CHAPTER VII

NAMADEVA: A VALMIKI OF
MAHARAstra IN MEDIAEVAL
AGE.
Namadaya: Valmiki of Maharashtra in Medieval age:

His early life:

The great mystic saint of Maharashtra was born on an auspicious day in the year 1270 at Narsingpur, a small village near Deogiri, now in Satara district. His father Damaset was an upright man and a tailor by profession and belonged to a low class. His mother Gonabai was a pious lady. They were devoted to Lord Govinda (the Lord of universe; the monistic meaning of Govinda means he, who attracts all being nearer to Him) and had a household deity Govinda. They shifted to Pandharpur, a holy place in Maharashtra, now in the Sholapur district with their all belongings. Damaset was a tailor by profession. But they never took daily bread without offering daily prayers to their Lord of the heart.

Saul turn into St Paul

There is a sanskrit saying written by an anonymous authors:
Durganah sajjans bhuyat sajjanah Santimaṃputat /
Santo mychyet Vandhawyo muktanschanyat Vīmocaśyet //
'May the evil minded become virtuous,
May the virtuous attained tranquility,
May the tranquil be free from bondage,
May the freed make others free'.

This prayer came in truth in the life of Namadeva, Namadeva influenced the north India and the Punjab, a land of confluence of five rivers with his teachings of universal love for all fellow beings. But this man, Namadeva was not a man of religion, a person of clean path of ethical process. Dr. J. N. Farquhar really said: 'the real leader of the movement (Bhakti), notably Namadeva and Trilochan from the Maharashtra country. 1

Damaset was a low caste man of Shimpi, a tailor. But man, with a large heart, though he was poor. He consulted astrologers after birth of his own son Namadeva

1. (An) outline of the religious literature of India, 2nd ed. Delhi, J. N. Farquhar, 1956.
those who predicted the bright future course of life of
the newly born child. Damaset was delighted. But un-
fortunately the prophecy of the astrologer did not
prove true in the first phase of life of Namadeva. The son of
pious Damaset with the growth of his year became a noto-
rious highway dacoit and a terror to the people of locality.
Murder, looting, burning of the dwelling houses became
a part of his nefarious activity. But an event changed
his course of life.

On one occasion on the special worshipping of
the deity Goddess Ambodhia (the form of Mother goddess
Durga) in the fourteenth day of dark fortnight, devotees
thronged to the temple of the goddess in the deep forest.
A poor and unhappy widow came to the temple with a child
in her lap in search of food. She was without any food for
the two days and came all the way on foot from the distant
village of Padna. Her husband was a military lieutenant
under the kind of Deogiri Ramadeva Rao, a contemporary to
Malik Kafur the army Commander of Allauddin Khilji. After
the brutal murder of her husband by Namadeva and his gang,
she lost her all. When she was lamenting on her fate
and was cursing the dacoit. Namadeva, with his eighty
four associates came to the temple as cavaliers. When
Namadeva heard the story related with her and the misbehaviour of her relatives those who deprived her of all her wealth. Namadeva shocked at his own behaviour. He prepared to make an end of his sinful life by sacrificing his physical body to the altar of the deity. He entered the temple without maintaining any formality of the temple and thrust a sword on his throat, however he escaped but oozing of blood was so profuse, that the image of the deity pulled with blood. This incident changed his way of life and he was granted with the blissful to cherish his life to the cause of humanity.

Repentance burnt his heart:

He left Ambodhia temple with the tears flowed down incessantly from his eyes and left for Pandarpur to Vittalji's (the Lord Vishu) temple. He embraced the non-violent life of Vaisnava and he was awarded with the name of Namadeva. He passed most part of his life in the temple of Vittalji by contemplating on Him, repeating His name (Nama). But his rapid progress in spiritual path perhaps made him a little Vain.

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2. (The) Saint of India—Sw. Tottvananda p 323. Cal., n.d. p 151

He faced a second test:

One day Jnanadeva came to the temple of Vittalji with his brothers and sister, Muktibai. Muktibai, a mystic girl observed the stain of Vanity in Namadeva and with an intention to teach him a lesson she ordered Gora Kumar, a potter to test the spiritual depthness of assembled saints. Gora, stroked them all in the heads of the saints, who gathered there to give an Ovation to Jnanadeva and his associates. When he came to Namadeva he said that 'pot' was unbaked. Only one in the group. 4  

Humiliated Namadeva went to Visova Khechara for higher spiritual guide. Visova gave him initiation and blessed him with further instruction for the spiritual progress. Returning from Barsigram from the abode of his Visova Khechara and again met with Gora Kumar (kunhar in Maharastrian language). He also advised him to remain immersed in the Ocean of bliss all the time. Finally they all joined the party of Jnanadev and set out for a pilgrimage. Jnanadeva passed away immaturely learning Namadeva was a worth man to preach the glory of God and to spread the path of devotionalism in the Maharashtra and her adjacent areas.

4. Ibid.
Teaching of Namadeva:

Namadeva was able to attain highest spiritual goal, through his intense love and devotion to his personal God Vittalnatha. But 'he experienced His immanence in all created things'. Namadeva, God-intoxicated as he was, he felt the presence of God in every living beings. The story is told that one day he ran after a dog with a piece of dry bread or the curd pot (one main food item of Maharastria) in his hand and shouted: Oh, Lord wait, let me curd (or butter) the bread'.

Namadeva was a man of higher level. Yet he had shown much of mysticism out of his compasion to others. Once a labour who died under the debris of a wall, he saved his life miraculously. The name of the labour was Chika, he was a devout devotee and a fellower of Jnanadeva a man of untouchable clan. Or it may be interpreted in the language of history that he enliven the untouchable devotee by showing his love to him by burying his bones at the campus of holy place of Pandarpur.

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
'The cultural heritage of India' just records his deep sense for spiritual love which included with the love for humanism:

"Intense love—warm affection like that of an infant for its mother, great fear and even bitter hatred of God are all known to have been effective means of mystic experience. The emotion should be all-absorbing, leaving no scope for any other emotion in the heart. There have been great devotees in Maharashtra, who might be cited as illustrations of all these different methods of God realisation. Even the greatest Sinner of enemies of God, the most confirmed atheists have been suddenly turned into great saints. It merely illustrates the psychological principle that strong emotion that invades the whole region of a person's consciousness drives away all other emotions......'7.

The later spiritual life of Namadeva was the result of such conversions based on emotion have the instances of the past. Ratnakara was a robber a little sense of consciousness and emotion changed him to a great poet Valmiki. Chandasoke was changed to a saint with the touch of an event, the crying of a beleaved widow in an emaciated condition. He, himself dedicated his life to the service

of the humanity's sake and taught them the truth of
the eternality of living being. His thought reached
the rear corners of North-India and influence the
mystic saints of the devotional movements in the mediaeval
history of India. He was a widely travelled man. It is
said that he stayed at village of Gheman in Punjab for
a considerable years. There he constructed a monastery.
Guru Nanak Coined some valuable 'Abhangas' (hymns de-
dicated in praise of the Lord). Later all these com-
pletes in form of songs were inserted in number of near
about sixty in the holy scriptures the Guru Granth Sahib',
some of his composed songs bear the philosophical taste
of Sankaracharya an exponent of monistic philosophy.

The concept of God of Namadeva was not God of
inert. His conception on God was described in one of his
Abhangas : 'He is one (but) fills and encompasses many;
whenever you look you find him there. He painted the
picture of God in the sweet songs composed by him and
never distinguished them in different personality cult.
He called Him 'Govinda' Rama, Murari (Krṣṇa). According
to him human heart is the ḍv citadel of God'. He attributed
the ideas which depicted in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita and
declared the truthfulness of being sacrificed to the cause
of other beings. Thus he said : ' They are like the trees
who do not know honour or dishonour, who render shade and give fruits equally to those who cut them or serve
them with sweetened milk. Unaffected equally by honour
and dishonour, to them a field of Gold, a clod of earth,
and the dung-heap are equal worth, or better of no worth
at all'. 9.

It was nothing but a message to the humanity's sake. Such idea was spread by the two saintly personali­ties in Bengal Ramaprasad and Sri Ramakrishna from the last phase of eighteenth Century.

His depth of devotion:

He was one of earliest saint of the Bhakti era, who showed his unfathomable devotion towards the Almighty. It was shown by him only to make an effective touch to the common people of the mediaeval age. In one song he said:

"As a bee's heart might be set upon the fragrance of a flower, or as a fly might take resort to
honey, similarly does my mind cling to God". 10

In other Abhanga he said:

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
'As boys playing on kites do not bother about twain up keep eyes on the kites, as women carrying on waterpots one upon another keep, while walking their mind fixed on the pots, as unchaste women always think of their lovers wherever they be, as thieves think of others gold, as misers think of their hoarded wealth, so a man should always keep his mind fixed on the mediation of God whatever his profess may be. He is the cause of his own misery. Sour seeds do not yield sweet fruits, water does flow from powered stone'.

He voiced against the social vices:

Perhaps Namadave was the first saint who protested in social manner against the prejudices of orthodox upper class Hindus, social vices of untouchability, polytheism and idol worshipping. And he advocated in favour of truthfulness and sincere life, the purity of societal base. His dedication of life to the altar of the Almighty turned towards the service of humanity. This was his outcome of interaction with the suristic thought which was then prevailing in North-India particularly in the Punjab.

11. Jr. from original Marathi by V.A. Thiagarajan.
Namadeva in his different Abhangas' defended the professionalism of the lowly castes. He also praised own profession as he said:

"I am all time sewing the name of Almighty with 'gold-needle' and 'silk thread'."

**His love for ethical life:**

Namadeva admitted of fault of his being fellow with the lowliness of life and his assassinations of eight-four soldiers in lone encounter in a highway robbery. The lamentation for his misdoings changed his course of life. He stressed much on the advancement of ethical life in his own clan 'Varakari Sampradaya' (a religious sect founded by him in self-surrendering mood). He was a strict disciplinarian, a saint of Nirguna (attributed God, without any worldly qualities) school. So he praised God and asked nothing: He said:

'If thou give me an empire, what glory shall it be to me?
If thou cause me to beg, how shall it degrade me?
Worship God, O my soul and thou shalt obtain the dignity of salvation,
And no more transmigration shall await thee, 
O God, Thou didst create all men and lead 
then astray in error; 
He to whom thou givest understanding knoweth thee'.

Namadeva was a wide-traveller. He was not inclined to speak his mother tongue only. Whereabout he went he used the local tongue as a vehicle to convert hearts of the common people in the religion of devotionalism. He was an illiterate person in term of modern concept of education but he composed nicely the Abhangas in Sadhukkari korivoli and the language of 'Brajbhakha' .

Here is a specimen of his poem mixed in regional languages:

"Kabahun khir khand gheebo na bhabai //
Kabahun ghar ghar tuk mangaboi //
Kabahun Kuran Chane binoboi //
Jew Ram rakhoi tiku rohiya rab bhai //
Hari Ki mahima kichhu kathama na Jai //
Kabahun turay turanga nachaboi //
Kabahun pai panhi 0 na paboi //
Kabahun khat : snoopodi Suhaboi //"
Kabahun bhum pai er na paboi /
Bhanati Namadeua ek nama mistaroi //
Jiha Guru nailoi tiha titha para utarol //
O Lord, what wondrful ways of You' some day you
feed the sweet to the devotee,
While on the next day you give nothing for the
day long.
And on the day after the food grains
full in the dust heap.
Such is the Glory of you and love of
you on your devotee /
And devotee endureth all, remain cheerful
all along.
Some day you confer on him a good
horse to ride.
Whist on the next term you allowed him
to run him on barefootedly.
On someday you allowed him with a
beautiful bed and
On the next day even not bear earth is allow
It is all the blessings of the preceptor
(i.e. the Lord) if one meets Him.
Cycle of rebirth he (devotee) may cross, if
you allow him with a vision of you'.
The Bhakti movement through the Vithoba cult by the three great teachers of Maharastra, Jnandev, Namadeva and Inkarana greatly influence the religious feelings of the mass, which included the resurrection of the Society from slumber. Their teachings led the family life in a sanctified reformation, elevated the position of women in the society. Spread the motivation of humaneness and enhanced the power of endurance of the common men. They bodily made 'a partial reconciliation with Islam'. 13 They also taught the nothingness of outer ritualism in the name of religion and made an easily accessible bridge between polytheism and monitheism. Humble men from different professions like tailors, gardeners, goldsmiths, potters thronged to them and even the fallen women, slave girls were taken into their fold. Namadeva had his disciples from all castes; Brahmans, kunbis (potter) and other people of indigenous low strata. He even dared to included Muslim as his followers. Perhaps his philosophy of religion was rightly interpreted in the holy scripture of the Sikhism, the Adi Granth, Saheb, as he emphasized on the unity of God 'who is contained in all, filling everything'. 14

Dr. Anil Chandra Banerjee, an eminent scholar in history has justly described him as a synthiser of different religious cults; "Namadeva was not a representative of the traditional Bhakti cult but the 'first of the great sants'. A distinction is drawn between the Bhakti cult and 'the sant tradition' which 'was essentially a synthesis of the three principle dissenting movement, a compound of elements drawn mainly from vaisnava bhakti and the Hathayoga of the Natha yogis with a marginal contribution from sufism'. But this marginal contribution was much which historians expect.

Namadeva passed away in the ripe age of eighty in the year 1350. Voidness created by him, was filled up by others, those who trod the path of mysticism.

One should remember his warning to the nation after migrating from Maharashtra to a humble hamlet and stayed for twenty years long to preach his ideal in the middle of thirteenth Century. He said:

Hindu andhra Turkee kana/
Duhumte gyani Sayama //
Hindu puja dehura /

15. The State and Society in India - Anil Chandra Banerjee
Cal., 1982 p 258.
('The Hindu is blind; Turki is half-blind, but one who knows is wiser than either; The Hindu worships in the temple and the Muslim in mosque')

The noted historian of the medieval period Kishori, Saran Lal puts in history 'Twilight of the Sultanate' thus:

'Namadeva in the thirteenth Century declared that both Hindus and Muslims were blind in insisting upon worshipping in temples and mosques, while to for His worship needed neither temple nor mosque. Such courageous denunciations were infections and Kabi, Nanak, Caitanya, Raidas, Garibdas and Dadu Dayal spoke in similar strain in later Centuries. 17 We should follow his voice of warnings and rosonce sounded by other even in this century for the greater benefit of the country.

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16. Santa karyo; ed. by Parasuram Caturvedi nd. p 144