

AN INTRODUCTION TO BHAKTI LITERATURE IN NARSINH MEHTA'S TWO SELECT POEMS.

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Abstract: Frequently titled as Bhakti literature is the devotional literature we find in regional languages of India. As it is more social and cultural, the poets from Bhakti Panth appear more as philosophers and social rather than literary figures. The translation of classics gives sense of belonging especially when a native language gets translated in English. The classics get presented before the world. What Hsuan-tsang did for Sanskrit scriptures, in modern age Shri Aurobindo, Dilip Chitre and A. K. Ramanujan also did in Post Colonial literature which has a heavy flow of translation and Bhakti literature is one of them. This paper discusses about Narsinh Mehta's devotional poems which are relevant even in 21st century.

Keywords: Bhakti poets and their literature, Idea of allegiance and salvation, Rustic spirit.

Introduction:

Often titled as Bhakti literature is the devotional literature we find in regional languages of India. As it is more social and cultural, the poets from Bhakti Panth are more philosophers and social reformers. At times this literature was written by Brahmins yet far away from the conventional Sanskrit hymns focusing upon God only. It takes into account the whole Indian society, all castes and creeds. Narsinh Mehta by birth a Nagar Brahmin spread a message of equality in the society when Brahmins were so much alert about their high breed and had pride for the untouchability of others. So what Meera for Rajasthan, Tagore for Bengal, Kabir and Rahim for UP, is Mehta for Gujarat.

Bhakti movement is a devotional trend emerging in mediaeval Hinduism. It had Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism. The movement was inspired by many saint poets presenting philosophical ideas from Dhavait to Adhvait but in a very simplified manner since the audience was illiterate, busy in traditional occupations majorly Narsinh Mehta is rightly called Adi Kavi of Gujarat. Mehta during Bhakti Yug 1375 to 1700 talked of cast and creedless society for which today also India is struggling facing unrest in the society. Mehta is revered today also in whole Gujarat for his contribution to Bhakti Literature. The translation of classics gives sense of belonging especially when native language gets translated in English. What Hsuan-tsang did for Sanskrit scriptures, in modern age Shri Aurobindo, Dilip Chitre and A. K. Ramanujan also did the same with the Post Colonial literature. Bhakti literature though majorly Hindu, has fervour of Momedian religion too at large.

Mehta was not the first poet in Gujarati language but he was the first prominent poet who was popular in whole Gujarat and his compositions are being sung and listened to by all Gujaratis even today. Gujarat Board's Gujarati language textbook starts with bhajan of Narsinh Mehta which is a tribute paid to him. He gave Gujarati poetry recognition worldwide. Mehta's bhakti literature was purely Vaishnav while Jain religion had spread widely in Gujarat at that time. His Padas are felt reformatory in taste at that time when cast and creed were not changeable and challengeable. The Padas of Mehta even today are approachable and has an influence on social reformation in orthodox Hinduism in Saurashtra a region in Gujarat where once upon a time caste by birth and gender was non-changeable. So we can say Mehta's Bhakti movement was a reworking of ancient Vaidik tradition. He worshiped Krishna – Lord Vishnu with 'Gopi bhav' (as if one female) where he differs from other Bhakti poets like Bhagat peepa, Kabir, Nank, Tulsidas, Ramanand, Ravidas, Ras Khan, Jaydev, Aknath, Tukaram, Meerabai, Valbhacharya and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Rightly said that **"When your being is soaked in devotion, even a piece of stone will become divine"** Sadhguru.

He had a wide range of poetic themes like autobiographical compositions, dramatic narratives, philosophical poems with moral teachings and love songs written with 'gopi bhav' talking about the childhood of Lord Krishna. Mehta is translated by Gandhiji, K.M. Munashi and Swami Mahadevand. All the poems by Mehta were preserved orally and believed that the manuscripts of them were available after a century after his departure. The emotive associations of Mehta's word music don't have equivalents in English. His padas are marked

with oral performative texts like rhyme, refrains, repetitions, parallelisms, metres and ragas. In Indian aesthetics, ornaments of sound and ornaments of sense are mostly contrastingly used which is very much there in the medieval Indian poetry and Mehta's poetry is one of such which is rich with simile, metaphor, hyperbole and irony.

His literature neither has complex philosophical idea nor words like it has cognizant language 're' and 'lol' mostly repeated to make it musical. As the language is layman's, it feels homely to the reader. The way he visited downtrodden classes with his bhakti geet-sangeet it was a social challenge and change. Mehta's Bhakti literature is preserved majorly orally that's why at times it is felt that their language has undergone modifications. Some of the manuscripts of his poems are available. His padas are also called Prabhatias meant to be sung in early morning. It is very remarkable that his poems are sung in celebrations, in rituals connected to death, in temple, in navaratri, and in literary gatherings. His padas have lyrical quality, what a range!! Here I have explained some glimpse of the two poems: "Akhil Brahmand ma" and "Vaishnav Jan" in which I have taken help from Prof. Sachin Ketkar's translation of the poems.

Akhil brahmand: Narsinh Mehta through his own insights explains that the God we worship may have different names but at end the God is one and only. This prayerful poem proves that God has extended his own supreme powers and created himself in the different forms like the earth, wind, water, trees and seeds. And the God has created such beautiful universe only for the pleasures of each embodied soul. Poet has tried to convince us that in the entire universe, you are truthful to the Lord. As you appear in different forms, you seem infinite. Moulding different forms and giving them different names. Ultimately it is all still gold. With the help of this prayer song Narsinh Mehta describes the presence and wideness of the God in the universe. Through this prayerful song Narsinh Mehta reveals the spiritual knowledge of the Vedas and explains the uniqueness of the God.

"Akhil brahmand ma ek tu shree hari,"

The one who is infinitely resembled in the entire universe with the different forms is only Shri Hari (Lord Krishna); you are the God in the body, you are the essence in all energy and you are being an utterance of spiritual knowledge in complete stillness. The one who is infinitely resembled in the entire universe with different forms is only shree hari that is Lord Krishna.

"Pavan tu, panni tu, bhumi tu, bhudhara !"

You are the wind, you are the water and you are the earth and the emperor! You are the one who is growing towards the sky being a tree. You have arranged for the various creations with the hope fill up the auspicious soul with abundant pleasures.

"Ved to em vade, shruti-smruti shakh de,"

The Vedas are speaking – listening, remember and trust them, there is not any difference in the matter of the golden hidden powers (of the God); no matter what name and appearance you give by molding the Gold in different shapes, at the end gold (God) will be gold (God) only.

"Granth garbad kari, vaat na khari kari,"

There are many who have disordered the holy books and said the deep substance of them; all humans worship the God with God's different names and appearance of their choice; but the insights of my heart says God considers only the intense desires of mind, words and actions of each human.

"Vruksh ma bij tu, bij ma vruksh tu,"

You are the seed within a tree and you are the tree within a seed, what we are trying to look with the hindrance is nearby only Narsinh Mehta. He has learned through his devotion to Lord Krishna that such bound of the heart will be visible through kindness and love.

Vaishnav jan Vaishnav jan – This poem is referred to by people world-wide as Mahatma Gandhi's favourite poem. This poem is more of a like Bhajan, a devotional prayer. Vaishnav jan is a true human who speaks only as Godlike of the man who feels other's pain, who

shares other's sorrow and pride does disdain. He has conquered greed, is free of deceit, lust and anger. Through him Narsinh Mehta has presented Godly vision that his generation to come will certain salvation

“Pid parai jane re” means empathy. The feeling which you are feeling the same as the opposite person, it may be physical, mental, social, or any type of pain but it is shared by you, that sharing is at the level that it makes sorry, grieving, and looking for some way out. Second line more important to avoid mental stress. Benevolence needs detachedness also otherwise it leads to ego, expectation and at last to distress. So Be good, Do good and to Forget it, is the key. The catalogue of duties done should not be longer than the joviality of life. Have no permanent revenge with anybody. Try to love all rather than having vendetta.

“Sakal lok ma sahune vande, ninda na kare”

Here Mehtaji praises those who pay politeness to all and never are busy in word of evil to any. Everybody in this world is different so better to accept the uniqueness of everybody. If you don't find equal thinking, say it straight way instead of condemning it. Don't waste your time in controversies. Be pure in speech, in character and in mind. Such people are called gentle in real sense and their mothers really feel honoured on having such children.

“Samdrashti ne trushna tyagi, parstree jene mat re ... ”

Then Mehtaji talks about equal vision and absence of greediness, large heartedness is equally important as his pure character. The person who is truth speaking, honest, is 'Vaishnav jan'. So commitment with oneself, commitment with partner, and honesty in total is pure character.

“Moh maya vyape nahi jene, dhridh vairagy jena manma re ..”

Illusion and attraction for worldly things do not drag him as he trades path of renunciation. No wealth, no anger, no fascination, no physical attraction is capable of spoiling his mind and his thinking as he chants holy name of Ram who governs his whole personality and life. The last line of the poem is very rare as Mehta says that such Vaishnav jan with Godly vision is a rare gem of his ancestry. The generations to come would like to be called in the name of such a gentleman. Such Vaishnav jan are recognition for an ancestry.

“Bhane Narsaiyo tenu darshan karta kul ikoter tarya re”

It is remarkable that Gandhiji loved this poem and last line was so truthful and applicable to him that somebody with Gandhi surname today also will feel pride because Ghandhian philosophy will be in his blood from generations to generations.

Conclusion:

Simplified use of raga and metre, is also there in the poems of Narsinh Mehta. At times Mehta's poems are easy to translate since it has a glossary of Indian Culture. Those who don't know the puranic characters get confused because Mehta talks of Prahlad, Shukdev, Narad at times just like 'Vaishnav jan' word in Vaishnav jan poem and 'Shree Hari' in Akhil brahmand ma. 'Sakhi' is referred to when he talks about Lord Krishna. 'Sakhi' is the favourite word of Mehta however it means more than a girlfriend but less than a beloved. So it can't be translated accordingly .

Hinduism has Bhakti in two forms Nirgun and Sagun. Nirgun – formless, knowledge focused. Sagun – love focused where Krishna is God. It is amazing that Mehta's poetry is having knowledge also which is Nirgun Bhakti panth though his padas are Sagun since long songs addressed to Lord Krishna. Mehta a contemporary of Meera addresses to Krishna in equality sense – Sakhya bhav, which is absent in all other Bhakti literature's poets since they always submit themselves to Lord Krishna but hardly they feel friendly. He was a Vaishnav and Lord Krishna was his God whom he worshiped with Gopi bhav. Both of these poems have deep connections with society and culture, especially Vaishnav jan which was also tuned in movie Gandhi 1982 showing which shows the greatness of poet and poem both. W.B. Yeats says, “Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people” so Mehta uses layman's language in his poems which is understandable.

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