but Him can I claim as own
I forsook my father and my mother and all those that were dear to me
in the company of Sadhus I sacrificed my world and my modesty
I rushed to meet a saint when one appeared, and wept when the worldly crossed my path
With tears I nourished the everlasting creeper of love
In my I met the deliverers
The saint and deliverers -

Thus she revolted against the orthodox royal family. Mira Bai paved the way for cultural entry of Muslim thoughts into Hinduism.

Mira Bai painted the picture of nothingness or the voidness of the religious practices of medieval north India; Thus she composed:
'If through daily bath one could attain Hari, then what about the aquatic animals?
If by eating fruits and roots one could attain Hari, then what about bats and monkeys?
If by worshipping the Tulasi (holy basil) plant one could attain Hari, then I would worship the Tulasi grove.
If by worshipping stone one could attain Hari then I would worship the mountain,
If by drinking milk one could attain Hari then what about the calves?

(quoted from the writings of Swami Yatiswarananda Meditation and spiritual life).

This was her conception on Salvation. She raised the pertinent question on the progress of spiritual advancement of so-called protagonists of the religious sects of the age. Her elevated consciousness of religious life brought her nearer to the philosophical thoughts of the safiatic saints of the age. Her thought on spiritual life no doubt opened an avenue for the Hindu-Muslim religious understanding.
Mira Bai was one of the foremost exponents of Bhakti-Cult and inspired poetess. 14.

She composed most of her poems in Vrajabhakha or Braja-bhasa mixed with Rajasthani. Through the medium of her composition she conveyed her message of God to all.

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14. Great women of mother India.
Swami Madhavananda & N. C. Majumdar,
Cal., 1953.