



Bhagat Namdev : Life and Philosophy

KEYWORDS

Mr.Pardeep Singh

Assistant Professor, National College for women, Machhiwara (Ludhiana)

The holy Adi-Granth was probably the first spiritual book of its kind in the history of India, which collected in one volume the out pouring of the poetic minds of saints and devotees belonging to different faiths, caste creeds, region and times. This sacred Granth preserves for posterity an authentic representative anthology of devotional hymns of India saints of the medieval age. It was but proper that Namdev, the most outstanding saint poet of Maharashtra should have been assigned an honoured place in this holy Granth.

About Namdev there is a great diversity of opinion on all matters like his birth-date, birthplace, parents, guru, travels and his death.

- According to Namdev's Abhangas it is 26th October 1270. Dr.Ranade, Sri Pangarkar, and Dr.Tulpule support it. Hindi scholars Sri Parashuram Chrturvedi and Dr.Vinayamohan Sharma also accept it. Dr.Macauliffe also agrees. European historians J.C. Powel, Price and A.A. Meedonell and an Indian historians Dr.Ishwari Prasad support it.
- Dr.Mohan Singh Divana thinks Namdev was born in 1390.
- Dr.Bhandarkar, Prof. V.B. Patwardhan, Dr.Nicol Macnicol place him as born in 1370 (and died in 1450).
- According to Bhagatram he was born in 1370 and according to Bansidhar Sashtri he was born in 1363. These two Punjabi scholars have given no evidence for these dates.
- Garsa De Tassy gives it as 1278 A.D. Dr.Mohan Singh's argument is based one pad in Guru Granth Sahib where a Sultan has asked Namdev to rejuvenate a dead cow. Sultan Ferozshah Khilji ruled Delhi from 1282 to 1296 A.D. Ferozshah Tughlak ruled Delhi from 1351 to 1388 A.D. but there is no reference to Namdev coming to Delhi. Ferozshah Sultan Bahmani could be this Sultan who died in South India in 1422 A.D. The pad referred to by Dr.Mohan Singh is also found under the name of Kabir in another manuscript. So it cannot be a reliable source. The arguments about the language of Namdev as later than that of Dnyandev have been discussed in the first section of this chapter.

It had in the beginning appreciative opinions by greatmen like justice Madhav Govind Ranade, Sir Ramakrishana, Gopal Bhandarkar, Sir Gopalrao Hari Deshmukh (Lokahitavadi) and Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Tilak wrote as follows:

"That great devotee of God who composed nearly a billion poems and pioneered the path of Devotion for the common people, and carried them to their destination successfully, should have been left neglected till now and no authentic biography of him should be available, is a matter of wonder.

Namdev has in his Abhangas given the account of his forefathers and has also indicated important matter like the time of birth and death and the account of his contemporary saints. Nobody had attempted to collect all those Abhangas at one place, and so the biographies of the pioneers of this popular Path of Devotion were not reliably recorded. The present author has taken great pains in collecting all this information. One can determine the dates of his birth and death and also of his contemporaries like Dnyandev, Nivrittinath, Sopandev and so on."

"The period of Namdev is very significant in the later history of India. At that time not only in Maharashtra but throughout India these saints laid the foundations of the Path of Devotion and showed the direction. Dnyandev, Kabir Nanak and such saints of different provinces met and discussed many common matters, which are given in this book. As a devotee, poet and pioneer of the Path of Devotion Namdev's life has a triple importance."

Namdev was a prolific poet. According to legend, he composed nearly a billion verses, through some of these are attributed to other members of household. The various stages of the development of thought through which the saint passed are amply reflected in the verses he composed. The 61 hymns of Namdev included in the Guru Granth Sahib pertain to the period when he had attained enlightenment through Nirguna Bhakti or devotion to the formless absolute. In a truly devotee's style, Namdev describes his relation with the Lord as the of a wife to her husband or that between the beloved and the lover!

I am a mad women and God is my spouse.
It is for Him I decorate myself elaborately.

This strand of thought is present throughout the Bhakati poetry. Guru Nanak is depiction of the various moods of the 'bride' in wait of the Lord's affectionate hug, his Baramaha Tukhari, not only is a study in aesthetic appeal of poetry but heightens the effect of devotional sentiment of the individuate going through the text.

Namdev's ancestry begins with Yadushet, who was a tailor by caste. The word 'Shimpi' in Marathi is used in Bhaktmal as chheepa. The legend that he was born out of a mother of pearl or shell is due to the verbal similarity between 'Shimp' and 'Shimpi'. He was the dweller of a village name Narasi Bamani near Kahrad on the banks of Krishna In the line of Yadushet, Namdev was the son of Damashet and Gunai or Gonabai. They had only one daughter Aubai and no son for a long time. He was born in the morning of Kartik Shukla Ekadashi in Saka 1192 (i.e. A.D. 1270). At the time of his birth, considering him to be the incarnation of Santkumar) Indra, Kuber, Varuna, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu rained flowers on the earth and the firmament echoed with the sound of heavenly and divine music.

At the age of two Namdev started repeating the name of Sri Vitthal. At that age of five when his teacher asked him to write on the slate 'Onama.....' (Om Namah) he wrote 'Sri Vittha'. At the age of seven he took stones as songs and repeated the same name of God and danced in ecstasy all day long. God himself came to accompany him in dance. God was repeating the name of Shiv as 'Har-Har' ! while Namdev uttered 'Hari-Hari' ! Namdev asked him about this difference between Shiva and Vishnu. God said both are the same.

Namdev was given some food (Naivedya) to be offered to the god Vitthal, in absence of Damashet He Went to the temple and insisted on Vitthal to take it, otherwise Mother would not eat. At his request God took the food. When his father returned he did not believe in this story and so he was taken to the temple and shown this miracle. Sri Vitthal eve drank the milk offered by young Namdeva, thought it was hot. The legend further gives the dialogue of the mother Namdev and God, who had burns in his mouth, but He gave some other excuses.

At the age of eight, Nama was married to Rajabai the daughter of Govindashet Sadavarte. On the first Divali after the marriage Namdev wanted God to come home and take only bath early in the morning, so he went to temple. God Vitthal agreed to do so if Namdev stood in his place. God also warned him not stir and take the candy which the devotees offered. Namdev's parents the God home and Namdev stood there in God's place as his shadow. When devotees started offering him candy and butter, he started eating. Some real devotees realized that idol was Namdev and not God Vitthal.

Namdev is held in equal esteem in Maharashtra his home state, and in the Punjab, where he is stated to have spent nearly two decades of his later life. Some of his Punjabi followers believe that the bhakta breathed his last at Ghuman, District Gurdaspur. However, most of his biographers are inclined to believe that he had returned to Pandharpur before he died. The story of his life, as also his composition unmistakably point out that Namdev Led the life of a householder, the name of his wife was Raja bai, he had four sons and a daughter his four daughter-in-law and a maid Janabai also lived with him. He also so passionately absorbed in the love of Vitthal that he attained complete detachment from the worldly life and became completely in tune with the Divine.

About the smadhi of Namdev Parikha (or sa?) Bhagvat gives Ashadh Shukla Ekadashi as the day. In Ghuman it is considered to be second of Margh. On this day there is a big fair held in Ghuman. Bohardas was supposed to be the successor of Namdev. Legends about this disappearance from his sleeping room and going to his mother in Pandharpur are not quite reliable. But very little evidence is there about these dates.

Reference:

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