

Eco-consciousness in Saint Tukaram's Selected Abhangas

Dr. Shriram Trimbak Dongre
Assistant Professor of English

A.V. College of Arts, K.M. College of Commerce & E.S.A. College of Science, Vasai Road (W), Dist. Palghar

Abstract:

Saint Tukaram was a revolutionary Marathi poet of bhakti movement. He dared to go against the established class and expressed philosophy and wisdom of life in simple words for the common people through his abhangas. He used nature images and similes that a common man can understand and identify with. He had great affection towards animals, plants and trees and had deep knowledge about their inherent qualities. The paper attempts to explore and bring out the relations of human being and the natural elements as reflected in Tukaram's poetry. It shows how Tukaram's thoughts are relevant in today's time.

Key Words: abhang, eco-consciousness, nature, animal, human being

Introduction:

Human beings have been facing today serious environmental issues like global warming, destruction of tropical forests, acid rain, loss of topsoil, toxic waste contamination, nuclear waste dumps, growing hole in ozone layer, extinction of species, etc. This has made them realize the importance of the conservation and preservation of the ecology. A branch of criticism called ecocriticism has emerged as a response to the global environmental problems. Ecocriticism expresses an urgency to create ecological consciousness amongst people

through literature. Ecocriticism studies the relationship between literature and the natural world. It demands literature to reflect the interconnections between nature and human culture. The critic, Cheryll Glotfelty writes in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* that the mission of the Association (for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE)) is, ". . . to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world." Glotfelty believes that the creative writers and thecritics can help in increasing the ecological awareness amongst people by bringing in and analysing the environmental issues and the natural elements like wilderness, geographical regions, animals, rivers, mountains, deserts, garbage and body in their literature. She expects environment to be represented in literature.

The poetry of Saint Tukaram (1598-1650) is the best example of literature that creates eco-consciousness by valuing nature as an indivisible and essential part of human life. Tukaram was a modernist poet of 17th Century in Maharashtra who wrote reformist poetry in Marathi called abhangas. He was a leading poet of varkari sect in Maharashtra which worship Lord Vitthal who is also called as Vithoba or Pandurang. Lord Vitthal's temple is located at Pandharpur. He is considered one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Tukaram not only rebelled against the Brahminic dominance over the intellectual and religious life of the common man but also criticized the falsehood of the priest class. Through the excellence of his poetry and wisdom, he questioned the interpretations of the Vedas, the traditional Hindu texts and claimed that the real meaning of the Vedas can be understood by the common people like him too. He rejected the need of the priests to interpret the scriptures. Consequently, he was not only tortured by the priest class but the gatha, the book of his abhangas was also

drowned in the river Indrayani. However, the popularity of his abhangas amongst common people and the genuineness of his poetry made the poetry survive in the minds and hearts of the people.

Saint Tukaram recognized the importance of nature in human life and preferred to write poetry by taking shelter on a hill called Bhandara, near his native place, a village called Dehu in Pune District of Maharashtra. The English poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850) defines poetry as 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity'. More than hundred years before Wordsworth, Tukaram wrote his abhangas by taking shelter at Bhandara Mountain. He always preferred to be in the vicinity of nature. The seclusion and tranquillity in the mountainous area of Bhandara inspired him to write poetry. Tukaram writes in 2481 "abhang, 'Vrukhsa valli amha soyari vanchare | pakshi hee susware alaviti || 1 || Yene sukhe ruche ekantacha vas | nahi gun dosh anga yet || 2 || Akash mandap pruthuvi asan | rame the the man kreeda kari || 3 || ...Tuka mhane hoy manashi sanvad | apulachi vad apanashi || 4 ||'. He says that seclusion in the natural surroundings gives you real pleasure as nobody blames or praises you there. The sky becomes a pandal and the earth becomes your seat. Your mind and body enjoy the surroundings. The mind communicates with yourself and it gets involved in the devotion of the God and the bhakti i.e. devotional poetry takes birth.

The above excerpt from one of his very popular abhangas makes us realize how ecology is an integral part of the poetry of Tukaram. In the first stanza, he looks at nature with sympathy and kindness. He says that the trees, vines, wild animals and birds are like relatives of human being. Their presence in the surrounding makes human life more enjoyable. He says that the company of the trees and the animals is more pleasant than the company of other human beings as they do not pinpoint your merits

and demerits.

However, human beings do not respect the divine gift of nature. Tukaram writes in abhang 1798, 'Toduni puspvatika phalvrukshyati | babhala rakhati karuni sar || 1 || kon heet tene dekhile apule | anik pahile sukh kai || dhru. || dhanye beeje jene jalilee sakale | perito kale jire beej || 2 || modoniya vata pudhilachi soy | adrane jay ghevuni loka || 3 || vishache amrut thevuniya nam | karito adham brahmahatya || 4 ||'. Tukaram's thoughts on farming are very relevant today when the conventional farming is most widely practiced for the sake of increased production and profit. He criticizes the farmers who are running after the cash crops by neglecting the traditional crops. The traditional crops are going extinct and this is going to cause great loss to the future generations as the seeds of the traditional plants of flowers and fruits will not be available for them. Today, it is observed the excessive use of fertilizers as a part of conventional farming has made not only the land but even the grains poisonous. This is how the elixir has been changed into poison by human being. Tukaram says that this is a sinful act on the part of human being. It's high time that we take inspiration from Tukaram's abhangas and turn towards organic farming to leave a healthy life and preserve the traditional crops. Instead of running after profit, human being should live satisfied life with limited resources without harming nature.

While talking about the satisfied human mind, Tukaram writes, 'Chitta samadhane | tari vish vate sone || 1 || || dhru. || bahu khota atishay | jana bhale sango kay || 2 || manachya talmale | chandane hi anga pole || 3 || Tuka mhane duja | upchar peeda puja || 4 ||'. The mind of a balanced and satisfied person is so powerful that even the poison is as precious as gold for it. Contrary to this, the false and restless person's mind does not understand what is good for it. Even the sandalwood burns the body of such person. In 76th abhanag, Tukaram contin-

ues talking about the mind. He says that an angry dog cannot control its mind even if it is served milk. It brings calamity on itself. Likewise, the anger in human mind too puts the person in troubles. Therefore, a peaceful mind is more precious.

In 122nd abhang, Tukaram says that a person's life is meaningless if his/her life lacks any discipline and who only prefers to eat like a dog. He/she is like a bull whose job is only to carry loads. "Kahi nityanemavin | anna khay to chi shwan || vaya manushyapan | bhar vahe to vrushabh || 1 || Tukaram emphasizes that human life should be disciplined and full of activities to be meaningful. One should have compassion towards the fellow beings. Otherwise, there is no difference between human life and the life of the animals.

Tukaram describes the characteristics of an excellent human being. A person should be sympathetic and kind towards the animals. He says in abhang 2864, 'Bhootdaya gaipashuche palan | tanhelya Jeevan vanamaji || 3 || shantirupe navhe konacha vait | vadhavi mahatwa vadilanche || 4 ||' A person should have compassion towards all the creatures. He should maintain peace without harming anyone. This will glorify the name of his ancestors. J. N. Fraser and J. F. Edwards in their work, *The Life and Teaching of Tukaram* write, "He (Tukaram) recognizes duties towards animals: 'Despise dogs and pigs; for their bodies, but show them respect for their souls-embrace spiritually beasts and trees'". This expresses Tukaram's sympathy towards animals.

In abhang 1492, Tukaram writes that pride and arrogance destroy the human being. 'Bahyarangache karan | mithya avghe chi bhashan | garva, tatha he adnyan | maran save vahatase || dhru. || pure mataliya nadi | lavha nande jivan sandhi | vruksha unmoloni bhedi | pari to kadhi bhangena || 2 ||' He gives the example of a big tree and a reed. In a strong flood of a river, the tree gets destroyed but the

reed survives. The powerful, strong and wealthy people should always keep this in mind that if they get arrogant and proud, they can bring their end. Further, in abhang 289, he talks that true nature of a person cannot be hidden. It comes out naturally. As a tree of sandalwood can be identified easily and, as soon as the sun rises the people are awakened and, as the black clouds appear in the sky, the peacock starts dancing, like that the inner true feeling of a person comes out voluntarily. One cannot hide them.

While talking about the wicked people in abhang 573, Tukaram says, 'bhav dharil taya taril pashan | durjana sajjan kay kari || 1 || karita navhe neet shwanache he puchch | khapra paris kay kari || dhru. || kay karil taya sakareche ale | beej taisi phale yeti taya || 2 || Tuka mhane vajra bhange ek vel | kathin ha khal tayahuni || 3 ||'. As one cannot make the tail of a dog straight and, as the philosopher's stone cannot transform a potsherd into gold and, even if you manure a tree with sugar the fruits will not change their natural taste, similarly, the wicked person will not transform into a virtuous human being. The hard stone can be broken with great efforts but the wicked man is harder to change. Tukaram refers the dog and says in 117th abhang that one should be cautious from a wicked person as one is from a rabid dog. He says, 'Durjanache bhay dharave tyapari | pisalevari dhave shwan || 3 ||'.

He also talks about an atheist in abhang 3831. As a crow cannot look beautiful even if a precious necklace is tied around its neck and, as an elephant cannot understand the importance of musk even if it is applied on its body, the atheists will not understand the importance of devotion or bhakti. However, in abhang 563, he says that the devotees of Vitthal will not be afraid of anything. They will not be victims of any illusory thing like a mirage.

Tukaram's poetry is full of illustrations from the world of nature. He uses immense natural images. He wrote his poetry in the honour of

Lord Vitthal. He says that his Lord is unique. In the 4th abhang, he says that his Lord is so beautiful that even the beauty of the sun and the moon is lesser than the glory of the Lord. 'Rajas Sukumar madanacha putala | ravishashikala lopaliya ||1||' In the 6th abhang, Tukaram says that the brightness of his Lord's forehead is more than the brightness of the hundred suns together. He writes, 'Mugut matha koti suryancha zalal | kaustubh nirmal shobhe kanthi ||2||'. In abhang 475, he compares the face of the Lord with the beauty of the full moon.

The yearning for Lord Vitthal's meeting is described beautifully by Tukaram in abhang 266 by using the image of fish. He writes that as a fish, taken out of water intensely waits to put itself again into the water, he is waiting that strongly to meet Vitthal. He says that as a newly married daughter looks again and again towards her parents' house eagerly and, as a missing child looks hard for its parents, he is waiting to meet the Lord that passionately. Further, in abhang 3908, for meeting the Lord Vitthal, he is as eager as a cat which is waiting for grabbing a ball of butter. He writes, 'Manjare dekhiyela loniyacha gola | lavuniya dola baisalese ||2|| Tuka mhane ata zadi ghalu pahe | pandurange maye tuze payi ||3||'.

Tukaram brings in the stories of Lord Shri Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu in his abhangs. Shri Krishna is a cowherd. His job is grazing cows. The animal cow comes again and again in Tukaram's abhangs. In abhang 185, 186, 199, 232, 396, 4385 Lord Krishna is referred as a cowherd whose company is liked by his friends. They take the cows together for grazing and play various games and eat food together when the cows take rest under the trees. The friendship and bond of love is so strong among the animals, Krishna, his friends and the natural surroundings that in abhang 4545, Tukaram says when Krishna disappears in the river Yamuna while fighting with the Kaliya Naag, the huge serpent, the friends, animals, trees and

the villagers are in intense grief. Tukaram writes, 'Tiri mana ghaluniya ubhya gae | tatastha ya dohi yamunechya || 11 || yamunechya tiri zade vrukshavalli dukkha komayili krushnachiya || 12 || yanche tyanche dukkha ek zale tiri | mag shok kari maybap || 13 ||'. In abhang 4552, Tukaram writes as soon as Krishna comes out of the deep water, everybody including the friends, cows and trees get delighted. This is the best example that Tukaram gives of how the natural elements too participate in human sorrow.

In abhang 990 and 1544, he mentions cows, buffaloes, sheep and goats and says that no one of them is as excellent as Kamdhenu, the mythological divine cow who is the mother of all the cattle and who fulfils all the desires of its owner. The people who show you the way to the Lord, are like the divine cow. Tukaram uses the traditional beliefs about the birds and animals. He writes in abhang 3128, as the flamingo can separate water from milk with the tip of its beak, he can differ between truth and falsehood. He also uses the image of the chataka bird which is traditionally believed to drink water only when it falls in its mouth when it rains. Tukaram says that he is as patient as the bird and waits for the blessing of the God.

Tukaram uses the image of mirage repeatedly in his abhangs. He compares the mirage with falsehood in 99th abhang. He writes, 'Mrugajala dise sachpana eise | khotiyache pise ur phodi ||1|| || dhru. || janoni ka kara apulale ghat | varare heet lavlahi ||2||'. He questions the people that in spite of knowing the falsehood of certain things like mirage, why some people still run after the false things in life. One should understand one's goal and welfare and should strive to achieve that. One should not run after the illusory things.

The holy river like the Ganga and the place like Kashi too find mention in Tukaram's abhangs. In 137th abhang, he writes, 'Kay kashi kariti ganga | bhitari changa nahi to ||1|| He says that people prefer to bathe in the Ganga and visit Kashi to get the salvation from their

sins. They think that only doing the rituals will help them to get rid of their bad deeds. However, it is of no use, unless they change their hearts and become virtuous. Whenever Tukaram writes about Krishna and his friends' activities, the river Yamuna finds reference. Most of the time they play games on the bank of Yamuna and graze cattle around the bank of the river.

Tukaram describes the yearly congregation of the devotees of Vitthal at Pandharpur in the month of Kartiki, as the appearance of the heaven at the place in abhang331. The paradisiac atmosphere makes the devotees immersed in the devotion of the Lord. They engross in the chanting of the name of the Vitthal and dance like a herd of elephants. He says that Padharpur becomes as holy as Kashi and Gaya, the religious places traditionally considered important for the emancipation of human soul in Hinduism. Like an eco-critic, Tukaram gives references of places and rivers in his abhangas.

Conclusion:

Tukaram uses the nature images to spread his teachings through abhangas. He shows how human life is intertwined with its natural surroundings. He wants human beings to observe nature as a great teacher and learn life lessons from the natural elements like trees and animals and other creatures. Tukaram has great sympathy towards nature and its elements. In today's time of environmental crises, Tukaram's thoughts about the preservation and conservation of nature are more relevant and contemporary.

References:

1. Shri Tukaram Bavanchya Abhanganchi Gatha. Shashkiy Photozinko Mudranalay,1973.
2. Fraser, J.N.& J. F. Edwards. The Life and Teaching of Tukram. Probsthain & Co., 1922.
3. Glotfelty, Cheryl & Harold Fromm. editors. The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology. The University of Georgia Press, 1996.
4. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth> Accessed 2 Dec. 2022.
5. <https://www.santsahitya.in/mahatisantanchi/sant-tukaram-maharaj/> Accessed 2 Dec. 2022.

संत एकनाथांच्या निवडक अभंगांचा सामाजिक दृष्टिकोनातून अभ्यास

डॉ. समिता एम. जाधव
मार्गदर्शक, प्राध्यापक, मराठी विभाग,
देवगिरी महाविद्यालय, औरंगाबाद

वर्षा रविंद्र उपाध्ये
संशोधक विद्यार्थिनी,
देवगिरी महाविद्यालय, औरंगाबाद
डॉ. बाबासाहेब आंबेडकर मराठवाडा विद्यापीठ,
औरंगाबाद

महाराष्ट्र संताची भूमी आहे. या भूमीला समृद्ध संतांची परंपरा लाभली आहे. या संत परंपरेतील एक मुख्य नाव म्हणजे संत एकनाथ. तत्कालीन समाजात अस्थिरता प्राप्त झाली होती. धर्माला ग्लानी आली होती. अज्ञान, अंधश्रद्धा, भोंदुगिरी यामुळे समाज अंधारात लोटला होता. अशा वेळेस संत एकनाथांनी समाजाला अंधारातून काढण्यासाठी प्रयत्न केले. त्यांनी समाजप्रबोधन केले.

संत एकनाथांची वाङ्मय संपदा अफाट आहे. आजही त्यांचे साहित्य दिशा देण्याचे काम करते. समाजाचे प्रबोधन करण्याची भूमिका त्यांच्या अभंगात आपल्याला आढळते. संत एकनाथांनी चार हजारापेक्षा जास्त अभंगाची रचना केली. त्यांच्या अभंगाबाबत विविध अभ्यासकांची मते आढळून येतात ते पुढीलप्रमाणे.

उषा माधव देशमुख म्हणतात, वृत्तीचा मोकळेपणा आणि प्रतिभेचा उत्स्फूर्तपणा यामुळे नाथांच्या अभंगवाणीतील भक्तीभाव माखलेला आहे. त्याला जनरीतीचा रंग आहे आणि ग्रामजीवनाचा गंध आहे. या अभंगांना एक सांस्कृतिक संदर्भ आहे. ईश्वरप्राप्तीचे साधन, ईश्वराचे भजन, ईश्वराची उपासना, ईश्वराची