CHAPTER XVIII

TUKARAM: A PROTESTANT VAISNAVAMISTIC OF MAHARASTRA
Tukaram: a protestant Vaishnava mystic of Maharastra

The Maharastra of seventeenth century produced two great sons, and the people of India still remember them for their contributions to the Socio-religious development of Maharastra.

Tukaram was a kind hearted man. He was born and brought up in a Vaishnavite family of Classical tradition of Maharastra. He was reared up in an environment of religious atmosphere. He had a natural inclination for religious zeal and made a deep dip into the inner part of spiritualism. He never delinked himself from the society and his countrymen. Tukaram influenced the Maharastrian people considerably by his mystical poetry, which goes under the title of Abhangas in the Marathi literature.

The saint Tukaram was born in the Christian era 1608 at 'Dehu' a village near the noted city of Pune on the basin of river Indrayani. He was the first son of his parents followed by two other brothers Sauji and Kenha. The name of his father was Valhova and his mother was Kankabai. Tukaram was a man of Sudra. Hereditarily his family used to serve their household deity 'Vithoba'. Because of a severe drought,
which brought other calamities like famine, etc, members of his family perished in 1629 A.D. He showed much courage at the time of bereavement at his young age. He was pressed in for marrying a second time but his second did not prove worthy of him. She was an amazon type of lady and frequently reprimanded him in abusive tongue for his saintly life. Tukaram did not like to give up his spiritual life on account of his life. He shifted himself far away from home. He expressed his mental agony and dissatisfaction and spoke thus:

'I am a Sudra by caste and a merchant by profession. We are hereditarily worshippers of Vithoba. O saints and telling you the woes of my family thought it is unpleasant to you all. Famine engulfed the country and devoured her. The temple of the deity dredged to the ground owing to our ill luck. I felt worried and began to start singing the glories of the Lord with my admirers. I used to take the water of the waste of cleaning feet of the devotees of God. I began to engage in the philosophical arguments about the good and evils of the world. I dreamed a dream of a Guru (preceptor) and I accepted his advice. Then I turned into a true believer of the Lord. I began to compose poems with the grace of the Lord 'Vithoba'.

"..."
The economic condition of the country restored normalcy, but Tukaram didn't give up his habits of singing the glories of the Lord even after his succession of second wife Jigai. He was then always in the mood of ecstasy. Once a wicked Brahmin Wambaji thrashed him to a thorny bush and beat him much with a stick. So intense was his love for the Lord that he did not feel it. He pardoned the wicked Brahmin and the wicked man finally switched over his alliance and obedience to his feet.

He composed nine 'Chhatras' (lines) of poems, which are called 'Gathas' in Marathi literature. His style of composing was 'Abhanga', so it is still called Abhanga in a general term of the masses. The orthodox Brahmin community of Maharashtra scolded him in a gathering for his misdoings of writings of poems on religious aspects which he was not entitled to do as he was born in a low Sudra family. They ordered him to immerse his manuscripts of creative art. It is said that his works were saved from destruction even after they had been thrown in water.

After sometime his name and fame spread all over Maharashtra. The king of the land, Sivaji, invited him to his court, but Tukaram politely declined the
invitation and in reply composed and sent a poem of 'Abhanga'. The essence of his poem was like this:

"What is the personal gain of a saint to visit a king? I live seclusively and think on the Lord of the universe, I lie down on the earth and satisfy my hungry by alming. I pass my time singing the glory of the Lord. Oh 'king' what is my utility to go to you'. You should be engaged in the work of well being of mankind and always keep off the wicked ones. Those who have their love for the country, you should pick up them, deploy their services in your administration. You should protest the weak and helpless ones. Do not lose your faith in God. You should see your own pictart in Samartha Ramdas. Your birth is meaningful and a blissful one. Tuka says: 'please listen to me, blessing will fall on you'.

The above statement of Tukaram indicates his love for his mother country. Though he was aloof from political events of the Maharastra yet he did not deny his right as a citizen of her mother country and speak for her cause. Sivaji went to his monastery for an interview with him. Tukaram blessed Sivaji and said: 'Listen please, Sivaji, you should keep your obeissance to Ramdas with an undivided attention. He is your preceptor (Guru). You
should prostrate before him, Lord Panduranga (i.e. Visnu: protector of all living beings). This is my wish. You have only to obey Ramdas (Samartha).

Samartha Ramdas was a saint without an intention of worldliness. But he was a servant and aware of the political situation of her motherland. In the year of passing away of Tukaram, Sivaji was initiated by Samarth Ramdas in 1681 and took as his spiritual guide. Sivaji was much influenced by the political thought of his preceptor and the advice of Ramdas was his political guide.

Religious thought of Tukaram:

Tukaram was a mystic saint but simultaneously he was a practical man in the field of religion. He did not like to apply his mystical power to the cause of the social problems. He developed his certain important motifs, which he acquired by his mystical process of thinking on the socio-religious background. Some of the motifs of his thought may be traced in continuity of the ancient thoughts of Brahmanism. His concept of religion exerted a dominant influence on both the society and individuals in Maharastra. The treatment of his religious
thought was slightly changed by the scholars and sages of various sects in applying it to the society.

His predecessors and contemporary saints like Jnaneswar, Ekanath and Ramdas were Brahmans by birth. Namadeva was tailor, Narahari a goldsmith, Gora, a potter, Savanta a gardner, Sona, a barber, Chokha, a sweeper, Jani, a maidservant. Tukaram was a farmer by caste and trader by vocation. The ideal devotee as expressed by the Srimad Bhagavad Gita is 'one who does not hate anyone, is friendly and compassionate towards all, has no egoism or vanity, is alike in happiness and misery, is forbearing alike to friend and foe, to honour and dishonour, praise and blame, and is satisfied with whatever comes unsought'. That was the psychic plane of Tukaram. So he delighted by inspiring ideal of Sri Krishna Caitanya and sang an 'Abhanga' in a melodious tune:

Kase Guru ce pai bapa kase guru ce pai /
Swapang te mala darsan didhale //
Mantra dib yado rai /
'Rama Krishna Hari' mantra didhate //
Masta kale guru rai II Bapa II (I)
Hare he admitted the presence of Srikrsna Caitannya, commonly known as Gora Rai, to him and was duly initiated by him. But such event was not from a historical record but a product of mystical thinking and he was imbied with the thought of univocal love of Srikrsna Caitanya. 2

View of his religious thinking as it was depicted in some of his creative art of composing of 'Abhanja' or panegyric hymns dedicated in the name of the Lord revealed the truth of the universe.

Satya parata nanhi dharma Satya tanci Parabrahma Satyapansi purusottama Sattakala tistheta //

Tukaram

2. Prabasi (a Bengali monthly orgin) Caitra, 1337 B.S.
There is no greater religion than truth; Truth is God. Divinity ever attends on Truth. Tukaram had love for the earth for the sake of the well-being of his countrymen and in the same way he had an ambition to attain the higher spiritual level which is a mystical abode this narrower world. Thus he sang:

'You shall not know how I am going to Vaikunta (abode of Visnu) with my body. What is to happen hereafter is known only to Sri Vithoba (Visnu). What is to happen hereafter is known only to Sri Vithoba; how can ordinary people have any knowledge of it'.

It shows from his statement that he had love for the common men yet he had a higher outlook and the power of conception on spiritual life of the common people of his day.

Tukaram made no disciple in the traditional manner. This was not due to his personal denial in this regard or anything else. But it was his philosophy of life. His own guru came down to him in a dream. So he wanted the people should follow him not in traditional way but follow him in a mystical process of self-retrospection. He even declared that to consider
oneself a Guru another a disciple is 'a mark of immaturity'.
According to him; 'All are alike; God is in all beings'.
There was due to his intense humility. He clarified
the nature of a true devotee of the Lord in his own
poetical expression which has an universal appeal for
the spiritual seekers all over the world. 6 Thus he
said:

As daughter peeps her behind mother's house
with an intense for love, so am I 'kesava' (all pervading
Lord of the universe) and eager to meet with you. My
mental condition is like of a child whose mother is not
near him. One of his admirer of the twentieth century
Nicol Macnical introduced him in the preface of the 'Psalms
of Maratha saints' that: 'Tukaram came at some time under
the influence of teacher belonging to the Vaisnavite sect
founded by Caitanya in Bengal at the beginning of the
sixteenth century.'

However his urgency for a vision of God
indicates his fair connection with the Vaisnavite thoughts
of sixteenth century Bengal; He used literary terms from
the sociological instances of the age. 7

5. Psalms of Maharashtra saints - Nicol Macnical
   London, Uup., (Introd.)
6. BharataKosa - Vol.3 N.D. p 729 (Bengali)
7. Bharatiya bhakti sahitya - Binupada Bhattacharya
   Cal., 1964, p 388
1. As the Chaste lady likes to dedicate her life to the pyre of her deceased husband, in the manner a devotee should surrender himself to the will of God:

(Agi dhakhoni sati, angi romancha utthi)

2. We should have to be fearless like fire flame embracing insects.

(Tuka mahane bahawa tayapari dhit / Hatang ha neet deepabari)

3. Alike water spring which raises the water level upwards. The devotee's mental plane should uplifted in a natural process towards God.

(Jaini Karangyaci kala To Jiwhala Swahirtace //)

4. As a mother delights hearing the news of welfare of her son, a true Bhakta (devotee) should naturally be delighted hearing the glory of God. Hearing the songs of the glories of the Lord, we have to forget the physical existence of us.

(Putraci barata, Subha ai ke jeuri mata / Taisain rahen mana / Gatam ektan hariguna //)

(Nadain lbdha jala mriga Deha birasata anga / Tuka mahane pahe kasbechan pilan maye)
As miser hankers after money, desire of a devotee to God also needs to me so.

He was dualistic worshipper of God but finally he emerged into the monistic outlook of religion. According to him the best form of worship is mental process. As he understands your innermost feelings. The truth is verily within. In excess exposition of worshipping, there is no gain. Tukaram taught the common men about the nothingness or ostentation of outer religious performances. He said: 'while God is within yourself; in vain do you wander about places of pilgrimage, the musk deer has his perfume in its own navel, but it roams about the whole forest in search of it'. why don't you see God in your own person, O you foolish people. 'He is not far away, apart, but surrounds us everywhere'.

Tukaram himself never went in search of a guru (the preceptor). He was blessed by Balaji Caitanya in a dream, i.e. he imbibed the religious propagator Sri Krsna Caitanya's philosophy of religion. He considered his own mental strength was the main fountain source of his religious life. 'The mind of a person is responsible for his own good and evil' this was his view. 'God is in all beings'. The 'Bhakti' is only the medium to grasp the
idea of Godhood. So he said in an Abhanga:

Thy native is beyond the grasp
of human speech or thought
So love I've made the measure-rod
By which I can be taught.

Thus with the measure-rod of love
I measure the Infinite.

In sooth, to measure Him there is
None other means to fit.

Through the intense love of God he attained emancipation
from the clutches of worldly desires and the sensual
urging of mind. So he said in a tone of triumph:

Beat we the drum of Love, whose din
Brings terror to the age of sin.
Hail, Tuka bids, with joy the victory we din.

The victory of the passions means to conquer the ego of
oneself. The Upanisadic teachings speak of Syarat,
true freedom born of self-realisation. God realized man
can guide a nation or countrymen in a proper manner. There
is because of his intense love for the humanity, he can
urge for droppings of the social and political hazards.

Ibid
In song he reflected selfishness as a hindrance to the interest of individual self-improvement. Thus he said:

Before my eyes my dead self lies;
I bliss beyond compare:
Joy fills the worlds and I rejoice,
The soul of all things there
My selfish bonds are based, and now
I reach forth far and free.
Gone is the soil of birth and death
The petty sense of 'me'.
Narayan's grace gave me this place,
where I in faith abide.
Now Tuka says, my task I've done
and spread the message wide.

This was his message for his countrymen to avoid selfishness for the interest of his development in individualistic way and the natural process of overcoming the social and political addrs.
Tukaram as a lover of human being and also lover of all living being to cause of ecological balance of the Country.

Tukaram had a great compassion for all living beings including small creatures. One of his celebrated songs which depicted the character of a true saint, whose thought has social utility for the true sense of political cause. His beautifully song was beautifully rendered in English poem by Mehta in his 'Psalms of Maratha saint' like other higher poetical substances inserted above:

'Is there a man who says of all, whether upon them sorrow fall Or whether joy - "These are mine" That is the saint: mark well the sign God dwells in him. The good man's breast Is of all men the tenderest. Is any helpless or undone? Be he a slave, be he a son: - On all alike he mercy shows, On all an equal love bestows How oft must I this tale repeat? That man is God's own counterfeit.
Tukaram was a model saint of medieval India. He practised what he preached. He realised his happiness in the happiness of others and fretted over others unhappiness and misery. He declared: 'I cannot bear looking on these people sunk in misery' he said 'Let us comfort those that are sweetering in the heart of worldliness'. 'I seek these people because God is in all, making us difference between men and women. They are the limbs of the same body; to discriminate between them is an unholy delusion'. He fraternised with the 'poorest and lowliest and least'. Tukaram like Ekanath revolted against the exploitation of lowliest and oppressed classes in favour of the interest of upper class people. So he declared: 'Whether people carp at us or adore us, we are concerned only with our own God'. S.K. Sharma puts in his 'Tukaram' what Tuka meant by 'our own good', as 'The good of all' including animals, birds, and even plants. Tuka felt kinship with all of them.

Once in his boyhood he was ordered to keep a constant watch over a harvesting land to drive away birds from the destruction of the corn. But he carried the order led by his own consciousness. Tukaram delighted at birds in sumptuous fests and he innocently declared
the following utterance spontaneously: 'I have done my duty honestly. I was asked to take care of the birds. I have verily seen to it that they had their fill without any let or hindrance'.

On another occasion, he was passing through a field. Some flying birds felt disturbance, Tukaram felt sorry for disturbing the innocent creatures. He prayed silently to God to remove all the fear of the creatures and the fear of the birds was dispersed automatically and Tukaram was delighted and shared their joy.

Once a rabid dog was berserking; villagers were in trouble. Tukaram was going in the village street. Villagers warned the sage. But no sooner than the dog saw him, it fell down on the feet of Tukaram like his own pet dog. The fear of the villagers disappeared.

His love for all other creatures was worthy to be considered with the service to the creatures by St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis used to call the birds and other animals as his 'brothers and sisters'. He was a Christian saint of medieval Europe.
In one of his abhangas Tukaram said 12.

'Hold yourself in peace, for life's sake: it is the best and most beautiful state to be in. Consider the body of no use except to serve others....... so long as it exists, it is subject to passing pleasures and pains, unending gain is only in faith, at the feet of God. That is the basis of all well being...... God has provided me with a shelter where there is no more dying' and 'wherever I go, He leads me holding my hand. All have become my protectors, friends and kinsmen'. A Christian dedicated monk; a hagiographer of the Indian mystics and critic rightly observed that Tukaram's life is "full of human interest, full food for the moralist, full of suggestions for idealist, and to every one an inspiration to a better and a nobler life". The greatness of Tukaram cannot be measured by merely judging his poetical works, but we have to much stress on his personal life and his behaviour to his contemporary fellow men. One of his followers, Mahapati had recorded some important information regarding his philosophy and actions.

'He acted his part well as a son, as a brother,

12. Ibid.
as a comrade, as a trader, as a devotee, as a lover of man, birds and beasts. As a husband he loved his wife despite her cantankerous nature. He married away his daughter at the customary age. His son, Narayan was more after his heart. 'Trees and creepers and the beasts of the jungle, are my next of kin; the birds warble around me sweetly. 'Really his saintliness was rooted in his humanity. His humanity extended even to the lower level animal population and also to the natural beauty coming out of the creation of the Almighty.

Influence of mystic thought on him:

Tukaram used to sing the songs composed by himself. But before composing all the valuable songs which had the social and ethical meanings, he connected his own thought with the thought of predecessors of the southern school of mystical thinkers like Jnanadeva, Eknath and Namadeva of Maharashtra. He also had gone through works of Kabir, one of the torch bearers of Bhakti movement of North India. He studied the works of all of the mystic saints in the solitude of Bhandar mountain. He had a sharp memory and memorised them with his own intonation. He read the 'Bhavartha Ramayana' composed by Ekanath and was highly inspired by the thoughts of Ekanath. Tukaram committed the whole to memory. The

13. Ibid p 86
stories from the Bhagavata were full of inspiration. He was also familiar with the Yogavasistha and Anubhavanitram of Jneswar. Under the influence of the monistic thought, he regarded the whole universe as himself. He saw no duality even in his dreams.

Religion of Tukaram:

'Like Milton, Tukaram in his own way through example and precept, 'justified the ways of God to man'. He was, however, more interested in 'Paradise regained' than 'Paradise lost'. His own personal transformation which is closely reflected in his 'undying utterance' is more full of inspiration than any epic in the Miltonic style. The miracle of his spiritual ascent is more astounding than the legend of his dramatic, 'transformation of Vaikuntha'. 14

His religion had a good link with the herth and home of this world. One of his disciple of Tukaram Mahapati wrote: 'Tukā had made his body God like, having attained to an incorporeal state even while he was in the body'. 15

14. Ibid p 77
15. Ibid. p 78
He created a Vaikuntha in the world. He shared the views of Kabir regarding the concept of higher world after death. Kabir spoke:

The palanquin came to take me away to my husband's home and it sent through my heart full of joy.

wait but a moment longer, let me go back to my kinsmen and friends, and take my leave of them........