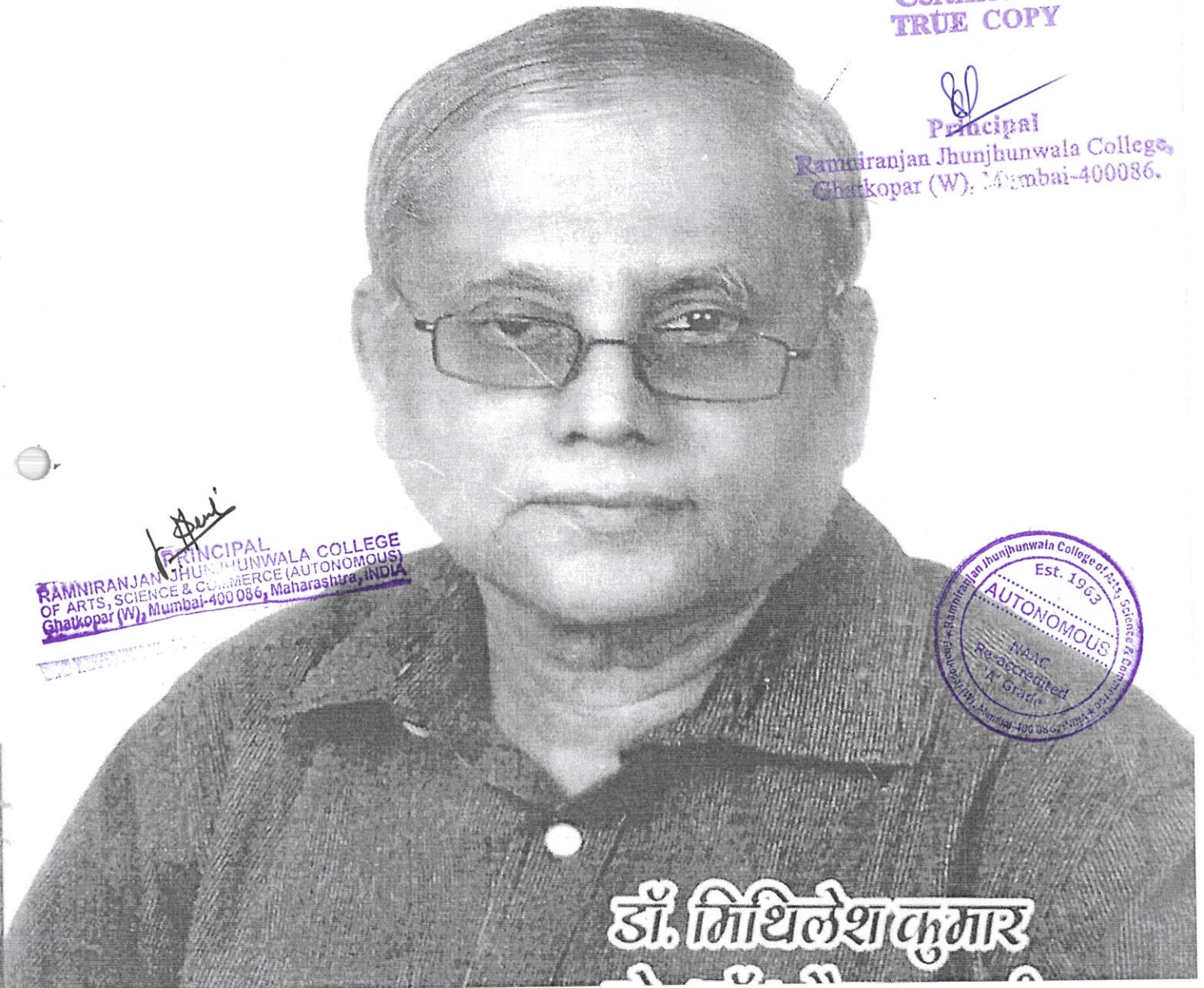


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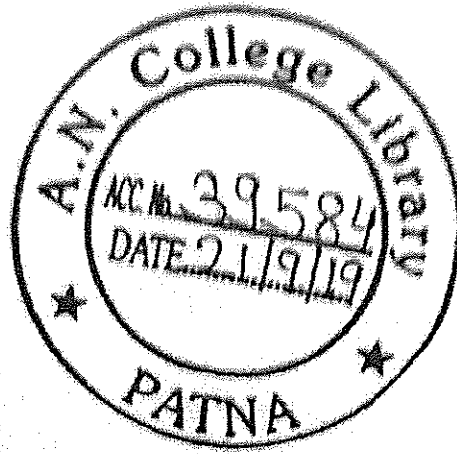
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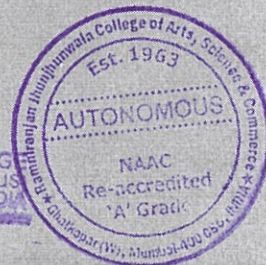
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Saint Tukaram — A Quietist Saint

— Amita Valmikki

Associate Professor and Head
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There are few personalities in our lives that contribute to make us critically think, analyze, 'be the change' (in Mahatma Gandhi's terminology) and transform for betterment. Out of these positive contributors to my life not only as a philosophy student and teacher but a better human being was prof. R.C. Sinha. We often met at various conferences and congresses (especially India Philosophical Congress held in India every year) and even at international level, at Athens, Greece for World Philosophy Congress; I used to keep some distance from the person Prof. R.C. Sinha. For what that I used to keep that distance " It was his personality that always had an aura behind him, I thought of him as person who spoke well counted words, used to think before speaking (very few have this quality), strictly organized and absolutely scholarly. I was no match as a student in front of him. Once in a congress, having no other seat to sit for breakfast I sat next to him with his permission. We started talking, I knew him, (in fact all in the congress knew him), but he did not know me so I introduced myself very timidly. And he just accommodated me in his universe of philosophy. We started discussing about one of his (endowment) lectures the previous day where he spoke of incorporating the marginalized lot of the society. Since my research area include Mysticism and Philosophy of Saints and Mystics, I was thrilled by the solution he offered to the problem of incorporation of the marginalized in the mainstream social life. I read his article on Subaltern Morality in Post-Ramayana *Ram Katha* (pp. 62-70) in the book *Ethics and Epics : Reflections on Indian Ethos*

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edited by K.C. Pandey 'Readworthy Publications, New Delhi, 2011]. I was once again spellbound by his immense knowledge of the great Indian epic Ramayana. Here Prof. Sinha takes Valmiki's version of Ramayana and Tulsi's version; where in Tulsi's version he finds 'postmodern philosophical concept of deconstruction; where the marginalized in the society are incorporated to main stream social life. This shows Prof. Sinha's humane side that leads to harmony and peace it save, by discarding all kinds of distinctions of caste, race, class and gender. Both theory and P.M are its amalgamation in Prof. Sinha's philosophy. This gave me inspiration to write an article for this book honouring Prof. Sinha where Sant Tukaram's spiritual poetries show the same inclination.

It was a haunting question to me that saints/mystics of the world — are they with, social moral contributors to society? Were they only walking alone for their own enlightenment, or were they along with spiritual pursuits brought about positive reforms in society? While reading R. D. Ranade's work on saints and mystics of the world my quest was answered. Mystics have positively contributed to bring about social reformation, peace and concern for environment. Gurudev Ranade was of the opinion that if a saint is not practically and morally active in the society s/he is not a saint. But further he says saints are of two, 'passive' and 'activist type'. Ramdas Swami, Jnaneshwar, Buddha (a great mystic), Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and many more are of activist type; but Tukaram, Mirabai, Narsinh Mehta, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and many more were quietist type. But this does not mean they were completely passive, their life and philosophy were active guiding factors to the world. The article will revolve around Sant Tukaram, his life and philosophy; his anhangas (devotional poems) that brought about drastic metamorphosis in society and toppled the authoritative upper caste regime in medieval Maharashtra, India.

Tukaram (c. 1608–1649), a seventeenth century saint from Maharashtra, belonged to a low class of Hindu community. His father was a trader. Since the elder brother of Tukaram, Savji, refused the family business as he was avert to worldly life, at the age of thirteen Tukaram was handed over the business. But this is the time where the popular mystical movement was developing in Maharashtra which was to lead the movement of devotionism in the state. In this, the most important figures who built up and propagated this kind of movement

were Inanadeva, Namdeva, Eknath, Tukaram and Ramdas. They were the exponent of Valshanava devotional-ism, where Lord Vishnu is considered as the Supreme Lord and whose incarnations are accepted. They emphasized on austerity of life which is under-scoring life's futile effort to enrich itself by means of a misguided attachment to the material pursuits.'

There were two popular movements among the saints that prevailed during those days in Maharashtra. The bhakti movement in Maharashtra, therefore, is classified into two

1. Varkaris, where the emotional outburst is free and full. Tukaram, ever esteemed for the eccentric simplicity and candid behaviour, was a Varkari.'
2. Dharakaris, where there is restraint by reason and by practical compromise between love for God and a need for moral education. Saint Ramdas, who is well known for his association with King Shivaji, was a Dharakari.

The above major types seem to be by Gurudev Ranade's quietist and activist types of saints respectively.

As such the theory of bhakti seems to have its original source in the Pancaratra school of Vaishnavism. Well, in Vaishnava bhakti, one totally surrenders to Lord Narayana, Hari or Krishna as He is considered as the one and the only God, where there is no other acceptance of any mythical gods; this is also the basis of the Bhagavad Gita that is considered the important work of the Ekantika school of Vaishnavism. Indeed, this kind of devotional-ism forms the universal basis of all kinds of bhakti worship, though among the Shaktas, the supreme deity goes by the name of Shakti; and or Shaivas, where the supreme deity goes by the name of Shiva. Vaishnava bhakti marga accepts that Narayana of Krishna is the only God, that He alone is great and that we should lay aside all other forms of worship and take complete refuge in Him. So, in all a love for God, the objects of sensual world do not interfere in their ascetic sort of life. It is simple and absolute austere life that they lead. In the Bhagavata or the Shandilya Sutra, such kind of devotional-ism is described as not worship out of a sense of duty or mere meditation on God or man, but it is deep affection (anurakthi).

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It Therefore neither knowledge nor any kind of activity, but is a feeling. So, complete refuge prapatti to God is not motivated by knowledge i.e. *jñāna*, but by a deep affection which impels the individual to take his first and last refuge in Lord. It is therefore neither reason nor any kind of activity, but is a feeling of being at transcendental level. Though a feel., this kind of bhakti does not bind anyone to this mundane world. This world is considered as a play of God's maya and God so arranges for those who love Him that His maya cannot bind His devotee to the mundane world.

Although the activities of the saints from Medieval India had their individual take on their respective path they adopted for spiritual realization, they simultaneously stirred up people's ethos, set the ball rolling towards the path of self-realization and spirit.' realization. Their experience was like flow of the river, therefore there was no competition or rivalry among them as to religious superiority, caste, racial or linguistic differences: even the differences of sects or deity they worship did not make them hate anyone. Ultimately the intensity and quality of their experience remained same. The main theme of their lives was a single presupposition of the material world. Therefore austerity is part and parcel of their life.

The tradition of Hindu philosophy that has generally been most prestigious T.U.S.,s Vedanta philosophy that centres on the teaching of the Upanishads, the philosophy, ter: concerning Brahman as one with the Atman and as the 'Sole Existent'. Other texts, such as the earlier Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, are interpreted in light of this philosophy. The theistic interpretations of Vedanta related to bhakti or Hindu devotionalism appeared, allowing some differentiation between God and the creation, and God and the human so, Though Shankaracharya opted for *Aana marga* (the path of devotion) for liberation, he did not discourage the path of devotion, *bhakti marga*. In fact, he tried to modify the harshness of caste distinction and encouraged devotion to the Hindu Gods as aspects of the One Supreme. But, the early Middle Ages were times of realization of both the social and devotional promise of the Hindu reaction to Buddhism. The main exponent of this path of devotion was Ramanujacharya. He accepted an organic model in which God is like the head and the cosmos is like the body, the two (no doubt) are inseparable

and interacting but having distinct mode of life. He adopted a theistic system where God is personal and toying, which individual souls can respond to His love and grace in many life-times. They (the devotees) purify themselves through bhakti worship, draw philosophic argument. Ramanuja defended the religion of the love of a personal God, which was and is dear to Him until they gain blissful eternity with Him in heaven (Vaikuntha). The bhakti-margins, therefore, accept the avatars (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu. Hinduism may take very austere forms in the case of renunciates who "interiorizen It all and worship without priest or temple. In the worship of Krishna, devotees lose themselves in graceful dance and chanting to exciting music _ This reminds of the whirling dervishes, the Sufis. A bhakta allows himself to be moulded in any form, say, mother, lover or companion — just for devotional purpose. Therefore, 'Bhaicti' means lose" - (Though the etymological meaning means "to serve" or "in service or,) Its intense search for that 'common bstratum' that lies behind this diversity. It begins, continues and ends in 'love'.

Again a brief discussion on mystics or saints of north and other parts of India Is relevant at this juncture as it will give us some idea as to what must be the spiritual scenario at that time in India. This will also give us an insight as to where Sant Tukaram's spiritual endeavour can be conceived of. The mystics of northern India have been noticed to aspire for Oneness, without any distinction. But 'bhakti-margins of southern India have accepted the duality of bhakta (devotee) and his/her bhagawana (God); This distinction indeed, is not a rigid one. In fact, this is the initial distinction between 'mysticism' and 'bhakti'. The ultimate goal remains same and that is of 'God realization'. Mrs. Padma Kulkarni notes, "Mysticism Is a unifying principle of all religions. Mystics all over the world 'have the same teaching about the Narne of God, the fire of Devotion, the nature of Self-realization." Here mysticism and bhakti go hand-in-hand. She further says, "Beatific vision of Christian mystics is Sakshatkara or Atrnadarshan of Indian saints. If we have Tulsidasa, Tukaram or Purandaradas representing the devotional aspect of mysticism, we have St. Augustine who represents the same spirit."

In India, we have Shankaracharya s Advaitism which opposite to the bhakts movement as emphasized by Ram Madhvacharya and Vallabhacharya, as we have seen

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influence of Ramanuja's bhakti movement Niwther, Madhva's bhakti movement influenced Bengal's Chaitanya Mahaprabhu seem: influence NUM, Mehta and Mirabai (in Gujarat especially). Northern India witnessed mysticism in vernacular, giving up strict Sanskrit influence, so also in Southern part of India especially in Maharashtra we find saints popularized Marathi language. This aspect is beautifully narrated by Dr. Sadananda More in his book Tukarna Darshan that to understand Marathi culture, Maharashtrian essence one must read JrianeSvara and Tukaram's work. He further says that for people of Maharashtra, according to Rajaramshashtri, Agamas are not the one written in Sanskrit, they consider the work of Jnanetvara and Tukaram written in Marathi as Agamas. No doubt in other parts of South India too, the regional language was becoming popular, as we have Tamil 'the Sacred floral' composed by Tiruvalluvar. Thus mysticism became democratic in nature, were all boundaries were shattered and people from all walks of life participated. So we find in India or in any part of the world, the exponents of the bhakti movement were mystic saints, who were non-sectarian in the sense that they were not affiliated to any particular sect. To name few in India, St. Ravidas (c. 15' century) was a cobbler by profession; he strongly preached Hindu-Muslim unity. Shankardev (1449-1568), the greatest religious reformer from Assam, gave "Eka-Sarana-Dharma" i.e. Religion of seeking refuge in one. St. Jrianesvara (1275-1296), the great saint from Maharashtra simplified the Bhagavad Gita - liidndvori (also called the 8havartho Dipika) — a religious sermon in the form of poetry and in the language of the people i.e. Marathi or Prakrit to convey the thoughts and the ideas which hitherto had been hidden in Sanskrit in the Bhagavad Gita. He preached about the Concept of having only one caste and one religion and that is 'humanism' and 'universal good for all living beings'. St. Namdev (1270-1350). St. Eknath (1553-1599), St. Tukaram, St. Bahinabai (1628-1700), these saints were undeterred and unstoppable by the atrocities inflicted on them by upper caste, Muslim rulers and pundits. They liberated people from the shackles of rituals, caste and other distinctions, trying even to bring unity of Hindu-Muslim in the society. St. Ramdas (1608-1681) who wrote Dosbodh is worth

ng at this juncture. For him 'devotional-ism' and 'activism' were wedded. The list is endless. The Bhagavad Gita describes a Sthitaprajna, a Gunatita, a 8hakta, a Yogi and a Brahrnabhuta.

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The saints possessed of the character that gave up orthodoxy and fanatic approaches found in society. The Varkari movement, where Tukaram belonged to, made people realize human dignity and brought about 'unity in diversity'. They instilled in people the knowledge of serving God is love that did not consider any kind of distinction among people, say of caste, class, race or gender. Tukaram's philosophical ideology was of Varkari Sampradaya that was initiated by St. Jnanetvara. The height of austerity in order begins with Jnanetvara, and then Namdev followed by Eknath and culminates in Tukaram. This tradition is the tradition of self-realization. One cannot segregate Jnanetvara and Tukaram's spiritual endeavour. Tukaram's abhanga (devotional poetry sung in praise of Vitthal/Krishna/Vishnu) not only propagates a devotional element that binds the people of Maharashtra or India, but it has a universal-spiritual-devotional aspect for everyone. It binds the people of the world, transgressing the boundaries of place, race, caste, gender or community. This is the time where Marathi saints of the 17th and 18th centuries regarded themselves as providentially designated to preserve for their countrymen the worthiest ideals of Hindu bhakti. The explanation lies in the fact that the people of the time 'looked upon the Maratha leaders as the liberators and defenders of their faith', and the result of this fight for religious liberty, extending over more than three centuries, gave to the people of Maharashtra the famous epithet of 'Joyishnu' or 'conquering' while those of other provinces are described as 'dohiyarto' or 'passively suffering'. [This distinction is made by Mr. Rajwade, mentioned in the book *Stories of Indian Saints* by Abbott and Godbole, Pp. xi], — part III. Tukaram Ambale, born in Dehu to a trader, he had two wives and was quite prosperous initially. A simple man, truthful, no pride of any kind, he was always in contemplation of none other than God. After the death of his parents, his life was full of misery. There was a dreadful famine in 1629 in the land and whatever fortune he had was all spent. His first wife had two sons, and the second one was childless. They survived on boiled vegetables and could not obtain a kernel of grain. His first wife died of starvation. This left Tukaram completely shattered where he lost complete interest in mundane life. Along with the first wife too passed away. People started mocking him. After going through this thought 'that this earthly life is unreal. I

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of maya (illusion). The human body is perishable, I have spent my life for nothing, and I have forgotten the Lord of Pandhari. (39) If one sleeps on a cot full of bugs, how can he happily sleep there? If food is cooked with poison, it cannot be called good. [40] So those who say that there is happiness in the earthly life are the biggest fools. It is like the feeling of joy at the birth of a son to a barren woman. (Ch. XI. VIII 39-40, Bhaktavijaya).' Later he became a sort of sthitaprajna and he became a vairagi, a completely detached person. But then he gave himself to Lord Pandurang (also called Vitthal) and started singing songs devoted to Lord. This was leading him to total saranagati or prapatti (surrender) to Lord. Like the Sufis, this surrender to the Lord brings about complete detachment from worldly life and austerity is the natural outcome of it. This austerity was not just internal to him but was also seen in his daily actions. There was a complete attitudinal change where Tukaram started leading life of compassion for flora and fauna, having complete anthropocosmic stance for all animate and inanimate objects. Because of his austere life style, his penance and love for God, he gained poetic inspiration, he articulated his feelings in the form of abhangas (in Marathi) whatever is laid down in the Vedas and Shashtras. It is said that Bahinabai (who was contemporary of Tukaram) had visions of Tukaram to follow the life of austerity and devotion to God. (A well known event in the life of Tukaram and Bahinabai is, somewhere a cow was whipped and the wound marks were seen on Tukaram and Bahinabai's body.) As commanded by Lord (who came in his dream along with St. Narndev) he plunged in the art of writing poetry; and in his kirtans one notices, that they are laden with the message of love and compassion. As noted by Chandrakant Mhatre, "Tukaram's reputation as one of the greatest poets born in India resides on his four thousand or so extant poems which he composed in maraths, his mother tongue. Unlike most of the poets of seventeenth century, Tukaram did not write in Marathi, instead he chose the colloquial language spoken by the masses of his times. This has given a distinct vigour to his compositions which appeal to the heart of his readers. By temperament, Tukaram is as candid and as forthright! This makes his poems penetratingly consistent in taking aim at the very core of the questions grappling human existence and its resolution through devotion and overcoming."

exactly the same dilemma faced by the human populace in the twenty first century the world over ". All the pious devotees were spellbound listening to Tukaram's poems which were full of devotion, love and compassion. Though the stake holders of religion belonging to upper caste Hindus criticized him, Tukaram did not deviate from his stance and considered both these types of people (one who loved his poems and others who derided them) alike and continued his worship of Hari (God). He sang as well as heard other bhaktas' kirtan. His love for God increased day by day and like a true Varkari went on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur (Maharashtra) in the month of Ashadh (July) and Kartik (November). He used to distribute his share of grain to others saying to his complaining wife that how can we have a larger share than what is stores up for us in our fate) His bodily, verbal and mental penances were incomparable. As a low caste shudra writing incredibly towering poems, Tukaram became the target of upper caste Brahmin. as they believed he trespassed and encroached upon the boundaries of the realm that belonged to Brahmins. Legend has it that Tukaram was forced to drown his manuscripts in the river Indrayani in Dehu: so Tukaram fasted unto death that resulted in reappearance of his manuscripts, completely Intact, from the river. Another legend is that at the age of forty-one Tukaram disappeared but people had to say that Lord Vitthal Himself.

I came down in His Pushpak Vimana to fetch him. (Scholarly writing of the hagiographer of Marathi poet-saints Shri Mahipati has given a very lucid and vivid account of Tukaram's life.) But some modern critics suspect that Tukaram was murdered and his manuscripts were destroyed as upper caste Brahrnin would not have tolerated this movement which was started and accelerated by Tukaram. By the time, Tukaram had many followers and considered him as "Lord Pandurang incarnate". especially by Tukaram's contemporary saint poetess Bahinabai. It is said that it was Tukaram's great grandson Gopalbuwa revived the tradition of Tukaram. But through all this one thing becomes very clear, as put by Dilip Chitre, in his book Says Tuko, "A brief survey of Tukaram's life and his circumstances gives us an idea of universality of his experience at a this-worldly level ..."

Through Tukaram's poems we find that how perfection through austerity of bhakti was brought about in his life. We had a small historical glimpse at Tukaram's life and scholars figure out this through his poetries. As Dilip Chitre says aptly, "One can see from it that from absolutely ordinary origins and after having gone through experiences accessible to average human beings anywhere, Tukaram went on an extraordinary voyage of self-discovery continuing to record every stage of it in detail in his poetry. His poetry is a unique document in human history, impeccably centred in the fundamental problems of being and defining poetry as both the being of language and the language of."

In Maharashtra, the bhakti movement had quite an ego 'I' together Brahmanism and the folk-religion, opened up the door, is the keynote feature of this kind of bhakti. The legacy of Jainism, which did not completely disappear from Maharashtra in those times, it is a newer, yet form of bhakti. As Dilip Chitre notes, "Tukaram's penetrating criticism, state of Brahmanical Hinduism, and his scathing comments on bigotry, and profiteering and profligacy in the name of religion, bear witness to his concerns." This comes through very well in one of his abhangas,

"Nobody becomes a saint merely by making poems.
 Nobody becomes a saint Just by being a saint's kin.
 A saint is not known by the manner of his dress.
 A saint is not known by his family's name.
 A saint does not wait for the chance to become a saint.
 Nobody becomes a saint just by carrying a begging bowl.
 Nobody becomes a saint only by wearing rags.
 Nobody becomes a saint by delivering songs and sermons.
 Nobody becomes a saint by telling sacred myths.
 Nobody becomes a saint by reading the Vedas.
 Nobody becomes a saint by performing rites.
 Nobody becomes a saint through penance or pilgrimage.
 Nobody becomes a saint by living alone in forests.
 Nobody becomes a saint by merely wearing beads.

Nobody becomes a saint by merely smearing ashes.
Says Tuka, all these so-called saints have worldly desires
As long as they do not have one unflinching faith."
[From Chive's Says Tuka].

The bhakti element is so strong in this abhanga that the love for God rules out any separatist factor. One of the vital points of his abhanga is that human being has to work out himself for his own spiritual salvation. God-men and Gurus can guide us, but ultimately we have to walk alone.

Indeed there is a strong criticism of mystics of this kind, that they are escapists; that they reject reality and they are not able to face facts of life. But, on the contrary, Tukaram faced reality with spiritual look; and spiritual response is a basic fact of life that is what he accepted. His conventional wisdom was not opposed to his bhakti. In fact they were complimentary to each other. Tukaram strongly advocated equality, universal love and compassion. The monopoly of Brahmins in spiritual realm was challenged by them. They made Marathi language as an expression of their religious endeavours. All this cannot just happen by thinking only or escaping from society. One has to be in society and work out practically all this. In one of his abhangas he says,

"We battle all day
We battle all night
We battle with the world
And with our own mind
We remain alert
For a sudden assault
We have to make
A constant stand
Says Tuka,
The power of Your name
Gives us the strength
To thwart them all"
[From Chitre's Says Tuka]

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And one of his poems says the worth of skill then mere words.

"Wheat is all the same in kind, but bad cooks spoil it. To know the secret of an art is the great thing; be it much or little; the secret what to do and where to do it. By honest toil different kinds of grain may be made into different dainties. Tuka says, It is skill that is valuable. words are false and worthless."

The austerity and simplicity of his life makes him such a bhakta who is dear to God. Tukaram Says,

"We are lucky, We are lucky!

For a copper vessel, we use a dried gourd.

Others take pride in owning cattle;

We are content with rats and mice.

People ride horses and elephants;

We walk in raw-hide shoes.

Says Tuka, we are barely clothed,

To touch us, even death does not dare.

[From Chitre's Says Tuka)

Such has been the stature of Tukaram, a bhakta, a devotee. Love is immense for flora and fauna. Environment concern is prime factor in a bhakta's life. Bhakta like Tukaram sees God in everything and everywhere, therefore there is love and compassion for all forms of life. Tukaram says,

"Trees, creepers and creatures of the forest

Are my kith and kin.

And birds that sweetly sing,

This is bliss! How I love being alone!

Here I am beyond good and evil;

Commit no sin.

The sky is my canopy, the earth my throne.

My mind is free to dwell wherever it will.

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Take care of all my bodily needs.

The wind tells me the time.

I least on the culs In A delighted connois

Says Tuka, I talk to my self

For argument's sak"

[From Chitre's Says Tuka]

Love, compassion, humanity, humility, gentleness, etc., all possible human ethical concepts are In the bio.data of saints. We can see how simple and pious life the saints lead and this is perfection through the austerity of bhaku. Let me sum up by one more poetry by Tukaram to summarize the topic,

"Don't kill a snake

Before the eyes of a saint

For the saint's being

Includes all living things

And he's easily

Hurt.

A single hair

Plucked from one's body

Causes instant pain And the soul that perceives

Life as a community

Always suffers

"To those who equate

Thair beim,

With everything

Even the other

Is a sensation

Of the self.

Says Tuka

I give you

TE

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Of et ho Be happy to worship
The Lord of All Being
In your own being
(From Chive's Says Tuka)

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So, was Sant Tukaram a quietist type of saint or an activist type?
It's both. When Tukaram says,

"He who becomes enraged at the touch of a Mahar is no Brahmin,
There is no penance for him even by giving his life.

There is the taint of untouchability in him who will not touch a Chandal.
Tuka says: A man becomes what he is continually thinking of."

From Chitre's Says Tuka

Sant Tukaram got to be an to dot saint. the message Is quite rebellious and revolutionary, In that time so Is It today. Tukaram's message that comes through his poems (abhangas) doubt, brings forth the Varkari metaphysics and epistemology but along with It the humane philosophy that enriches our realm of axiology. Salute to one of the greatest saints from Maharashtra Sant Tukaram I.

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