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THE WOMEN SAINTS OF MAHARASHTRA DURING THE LIFE OF KING SHIVAJI.

Vandana Mahanata (Bhanap)

Abstract:- Poet – Sainthood among the Marathas has by no means been confined to men, but the women saints have existed under a handicap. According to traditional stories the wives of many of the men – saints quite equalled their husbands, in piety and goodness, their very aid giving glory to their husbands, but they have modestly stood in the background, and even their names are hardly remembered. Many of them to may have been true poets, for poetry is natural to Indian women, but their words were not recorded. His words were recorded and she is known only as the wife of the eminent saint. But there have been notable exceptions to this rule.1 During the life – time of Shivaji three such exceptions may be mentioned, Bahinabai, Venubai and Bayabai. But among the Ramdasis there were others whose works are now lost and their names as well.

Keywords: Women Saints ,Indian women , autobiography .

INTRODUCTION



BAHINABAI :- Shivaji was born in 1630. Two years ago in the little village of Devgav, a few miles to the west of ellora caves, Bahinabai was born in 1628. She was 2 years his senior. In her autobiography she gives no hint of direct or indirect contact with Shivaji. Never the less her life and teachings helped to create the religious and moral atmosphere that Shivaji had to breathe. When she came Dehu, at the age of thirteen, about the year 1641, Shivaji, with his mother Jijabai, was living at Poona, only sixteen miles away, and he was but 11 years of age. It does not appear that she remained long at Dehu, listening to Tukaram’s Kirtans. Apparently her life was chiefly spent in her home – town of Devgav, rather far from the activities of Shivaji.

The autobiography of Bahinabai, is unique in Marathi literature, other poet – saints, from Eknath down have furnished in their writings a few details of their lives. Such as their ancestry, the name of their guru and the like but Bahinabai has written a long account of her girlhood, until her thirteenth year, she is not described in detail after marriage but through her experiences and thoughts much can be gathered of what her life must have been in the village and the home she loved.

According to her own story Bahini was born at Devgav, not far from Verul and the Ellora Caves. Her father was the Kulkarni of the town. At the age of five she was married. When her family goes to Kolhapur. Just at that time Jairam Swami was visited to Kolhapur.2 He was disciple of Ramdas. Among his intensely interested listeners was Bahini whose mind was turning more and more to the religious life.3 At the beginning of her thirteenth year. She had read some of Tukaram’s abhangs and her heart and mind was moved. Now she had dream in which Tuka placed his hand on her head and give blessing. She admitted into his discipleship from that time she regarded herself as Tukaram’s disciple.4 The husband was more and more exasperated against his wife and treated her cruelly. But when he fell is on this time she nursed him through his illness and gained his love and whole family went to Dehu to see Tukaram, her guru, but whom she had never seen. They arrived at Dehu and listening to Tukaram’s kirtans was their delight or as she describes it. “Joy danced in my eyes.” After that time the poetic inspiration came to her thoughts now flowed in verse.

The subjects comprised in her verses cover a wide field and coming from the heart and mind of a woman who sought her freedom and gained it by her determination and courage, they become doubly interesting. The devotional element is not lacking, but she has much to say on the practical side of life, and her moral ideas are of the highest perhaps in her quiet life at Devgav her fame may not have reached far, and Shivaji may never have heard of her, but it be could have sat at her feet and listened to her wisdom she could have taught him great truths and ways of noble living.

VENUBAI :- Ramdas admitted women to his discipleship and the more learned of them were even appointed as heads of his established religious houses. Such as one was Venubai, to whom Ramdas entrusted responsible positions and duties.

Venubai was born at Miraj in about the year 1628. At eight years of age she was married into a Kolhapur family but very soon became a widow. A desire for learning now possessed her, and one of the first books to attract her was Eknath's great work, the Eknathi Bhagwata on one occasion as she was reading the Bhagwata, Ramdas is said to have come to her home asking for alms. Noticing her book he asked her whether she experienced its truths. In 1655 Ramdas appointed her as head of the religious house at Miraj which prospered under her leadership and the order grew.⁵ Venubai's Math still exists at Miraj. She was the author of poems and sita-svayamvar.

BAYABAI :- Bayabai was one of the disciples of Ramdas's. Ramdas was accustomed to call his "daughters." Some of her poetry in Arya metre, and some poetry in Hindi,⁶ are extant.

AMBABAI :- A disciple of Ramdas and poetess.

PREMBAI :- The saint and poetess Prembai is little known and a few only of her verses are extant. She is believed to have been living at the close of the 16th century. So that she have been living during the Shivaji period.⁷

At any rate her influence must be assumed in the creation of that religious and moral atmosphere which king Shivaji had to breathe.

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