CHAPTER VIII

NARASIMHA MEHATA: A MYSTIC POET OF MEDIEVAL INDIA.
Narasimha Mehata was one of the great mystic poets of India, who contributed to the development of Gujrati literature at its nascent stage in the fifteenth century of Indian history. He is called Adi kavi (first poet) of Gujrati literature. 1 The philosophy of his life was to express the pangs of miseries and suffering which he had gathered from the social structure of Gujrat at that time. His personal feelings were assimilated by the use of his creative art. Through his mystic poetic art, chanting the songs composed by him in melodious tunes, he opened the eyes of oppressed and neglected communities of Gujrat. The light of Jnan-Shakti marg (a path of devotional cult admixed with super conscious state of wisdom), which he kindled in the fifteenth century in Gujrat, is still flickering in the twentieth century of India. The religion was the base land for socio-cultural development all over the mediaeval world. The philosophical perception of the mystic saint

Narasimha Mehata influenced Mahatma Gandhi, founding father of 'Ahimsa (non-violence) movement India in the later ages.

Narasimha Mehata was born in the house of a Nagar Brahman of a small hamlet Lataja in Junagarh district in Gujrat. His father was the son of a noted vaisnava scholar of the Bhagavata lineage, Purusottamadas, his mother was Dayakar. The name of his elder brother was Ramsidhara. The year of his birth was tentatively determined by the two noted scholars by Dr. K. M. Munshi and Dr. V. Dhruba, to be the year 1414 according to the English Calendar. He died in 1480.

Advent of the mystic poet Narasimha is earmarked with the advancement of devotional cult of India including Gujrat. From the beginning of Jainism in that state, Bhakti dharma, i.e., the path of devotional approach in religion was strong in Gujrat. Narasimha was born in an orthodox Saivite Brahmanical sect, but he was imbued with the higher thoughts of Catholicism through the religious thought preached by the great exponents of devotional schools, Ramanuja, Nimberka,
Madhvacarya and Mahaprabhu Ballavacarya. Dr. K. M. Munshi suggests that Sri Chaitanya also had some influence on Narasimha. Chaitanya and Sri Ballavacarya were his near contemporary. But there is no such authentic records in the hagiography of Sri Chaitanya that he had any direct or indirect contact with Narasimha. He was bestowed with the blessings from the thoughts and ideas by two saints of Bhakti era. The thought of Marathi mystic poet Namadeva of South and Kabir, the torch bearer of Ramananda much influenced him, though he had no direct link with them. His life-span can be divided into two historical phases. He lost his parents in his boyhood. His elder brother was his legal guardian and was responsible for his early development. Narasimha had a spontaneous hunger for spiritualism. He was always in the mood of contemplation. Disregarding the karmayoga (work in need of livelihood and social obligation) he used to religious rites. This is not a real path for the advancement of spiritual life. Most of the saints of Bhakti-Cult (age of devotional Cult) always refused such system. Narasimha was rescued from such unwanted situation by his elder brother's wife. After his realization of truth, he showed much respect to his elder brother's wife.
But it came to him through certain social processes of the age. His elder brother tried to give him in marriage at the comparative of early age according to the social custom of Gujrat of that time. As he was god-intoxicated, he danced and sung like Crazyman in an estatic mood of absorbing some anthropomorphic ideas of Lord and his associates. The arrangement of marriage was turned down by his relatives to a bequethed bride for that reason. His Saivite relatives were enraged against him. His elder brother became successful in his second effort of arranging his brother's marriage to a suitable girl Manikbai in the year 1432 A.D. Modest Manikbai presented him one son and a daughter during their conjugal life. Samal Shah was his son, Kanwarbai (कन्वारबाई) was his daughter. Even after embracing the house hold life, he did not like to give much stress on earnings to provide the members of his family. According to the customs of Hindu joint family of Narasimha, his consort and his off-springs made a united family a heavier. The wife of his elder brother, being the mistress of the family frequently admonished him for his indifference, Narasimha's non-attachment with his duties to the members of his family caused his wife to turn into a Amazon lady and she used abusive language daily to the poet saint. One day he flew from the precinct of
the house with an unbearable mental torture and finally took refuge in a temple dedicated to the God Siva
Gopeswar
he practised there penance for two weeks with taking any food and drinking. Gopeswar, the Siva awarded him with two of his blessings to the mystic poet, after giving him a glimpse of vision in mystic process of anthropomorphic form. With the one of the blessings of Siva, he bridged the widen gap between the culture of Rama Bhakti school and the Krishna Bhakti Culture, both of them had considerable influence on the society of Gujrat and one with blessing he switched his leaning with Krishna Bhakti Culture. He equated Visnu of the Purana, Vasudeva of the Bhagavata with no different eyes. His intensity of penance was so high that one day in an ecstatic condition he conflagrated his palms by oil Oozing from a burning candle-stick. After constant repetition of the name of Lord Krishna, he realised the truth that Visnu or Krsna’s dwelling house is the heart of a man. He also lives in the hearts of all communities.
So he shifted his palace of residence and used to worship in the temple of Damodar (a temple dedicated to Lord Visnu), near to the temple where there are the dwelling houses of the oppressed untouchable communities, the relatives of Hari (i.e. Harijan). At their invitation he composed some sonorous and melodous penlyrics dedicated to the Lord and sang them on his lyre.
The Saivite Nagar Brahmin community ostracised him from their society. But the mystic poet composed a couplet in protest of their action against him. According to him every religion has ambition to attain the supreme reality through the experiment of truth. He pronounced such utterings:

'Kulne tajse harine bhajase sahase
Samasanun maherune
Bhane Narasaino, Hari tena malse, biji leste bahununre'.

'If you like to attain the Godhood, you have to leave your egotistic attitude of Clanship, you have to bear also the taunts of the worldly men during the period of worshipping the Almighty for the realisation. This is way of life. The ambition of others life is fruitless says Narasimha'.

He used to dance with the untouchable population of Gujrat. The upper population particularly of his own saivte Brahman Clan propagated much against him. They attributed him not with a qualified name, but used to call him a rogue (Vondo in Gujrati). In reply to their allegation he composed a sarcastic couplet. He said,
"I may be a man of the worst type in the society. You can easily leave all but I cannot leave my men who believe in the mission of God (Harijan - Hari's men - Harijan)". This was his utterance:

'Abare amo abare aba, tane kao
Chho bali to babe ..... 
Saghana sathe ma hun akh vondo.
Vondethi bali vondo re........'

'I am a rogue of the worst type, as you are alleging '.

Technic of the propagators was so oppressive that even the man of high religious status like Narasimha revolted against them and accused the Almighty for his birth in that society and his impoverish economic condition, thus he spoke:

'Nirdhan ne wali nath nagari ma
Deish pravo avatar re'

However he regained confidence in him and preached his own ideals among both the low and aristocratic communities in a simple manner. His ideal of life was to propagate the equality of all living creatures like other mystic saints of all ages. He said:
'Paksha pakshi tyan nahi paramesvar
Samadristine sarvasaman'.

'Where there is differentiations, there is no God'.

He was the lover of the men, those who love God.

'Mujane to Vaisnava bahata re'. (I love Vaisnava). It was a favourite song of Mahatma Gandhi, from his idealistic point of view Gandhiji took it as a source of inspiration. But who is Vaisnava? The mystic poet has given a definition of a Vaisnava. According to him:

'Vaisnava Jane to tene kahiya
Je peeh yeraas jane re
Paradukhae upkar kare toye
Man abhiman na ane re'.

(One can call himself a Vaisnava who feels the sorrows of others; helps them in their miseries, and has no pride at all in his mind).

It was his ideal and he propagated the essence of Vaisnavaism according to his own interpretation from personal experience which he acquired from the existing social structure of the fifteenth century Gujrat.
He also refuted the meaninglessness of the rigidity of religious rites like the holy dips, worshipping without love, and distribution of wealth to the cause of religious motives, outer dressing of the mendicants and reading of the scriptures only for the worldly gain of livelihood.

'Su thau nman sevane puja thaki, sun thanu gher rahi dan didhe
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Narasimha himself fought for the cause of righteousness but he too never left the path of Bhakti (devotional way) of the religion. He said:

'Samlipani sange ramta man tajo ne
Malisay re'.

'When you will play with Lord, you should avoid your egoism'.

As religion is a road which leads to the social uplift, so he asked the believers of Almighty to open their hearts, thus he spoke:
Nirakhane maganata kon dhumo
rajhyo, ' tej tun sabodo bola /

'Look at the sky (sky is used here symbolically to represent the broadened heart) soul of the universe is being manifested there. i.e. if you open your heart with broader outlook you will be able to visualise the soul of the universe in one'.

He also reminded others not look down any living being:

Akhil brambhandamang ak tum Srihari
pujate rupe antanta
bhasa /

'Almighty is responsible for the creation of all things within Him. He manifests Himself in the different names and forms' and he said:

Jeo na sao to ap ichhaye
Thaya.

Supreme soul takes different forms according to His will.
The thoughts of Narasimha were carried on to the nineteenth century by the great political and social leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, the savants of the 19th century renaissance in the field of social and political reconstruction of modern India.

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