

EKNATH (A. D. 1533-1599), a great saint-poet-cum-social reformer was a polymath, a *Sahitya Samrat* whose valuable contribution to different forms of literature served as a beacon to his contemporaries and future generations.

Chapter 1 of this monograph depicts the deplorable socio-economic and political condition of Maharashtra of the 16th century. After a brief biographical sketch (in Ch. 2), chapter 3 evaluates Eknath's *magnum opus*, his commentary on the Bhagavata which by its lucid exposition popularised the Bhagavata Sampradaya in all classes of society. His romantic presentation of the merger of the Individual Soul in the Supreme Soul in *Rukmini Svayamvara* (Ch. 4) is still unsurpassed. His interesting narrative of the Rama Story in the *Bhavartha Ramayana* (Ch. 6) was a model to later narrative poets like Mukteshwar, Mahipati and others. His miscellaneous works include not only his Vedantic treatises, but a vast number of his Abhanga-lyrics. His Abhangas popularly known as *GAULANI* describing the life of Krishna in Gokul, have enchanted not merely the elite (in Keertana) but have fascinated the masses in folk-dramas based on them. Ekanath's unique contribution is his *BHARUD* Abhangas. Through the wide social spectrum including all the castes and subcastes, gods of the lower castes, games of boys and even animals, allegorically, Bhakti is preached in an attractive style.

The last chapter shows how this spiritual leader of his times, "The Avatara of Jnanadeva" ushered in a New Epoch in Marathi literature and is still regarded as the greatest saint (next to Jnanadeva) of Maharashtra.



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G. V. TAGARE (b. 1911) : Linguist, Hindi literatures and author of works on Shaiva English translator of the Bhagavat, Kurma Vayu Puranas (20 Volumes published) and Skanda Purana (in press.) A writer on saints of Maharashtra in Marathi journals is now engaged in the (English) translation of *Eknathi Bhagavata*.

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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

EKNATH

G. V. TAGARE



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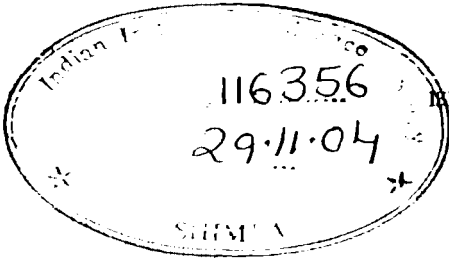
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PREFACE

Eknath (A.D. 1533-1599) a great polymath, a poet-saint cum social reformer of a high order, was a beacon unto his contemporaries as well as to successive generations. Though spiritually motivated, his contribution to literature is so rich and varied that he may be regarded as a *Sahitya-Samrat* of his age. He ushered in a new epoch in Marathi literature.

Due to his great contribution to the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra, he came to be regarded as an Avatara of Jnaneshvara by the masses - 'a prop unto the temple of Bhakti' as Bahinabai, a disciple of Tukaram puts it.

Here is a peep in the life and works of Eknath as a maker of Indian Literature.

I place on record my sincere thanks to the Sahitya Akademi for giving me an opportunity to make an in-depth study of Eknath and to my friend Prof. N. G. Deshpande for critically reading my manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

G. V. TAGARE

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THE CHALLENGE

It was one of the darkest periods in the history of Maharashtra. Hindu kings of North India had already capitulated. The whole of Maharashtra was occupied by different branches of the erstwhile Bahamani kingdom. The tottering Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar was reeling under incessant invasions by the surrounding Muslim states resulting in its ultimate collapse in A.D. 1565, within the lifetime of Eknath.

As recorded in Muslim Chronicles, accounts of foreign travellers like Ibn Batutah and in contemporary Indian literature, condition of Hindus under Muslim rule was unenviable. Pogroms and other barbarous - almost incredible cruelties were perpetrated on Hindus.

The following brief summary of the description of the condition of Hindus under Muslim rule given by the eminent historian, Sir Jadunath Sircar, will throw a flood of light on the enormity of the challenge before Eknath and his contemporaries :

"By the basic concept of the Muslim State all non-Muslims are its enemies. The ideal aim was to exterminate them totally.... The poll-tax, jizya, was payable by Hindus for permission to live in their ancestral homes under Muslim sovereigns. In addition to the payment of jizya, the Hindus were subject to many disabilities in the practice of their religion and in other civil rights.*

Still more humiliation was the impotence of the Hindu society to protect their women while "Muslims took delight in enslaving Hindu women *en masse* from the highest to the lowest community."*** Ramadas, the activist saint of the 17th century A.D., the guru of

* Summarised from *The Delhi Sultanate* pp. 617-623 Vol. VI of *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Pub. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1967.

** Op. cit. p. 582

Tulasidas deplures :

गोड, गैवार, नृपाल, कलि यवनमहा महिपाल ।

साम न, दाम न, भेद अब केवल दंड कराल ॥

Shivaji, deploras the pathetic condition of women, both in his *Dasabodha* and his miscellaneous poems.

The Hindu society has its own inherent weaknesses. It was fragmented into different castes, sub-castes and regional groups—each regarding itself self-sufficient and “pollutable” by commensal and connubial relations with any other outside group, caste or sub-caste. The moral deterioration of all castes and communities at the time of Eknath has been graphically described by Eknath himself in the *Johar** songs. Eknath declares himself to be a Mahar of his guru Janardana. Assuming such a low profile, he says :

“They call themselves Brahmanas but do not perform bath, sandhya-prayer, recitation of the Vedas and indulge in impure acts of black magic.

They call themselves Sannyasis but entertain in their hearts the six enemies (Viz. Lust, Anger etc. which are to be eschewed by the very term sannyasin). Day and night they keep a watch (to grab) the wealth and food of others.

He becomes a fakir for filling his belly and went on crying “Allah, Allah” throughout his life.

They say, “We have become a Jangam (a Veershaiva priest)”, but do not propitiate God Shiva; but beg to fill their belly blowing out through a conch “Bham, Bham, Bham”.

SSG (*Sakal Sant Gatha*)
Vol-II *Abh* (Abhang 3891)”

In this way, Eknath criticises other communities and religious sects of his time. But these *Johars* (Abhs. 3862-3899 and Abhs. 3900-3908) describe the heart-rending plight of the masses, their exploitation

* *Johar* - Former customary salutation by Mahars to members of the higher communities. The higher communities greeted each other by uttering, “Rama, Rama”. The Mahars saluted the members of upper caste by saying “Johar” or “Johar maya bapa” as recorded by Eknath.

and extortion by village officers and others.

Eknath's criticism of the proselyting campaign of Muslims (in "The Hindu-Turk" dialogue Abh. 3970) has been now supported by historians like Setu Madhavrao Pagadi*, N. R. Phatak** and others. They have thrown glaring light on the nefarious activities of Muslim missionaries professing pseudo-Pro-Hindu-Sufism. It is said that they converted more Hindus to Islam than the ruthless Sultans with their swords.

Undaunted by such grim, dismal circumstances, Eknath and his contemporary saint-poets accepted this challenge of their time. Though bereft of any royal, military or physical sanction, they tried to minimise social demoralisation and disintegration by enlightening the masses about their glorious cultural past and their valuable legacy of philosophy, through the medium of their mothertongue (Marathi). These saint-poets were not anti-Muslim. They saw God in Man and treated all men alike irrespective of their religion or caste.

Eknath (A.D. 1533-1599), the great scholar - saint-poet-cum-social reformer, was the brightest star in the galaxy of those contemporary saint-poets and stalwart defenders of our ancient culture. As R. D. Ranade states :

"He (Eknath) surpassed all saints in accomplishing a high degree of reconciliation between worldly and spiritual life" (*Indian Mysticism*, p.256).

Significant is the compliment of Dasopant, the great Sanskrit scholar, poet-saint and an eminent contemporary of Eknath. States Dasopant :

Obeisance to Eknath Pant

. He is verily a great saint.

EKNATH : A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH*

(A. D. 1533-1599)

A reference to the *Marathi Vangmaya Kosh* (A biographical dictionary of Marathi writers) shows that there were three authors called "Eknath" and seven authors who used the *mudrika* (Pen-name) "Eka-Janardan" used by our author Eknath. Eknath was a Rigvedi Deshastha Brahmin, a follower of the Ashvalayana Sutra. His Gotra was Vishvamitra. His family deity was Ekaveera (or Renuka). His family lived at Paithan, the capital of ancient Satavahana dynasty - now a modest town in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra.

GENEALOGY

Eknath was born in a well-to-do Bhagavat (Varkari) family. Eknath's great-grand-father, Bhanudas (circa 1448-1513 A. D.), was a leading member of the Varkari *sampradaya* of his time. Both he and his great-grandson Eknath were proud of their Varkari lineage.

States Bhanudas about his family :

"In our family, it is the tradition of regularly attending the *Vari* (the pilgrimage to Pandharpur on Ekadashi days) and continuous *Japa* (muttering) of the name of (god) Vitthala.

-*Sakal Santa Gatha* (SSG) Vol II Abhang (Abh. 36).

Gratefully endorses Eknath :

"Blessed is the (sportive) working of my fortune,

* Based on Keshava Swami's "*Biography of Eknath*" (A.D. 1684), Mahipati's *Bhakta Leelamrita* (A.D. 1774) and *Bhakti Vijay* and Krishnadasa Jagadananda's *Pratisthana Charitra* - the last being of a controversial nature is sparingly quoted when necessary.

that I got birth in a Vaishnava (Bhagavata or Varkari) family.”

-*Eknathi Bhagavata* (EB), chapter 1, Ovi 136.

Traditionally Bhanudas is credited to have brought back the idol of Vitthala from a king of Karnatak (variously mentioned as Krishnadeva Ray or Ramadeva Ray). Though Mahipati records this exploit of Bhanudas in the *Bhakta Vijaya* (BV) chapter 43, Ovis 147-220 (BV.43.147-220) both Bhanudas and Eknath are silent about it. Bhanudasa's son was Chakrapani. He was a reputed scholar-saint (*Pratisthan Charitra*, chapter 2, Ovis 30-40 = PC.2.30-40). Chakrapani's son was Suryaji. He is supposed to be the same as Surya Pandit, the preceptor of the Dharmashastra writer Dalapati of Devagiri fort (A.D.1490-1512) as he pays respect to Surya Pandit in his work *Nrisimha-prasada*. But there is no indisputable evidence on this point. If true, Eknath belonged to a family of Sanskrit Pandits - a family tradition continued later by his son Hari Pandit.

The birth date of Eknath is still uncertain. In a poignant Abhanga, Eknath simply records that he was born under the star Moola.

“How (unfortunate it is) that Moola was ordained
as my birth-asterism and I have become the cause of
the death of my parents despite the performance of
Shanti (Pacificatory rite).”*

The year of Eknath's birth (viz. A.D. 1533) is deduced from the year of his death (A.D. 1599), when he was deemed to be sixtysix years old. Eknath lost his parents before he become three years old. He was brought up under the affectionate care of his grand-parents. They performed his thread ceremony when he completed his seventh year (PC.1.20.). Chakrapani sent him for further education to his junior friend Janardan Pant, a famous scholar-saint of that period. (PC.1.62-70). Despite the controversial nature of P.C. this account appears to be more natural and reasonable than the derogatory legend recorded by Mahipati in the *Bhakta-leelamruta*

* मुळीच्या मुळी एका जन्मला । मायबापे थोर धाक घेतला ।
कैसे मूळ नक्षत्र आले कपाळा । स्वये लागलो दोहीच्या निर्मूळा ॥

(BL.13.59-64). According to that legend, Eknath sneaked out of his house without the knowledge of his loving grand-parents. He independently presented himself as a disciple to Janardan Pant and that Janardan Pant did not inform Chakrapani about Eknath for full twelve years. Such a criminal dereliction of duty on the part of a responsible officer-saint like Janardan is simply incredible. The story in PC shows that Janardan Pant and Chakrapani knew each other well. In the interest of Eknath, Chakrapani sent Eknath to his junior friend Janardan who was a reputed scholar-saint.

SPIRITUAL GENEALOGY OF EKNATH

Eknath traces his spiritual genealogy to Dattatreya through Janardan :

“This is the line of disciples of Dattatreya. (the first was) Sahasrarjuna; Yādu (was) the second and the third was Janardan in the Kali age.” (EB.9.430)

He further narrates how Janardan came to be initiated by Dattatreya :

“When Janardan was extremely eager and anxious to have a spiritual guide and forgot himself in anxious meditation about it, Datta had to come (i.e. manifested himself) and he placed the palm of his hand over the head of Janardan.” (EB.9.431-434)

Janardan tells us that when he was ‘scalded’ by three types (such as Adhi-Bhautika, Adhi-Daivika) of troubles, he came to Ankalkhop (Dist. Sangli) on the bank of the Krishna where he met his Sadguru, a Sannyasin. Janardan believed that the Sannyasin was Datta himself (SSG.II. P.1, Abh.1). Janardan exhorted Eknath to meditate on him (Datta) day and night (SSG II, p.17 Abh.,14). This Sannyasin was not Narasimha Sarasvati who passed away in A.D. 1458.

The statements of Janardan and Eknath about Datta being the spiritual preceptor of Janardan deserve acceptance as instances of the deity manifesting itself to the devotee and giving spiritual guidance are on record. Ramadasa states that his spiritual preceptor

was God Rama himself*. Tukarama was initiated in his dream by a Sannyasin who was already dead; so is the relation of Niloba and Tukaram. Even a British-educated Aurobindo tells that he used to get guidance from Vivekananda first and later by the Vedic Sage Kauthuma - both of them were not in this world then.

Such events are however beyond the ken of mundane researchers. There have been seven authors using 'Eka-Janardan' as their *mudrika*. But ignoring six Eka-Janardanas V.S. Bendre believed that a Muslim saint Chandsaheb Kadiri was the guru of Janardana, the guru of our Eknath, disbelieving the clear statements of both Janardan and Eknath about their spiritual genealogy from God Datta himself. Dr. R. C. Dhere echoed Bendre's view**. But one is surprised when a respectable scholar of Marathi Saint-literature, Dr. S. G. Tulpule, not merely toes the line of Bendre and Dhere but alleges that Eknath suppressed the name of his Muslim guru due to fear of Brahmin orthodoxy. In his *Classical Marathi Literature*, (Otto Harrassowitz, Weisbaden, 1979, p.353), he says : "Eknath himself concealed this fact of a Muslim guru - Said Chandsahib Kadiri, in order not to invite the displeasure of the orthodoxy and traced his spiritual lineage to God Dattatreya through his guru Janardana."

Any unprejudiced reader of Eknath's *Johar* - songs and his scathing criticism of Brahmins in the *Bhavarth Ramayana* and other works will show how boldly Eknath attacked Brahmin orthodoxy. But his opposition was not mere academic or limited to speech or writing. In his actual life he revolted against that orthodoxy by serving the holy food prepared for Shraddha to hungry Fakirs (BL.17.68-90). This act shows that *Eknath was not anti-Muslim*.

Eknath's dining in the house of Ranya Mahar (BL.ch.19), his merciful treatment to a Harijan thief (BL.ch.20), rescue of a Harijan child (BL.ch.22) - all these acts show that Eknath was a bold social reformer, a relentless fighter against Brahmin orthodoxy. Hence to

* वसिष्ठे उपदेशिले रामासी । रामे रामदासा उपदेशिले ।

This is confirmed by the inscription on the Samadhi of Tryambaka-raj the disciple of Ramadas at Bhalgav. The guru parampara given there is :

श्री आदिनारायण - चतुरानन वसिष्ठ मुनी - रामचंद्र - रामदास - त्र्यंबक राज.

-Brahmananda Deshpande- *Shodha Nibandha* -3, p.27.

** R. C. Dhere - *Musalaman Marathi Sant Kavi*, Pune 1967, p.84.

allege that Eknath disowned his Muslim spiritual lineage out of cowardice, fear of orthodox Brahmins, is, to put it mildly, blasphemous. Eknath was neither anti-Muslim nor anti-Brahmin, but a saint who saw God in man irrespective of class, caste or religion.

But this *faux pas* does not denigrate the value of other researches of Dr. Tulpule or Dr. Dhere.

Dr. Brahmanand Deshpande, in his book "*Shodh Nibandha-3*" (Aurangabad, 1982, pp.1-37) has completely disproved this theory of Bendre and others, by showing its contradictions, baseless conjectures, rejection of inconvenient evidence as "spurious" or ignoring it altogether. It shows to what length researchers go to "prove" their pet theories.

EKNATH'S EDUCATION UNDER JANARDAN

The works of Eknath show that under the guidance of Janardan, Eknath read the *Bhagavata* as interpreted by Shreedharasvami and the *Bhagavad Gita* as explained by Jnaneshvar. References in the EB to Patanjala Yoga (EB 14. 402-512) testify to Eknath's knowledge (and practice) of Pranayama and other esoteric details of Yoga Shastra. But like his guru, Eknath regarded Bhakti superior to Yoga (EB 19.213-300, 20.340-424) and from *Bhavartha Ramayana* (BR I. chapter:7, 9 & 10) Eknath seems to have read the *Yoga Vasistha* under his guru. His commentaries on Vedanta-stotras such as Hastamalaka show that he must have read some Vedanta stotras with his guru. Probably to test how far Eknath has mastered Vedanta, Janardan told young Eknath to write a Marathi commentary on the *Chatuh Shloki Bhagavata* (CSB) in circa 1555 A.D. Eknath wrote 1036 Ovi-verses on it, to the satisfaction of Janardan. Eknath, however, gives the whole credit of that excellent commentary to his guru.

After completion of education, Janardan advised Eknath to undertake pilgrimage to holy places in the North India first. It is believed that Eknath spent about two years in pilgrimage. It is difficult to believe that Eknath visited all the Tirthas listed by Mahipati in BL.15.70-106. PC is silent about Eknath's pilgrimage.

In A.D. 1556 (Shaka 1478) Eknath got married. There are two versions about the native place of his wife Girijabai. PC states that

she was the daughter of Trivikram Shastri of Daulatabad. Mahipati states that Girijabai hailed from Vijapur and the marriage took place at Paithan (BL.16). Dr. Brahmanand Deshpande notes that the Deshpande family of Vaijapur (Dist. Aurangabad) claims that Girijabai belonged to their family. (*Shodh Nibandh-3*, p.21). Perhaps Mahipati mistook the famous city Vijapur for the obscure place Vaijapur. Eknath permanently settled at Paithan after his marriage.

PC states that after Eknath's marriage Janardan transferred his spiritual lineage and gave his Padukas* to him (PC.4.90-91).

From his daily routine recorded in the PC chapter 5, Eknath seems to have led an ideal householder's life as prescribed in the Dharmashastra. As a part of his daily routine, Eknath gave Purana discourse in the afternoon and performed Keertanas at night. These became so popular that miraculous stories like the attendance of god Vitthala and river - goddess Godavari to listen to Eknath are noted by Mahipati (BL.22.150-184).

Eknath had three children, two daughters Goda and Ganga and a son Hari Pandit.

Eknath continued his Purana-elucidation and Keertanas for more than twelve years when Janardan thought that Eknath has become a mature scholar, and saint-poet. He suggested Eknath to undertake a commentary on the XI skandha of the *Bhagavata Purana* (EB.1.100-104). Eknath started his commentary on the Ekadashi day in the dark half of Ashadha Shaka 1492 (A. D. 1570). He completed the first five chapters on the Kapilashashthi day** in Shaka 1492 (A. D. 1570). Janardan was so highly pleased with Eknath's commentary that he voluntarily gave the blessing :

“The book will accomplish its own object. (Spiritual) knowers will be happy. The aspirants of Moksha will attain their highest objective and Sadhakas will cross over the ocean of Samsara. Although the commentary is in Marathi, it will be charming enough by its gift of spiritual knowledge.” (EB.31.535-537)

* At Karnal near Sangli, there is another set of Janardan Svami's Padukas in the family of one Shri Shridhar Bidesh Gosavi (Shri S. B. Gosavi's letter dt. 18-9-91).

** कृष्ण उद्धव गोड गोष्टी । हे निर्विकल्प कपिलाषष्ठी ।
तो पर्वकाळ कसवटी । सांगो उठाउठी पंचाध्यायी आली ॥

According to a current legend, Eknath went to Kashi as he was summoned by a Sannyasi to answer for his act of polluting a sacred text like the Bhagavata by a Prakrit (Marathi) commentary. Janardan was alive then. A devoted disciple like Eknath would never have complied with an order from a stranger Sannyasi. But *Ardhodaya Parva* (Sunday, New moonday of Pausha, Shravana Nakshtra and Vyatipat occurring on the same day) was there in Shaka 1492. With his guru's permission, Eknath went to Varanasi where he continued his work on Bh.P. XI Skandha. Perhaps by way of relaxation from the rigorous work of elucidation of the Vedanta in the Bhagavata, Eknath wrote the romantic story of Krishna's marriage with Rukmini (The *Rukmini Svayamvara*) on Rama Navami of Shaka 1493 (A.D. 1571). Though the dead weight of Vedanta and spiritualism is on this romance also, Eknath created a beautiful poetic work which even he could not surpass in the *Bhavartha Ramayana*, when he described the marriage of Rama and Sita. Needless to say that later poets like Shreedhar, Samaraja, Moropant also could not excel him. Eknath completed his commentary on the Bhagavata on Monday, the fullmoonday of Kartika in A.D. 1573 "on the bank of Manikarnika." (EB.31.551-552). As Eknath left immediately after completing the Bhagavata in A. D. 1573 and as Tulasidas came to Varanasi early in 1574, it is unlikely that these two saints met each other. After his return from Varanasi, Eknath followed his routine of Purana-Keertanas. But in addition to that, he rendered outstanding service to Marathi speakers, as if through divine will. In A. D. 1583 Eknath had a miraculous dream. Eknath saw Jnanadeva, a divinely resplendent personality, requesting him to remove the root of the Ajanu tree (*Ehretia Lacvis*) which had reached his throat. Eknath went to Alandi, removed the root from Jnanadeva's throat and renovated the Samadhi. In A. D. 1584, he brought out an authentic edition of the *Jnaneshvari*.

It was the evening in Eknath's life. Due to the collapse of the Vijayanagar Kingdom, there prevailed a sense of helplessness and gloom among the Hindu masses. To encourage the public, a hero who liberated Devas from the bondage of Ravana was presented by Eknath in a popular Purana-like fashion, in the *Bhavartha Ramayana*. He could however complete only 44 chapters of the Yuddha Kanda.

The circumstances under which Eknath took a decision to end his life voluntarily, are obscure. But on the significant *tithi*, the 6th day of the dark half of Phalguna Shaka 1521 (in A. D. 1599) Eknath took Jala-Samadhi in the Godavari.

Eknath was a great saint. He lived the philosophy he preached. Mahipati recorded the stories of his sympathetic treatment of Harijans, extreme tolerance towards his detractors (including the Muslim ruffian who spat on him scores of times). That was practical Vedant. It was out of love for the masses that he scorned the scorn of Sanskrit Pandits towards Marathi and strongly advocated the cause of Marathi as a medium of literature. Challengingly he asked: "If Sanskrit is created by gods, is Prakrit (Marathi) born of thieves?" He proved the capacity of Marathi to wield and propagate deep Vedantic speculations lucidly, in his commentary on the XI Skandha of the Bhagavata. His Abhangas are replete with Vedant. But Vedant proved a dead weight on him as a literary artist. He wrote a beautiful romance on the marriage of Krishna and Rukmini. But this beautiful romance is an analogy on the merger of Jiva (Individual soul) into Siva (the Universal soul). His *Bhavartha Ramayana* is more attractive than the bardic epic of Valmiki due to Eknath's skilled adaptation and adoption of legends from other sources. But Rama and Sita are Purusha and Prakriti. His interesting synthesis of folk dance and folk drama in his *Bharuda* songs are spiritual analogies. But he was such a great literary artist that despite his spiritual motivation, the different forms of literature that he produced are so interesting, beautiful and full of sentiments (*Rasa*) and variety of figures of speech (*Alankaras*) that he deserves to be studied from the point of Sahitya Shastra.

EKNATHI BHAGAVATA

Eknathi Bhagavata (EB) is the name of Eknath's (Marathi) commentary on the XI Skandha of *Shrimad Bhagavata Purana* (Bh. P). The work is very important as it forms "The main support of the edifice of Bhakti in Maharashtra" as Bahinabai, Tukarama's disciple, states it. It was Janardan "who made Eknath to taste the sweetness of the Bhagavata" (so much so) "that ultimately the sweetness of the Bh. P (*The Bhagavata Purana*) swallowed up Eknath himself." (EB.15.21-23)

Janardan tested Eknath's ability to elucidate the Bhagavata when Eknath, as a youth, wrote the commentary on *Chatuh Shloki Bhagavata* (CSB). After settling down at Paithan in A.D. 1556, Eknath regularly carried on his daily Purana-exposition and Keertanas. So popular were his Purana elucidations that after some years, by A.D. 1570, Janardan thought Eknath sufficiently mature and competent to undertake a commentary on *Shrimad Bhagavata*. Janardan's selection of the Bhagavata for a Marathi commentary was a wise decision. The *Bhagavad Gita* (BG) and the *Bhagavata* present the fundamental philosophy of the Bhagavata Sampradaya in Maharashtra. Out of them, the *Bhagavad Gita* was elucidated by Jnaneshvara. It was the Bhagavata which needed to be made available to Marathi speakers. Hence his advice to Eknath, though Eknath gives the credit of his commentary to his guru (EB I.98,110, 31-509-525 and practically in every chapter). Even the saintly members of his audience "time and again, personally and publicly urged Eknath to write in Prakrit (Marathi) on the Bhagavata which is the greatest among the Puranas and that (out of the Bhagavata) Eknath should write on the Uddhava Geeta (i.e. XI skandha of the Bh. P). In compliance of their "order", Eknath undertook this work. (EB I. 66-67)

The Bh. P. is a holy scripture to all Vaishnava Sects. Followers of different Vaishnava sects like Advaitins, Dvaitins, Vishishtadvaitins etc. interpreted the philosophical verses of the Bh. P. differently to

show that the Bh. P. supports their school of philosophy only. Eknath followed the commentary of Shreedhara Swami - The *Bhavartha Deepika* - which represents the Advaitism of Shankara. But Eknath was not a blind follower of Shreedhara. He boldly differed, though in a respectful language. For example, the words "Karma", "Akarma" and "Vikarma" occur in Bh. P. XI 3.43. Shreedhara interprets "Karma" = a ritualistic act ordained in the Vedas; "Akarma" = an act prohibited by the Vedas and "Vikarma" = Non-performance of an act prescribed by the Vedas. (By the way, it may be noted that Shreedhara contradicts himself in commenting on these terms in Bh. P. XI 7.8 where he interprets "Akarma" as "non-performance of prescribed, act "Karmas" and "Vikarma" as "performance of prohibited acts"). Eknath interprets "Karma" as an act (physical, verbal or mental) done with egoistic ("I am the doer") feeling. "Vikarma" is an act (prescribed and prohibited by the Vedas) accompanied with special ritual. "Akarma" or "Naishkarmya" are acts done without ego (*Ahamkara* that I am the doer.) - (see EB 3.765-790) I could trace a dozen such differences between Shreedhara and Eknath. Eknath had the Jnaneshwari as his model commentary. Hence Eknath's commentary on the Bhagavata is lucid, poetic and detailed - even leisurely - exposition that it required 18774 ovi-verses to explain 1367 Sk verses of the XI Skandha of the Bh. P. But in spite of the superiority of his detailed commentary, Eknath pays glowing tribute to Shreedhara (EB. I.119). It appears that Eknath had no access to Bahira Jataveda's commentary on this very skandha of the Bh. P; otherwise he would have mentioned him.

CONTENTS

The EB is the second *Prasthanā* of the Bhagavata or Varkari Sampradaya. It is respected like Jnaneshwari, the first *Prasthanā* of that Sampradaya. It is, hence, worthwhile to note its contents as summarised by Eknath himself in 16.29-69 and in the last chapter 31.389-441.

After the usual salutations, Eknath tells the Bhagavata story how Krishna managed through Brahmanical curse, reduction in the load of the earth, by exterminating his own (Yadava) clan. Narada visited

Dvaraka where in reply to Vasudeva's query about the Bhagavata Dharma, Narada narrated him the dialogue between Nimi and Jayantas (chapters 1-5). These five chapters form the basis of the following Uddhava Gita. Learning about the imminent annihilation of the Yadava clan and Krishna's promise to god Brahma to return to heaven after the destruction of the Yadava clan, Uddhava requested Krishna to allow him to follow Krishna (ch. 6). From EB chapters 7-29 is the Uddhava Gita i.e. the dialogue between Krishna and Uddhava.

In chapters 7-9, Krishna explains the nature of spiritual knowledge and of renunciation. Here he narrates the dialogue between Yadu and Avadhoota in which Avadhoota explains what he learnt from each of his twenty four Gurus. These chapters are known as "Avadhoota Gita." In chapter 10 and 11, the ensnarement of the Jiva in Samsara, nature of bondage, liberation and of Bhakti are described. Eknath attaches more importance to chapter 12 in which he explains the importance of association with saints and the renunciation of prescribed ritualistic Karmas. Chapter 13 tells how disequilibrium in *gunas* leads to attachment to sensual objects and how Sattva guna is to be developed. The next chapter called "The Hansa Geeta" - the teaching about the path of Bhakti and method of meditation imparted by the Lord in the form of a Divine Swan to sage Sanaka and his brothers. Chapter 15 gives the names and characteristics of Yogic Siddhis and their obstructiveness in attaining the Lord. Eknath regards chapters 1-15 as the first half or *Purvardha* of this Skandha.

Chapter 16 describes Vishnu's glorious manifestations (Avataras). Chapter 17 and 18 detail the duties of Varnas and Ashramas. Chapter 19 is a dissertation on devotion, spiritual enlightenment and Yogic discipline such as Yamas, Niyamas etc. Chapter 20 analyses Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Chapter 21 describes the "*Trikanda*" in Veda and the process of determining what is good and evil. Chapter 22 deals with Sankhya Yoga. Eknath groups together chapters 23-26 (EB. 23.25-30) Chapter 23 gives the 'Bhikshu Geeta' (The episode of a forebearing Brahmana). Eknath says, to establish oneself in Advaita, the Sankhya Yoga is detailed in chapters 24 and 25 - "Gunas arise out of Nirguna and merge in Nirguna. To describe the power of repentance, the confessional

utterance of Pururavas is given in Chapter 26. The Tantrika (-cum - Vedic) form of worship of Vishnu (Keshava) is given in Chapter 27, while the highest truth is discussed in Chapter 28. Eknath regards Chapter 29 as the highest point (*Nija-kalasu*) as it describes the greatness of the love of devotion (Bhakti Prema). Chapters 30 and 31 narrate the annihilation of the Yadava clan and Krishna's passage to Vaikuntha.

EKNATH'S VIEWS ON METAPHYSICS & ETHICS

Being a commentary on a discursive Purana like the Bhagavata, Eknath's views on Philosophy and Ethics are scattered all over the EB. They may succinctly be summarised as follows :*

METAPHYSICS

- (1) The Brahman alone is real. The world is unreal (EB 19.87-91; 19.197-205)
- (2) Plurality in the world is due to Avidya or Maya. God reflected in the dull mirror of Avidya is Jiva (Individual soul) and that reflected in the mirror of Vidya is Shiva (Universal self). "The grandeur of unity remains undefiled despite the appearance of duality" (22.111-113)
- (3) The Atman is the eternal, abiding reality present in all states of the body and mind (13.481-483, 490-491)
- (4) The Atman remains changeless though the body and the worlds are born, grow, and perish. That means the Atman persists through all the stages of creation, sustenance and the destruction of the world (28.258-259)
- (5) Moksha is an illusion because Bandha (Bondage) is not real (11.29-32)

ETHICS

Both Jnaneshvari and EB. are guides for God-realization. The virtues to be developed for God-realization are purity, penance,

* Based on R. D. Ranade's *Path-way to God in Marathi Literature*, pp. 183-202. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1961.

endurance, celibacy, Ahimsa and equanimity. By “Purity” Eknath means internal purity of the heart coupled with external purity of good actions (3.380-399). Penance is constant meditation of God (19.574-579) and with slander of others (23.778-781). The mind is to be cleansed of sexual attachment by avoiding the company, even of *sattvika* women (8.119-143; 26.241-244) and more so of uxorious people.

Vedic injunctions for weaning one of sense-objects are marriage and sacrifice (5.208-210; 214-240); Selfless discharge of duties pleases God (18.308-387). Bhakti is deep and sincere Love unto God (11.1106-1109). Eknath opines that Saguna Bhakti is easier than Nirguna Bhakti (27.251, 352, 364-371).

According to Eknath, Bhakti, Sipsritual Knowledge, Renunciation and Meditation are the four means of God-realization.

INFLUENCE OF JNANESHVARA

The Bhagavadgita and Uddhava-Gita being similar works of Shri Krishna addressed to Arjuna and Uddhava under similar circumstances, the similarity of their contents is naturally reflected in their commentaries viz. the Jnaneshvari and the EB. These similarities created the impression of their one-ness voiced in Marathi as *Jnanacha Eka*. Look how Eknath echoes Jnaneshvara.

In chapter 19, while explaining the nature of Bhakti characterised by non-difference between the devotee and God Shri Krishna demonstrated it by drawing Uddhava to himself and closely embraced him as if physically transferring what was in his heart to Uddhava's heart : states Eknath :

हृदयीं हृदय एक जाहले । ये हृदयीचे ते हृदयी घातले ।
कृष्णो सर्वस्व जे आपले । ते हृदयी सूदले उध्दवाचे ॥

-EB. 19.306

“(Krishna's) heart became one with Uddhava's. What was in this (Krishna's) heart was deposited in that (Uddhava's) heart. Krishna transferred all his own (spiritual knowledge) to Uddhava.”

Jnanadeva has used these very words at the end of the dialogue

between Krishna and Arjuna as to how Krishna embraced Arjuna and transferred as if physically all his spiritual knowledge from his heart to Arjuna's heart.

Describes Jnanadeva :

हृदया हृदय एक जाले । ये हृदयींचे ते हृदयीं घातले ।
वैत न मोडता केले । आपणा ऐसे अर्जुना ॥

-Jnaneshvari 18.1421

Gurudev Ranade pertinently observes (while discussing Ethics in EB), "As elsewhere, the chief merit of Eknath consists in his power of exposition rather than in absolute originality.....he (Eknath) was so much influenced by Jnaneshvara that practically it was Jnaneshvara who was explaining himself through Eknath" (*Ranade-Path Way to God in Marathi Literature* - p.189).

But if we take into account that the extent of EB. is twice that of Jnaneshvari and in metaphysics EB. follows Advaitism of Shankaracharya and not Jnaneshvara's concept of Shiva-Shakti, Chidvilas etc. as in *Amritanubhava*, we need not consider Eknath as a carbon copy of Jnaneshvara as some people imply in "*Jnanacha Eka*".

The EB. is a work on the Vedanta and the Path to Moksha. The very nature of this work gives little scope to the literary artist in Eknath. We find him at his best in the mythological romance - *Rukmini Svayamvara*, a Mahapurana like *Bhavartha Ramayana*, songs about the pranks of child Krishna and *Gaulanis* and to some extent in *Bharudas* - even though every work of Eknath has some spiritual implication. In spite of its didactic nature, Eknath showers similes or illustrations like Jnaneshvara in elucidating an abstract concept. Eknath is a past master in drawing pen-pictures. Look how Eknath describes beautifully the acting of bashfulness by Samba disguised as a pregnant young woman (EB. 1.348-51).

"Samba who was expert in exhibiting feminine graces, bashfulness and gestures like ogling" with his eyes (beautified) with collyrium, he cast askance his quick glances. Beautiful and tender in appearance, he moved ahead slowly like a swan."

He depicts a detailed description of the repulsiveness of old age (EB 22. 526-534) : "The toothless mouth, shaking neck, dim eyesight,

deaf ears, saliva oozing out of mouth, phlegm issuing from nose down on the lips, daring not to solicit a kiss from his wife, constant coughing and asthmatic trouble."

The original Marathi wording is extremely repulsive. Jnanadeva also describes old age in repulsive words (Jnaneshvari 13. 562-575).

Eknath is very fond of using extended metaphors (Rupakas रूपकऽ). Even if we peep through the introductory benedictions (Mangalacharans - मंगलाचरणऽ) of the EB., we find excellent Rupakas on his Guru Janardan. For example, in the introduction of ch. 7, he compares his spiritual preceptor to Indra, the King of heaven; in ch. 10 to Dhanvantari, the heavenly physician; in ch. 12, to the season spring, in ch. 14 to the Milky Ocean (Kshira-sagar - क्षीरसागर) to mention a few. A summary of the comparison of his sadguru and the milky ocean in ch. 14 (ovis 1-17) will give an idea about these Rupakas :

"Oh Sadguru, salutations to you. You are the milky ocean incarnate. The moon of the spiritual knowledge that rises from you, gives delight to all beings; it dispells the darkness of ignorance in the heart; it satisfies the thirst of Chakora birds (viz. troubled souls in Samsara) by its nectarine rays. The milky ocean (viz Sadguru) is very deep with Vedantic surges. For churning this ocean, faith is the Mandara mountain, Vairagya (disaffection from Samsara) is Vasuki, the rope for churning. In the first stirrings came out the deadly poison called distraction (Vikshepa - विक्षेप) which Shiva in the form of (Viveka - विवेक) discrimination contained in his throat. With more practice of meditation was born Lakshmi (in the form of peace of the soul) of whom Lord Krishna is enamoured. Thus Sadguru is the ocean of spiritual knowledge. From him arose Narayana and other Avataras (Incarnations). Oh Janardana, you are that unfathomable ocean of happiness." (14. 1-17).

A modern reader is however puzzled, why saint Eknath with a happy married life, should be so critical about women as in

chapter 26 - Pururava's repentance about his association with Urvashi. The reason is obvious. His hands were tied down with the text of the Bhagavata. Secondly that has been the way of creating disaffection about Samsara - even before the time of Bhartrihari's *Vairagya Shataka* and is found in all the sects in mediaeval India. And every author is bound by the limitations of his Age, Eknath being no exception.

At the same time, Eknath never forgets to scold sex-proclivities of man. In commenting on Bh. P. 11. 13.8 "Like a dog, a donkey and a he-goat" (स्व-खराजवत्). Eknath is brutally severe on men (EB.13. 203-224, 14.376 and 25.247-252). In 14.361 he warns that "the association with a sex-addict is worse than that with women". He praises the role that Choodala, Madalasa and Sarasvati played in the spiritual uplift of their husbands (14.377-378). He is all praise for chaste women like Sita, Mandodari in the Bhavartha Ramayana.

In the last chapter of EB. Eknath confesses the eligibility of women for spiritual knowledge as in the case of Maitreyi (Yajnavalkya's wife), Kayadhu (Prahlada's mother), Devahuti (Kapila's mother), Parvati (God Shiva's consort) who are eager to get spiritual knowledge (29.589-595).

Eknath, the man, never condemned Pingala, the public woman. How can he forget the charter given by Krishna to women and Shoodras for their eligibility to Moksha ? (*Bhagavad Gita* 9.32)

EB. had a tremendous influence on later eminent writers like Tukaram whose Abhangas are replete with the echoes of EB. For example : "When saintly persons visit (your) house, that day is (as auspicious as) the Divali and Dasara". Eknath's commentary on the Bhagavata is still unsurpassed in Marathi literature. Millions of Marathi speakers regard it as a sacred work like the Jnaneshvari.

RUKMINI SVAYAMVARA

The marriage of Krishna with Rukmini is the most romantic episode in the life of Krishna. It has been a favourite topic with Marathi poets since the 13th century A. D. Mahanubhava poets like Mahadamba, Narindra, Santosha-muni, wrote their works on Rukmini Svayamvara on the basis of The *Harivamsha* and *Bhagavata Puranas*. But Eknath's *Rukmini Svayamvara* (RS) has been the most popular of all. Believing that reading of the RS facilitates the prospects of their marriage, girls of marriageable age in Maharashtra used to read it, till the last generation.

It was during his stay at Kashi for writing his commentary on the XI Skandha of the *Bhagavata Purana* in A.D. 1571-1573 that Eknath wrote this work. Eknath completed the RS. on "Chaitra Shuddha Navami Shaka 1493 (A. D. 1571) at Manikarnika." Even Purana-writers were enamoured of this romance. The *Vishnu Purana* (V. 26) notes that Krishna abducted Rukmini as her father refused Krishna's request for her hand. The *Harivamsha Purana* described this episode in five (47-52) chapters while the *Bhagavata* devoted 144 verses (chapters 52, 53, 54) to it. The colophon of every chapter of Eknath's RS states that the work was based on the *Harivamsha* and the *Bhagavat Puranas*.

In RS. 18.70 (*Rukmini Svayamvar, Prasanga* i.e. Chapter 18 Ovi 70), Eknath says that he voluntarily undertook to write this romance even though none else requested him to do so. It means that he wrote it by way of relaxation from the rigorous task of commenting on a Vedantic Text, for his personal pleasure (*Svantah sukhaya*). His object was "to depict the union of the individual soul (Jiva) with the supreme soul (Shiva)." (RS. 18.73). It is thus a sustained Vedantic analogy.

As the legend goes, Eknath wanted to perform the marriage of his boy-servant Shrikhandya. On his disappearance, Eknath came to know that Shrikhandya was Shree Krishna himself. As a substitute

for the actual marriage of Shrikhandya i.e. Shree Krishna, Eknath wrote this romance. Eknath is silent about this legend. The story of Krishna-Rukmini marriage is pretty old. What is new therein ? Anticipating this criticism, Eknath replies that "The novelty of this poem lies in the description of the celebration of Rukmini's marriage." (RS.18.62) And it is literally true. Eknath explained 144 verses of the *Bhagavata* in 1712 Ovi verses. And to explain one word *Vidhi-vat* (in the *Bhagavata*) as per 'prescribed procedure' - of marriage, Eknath wrote five chapters (14-18) in his RS. It is worth noting that Bahira Jataveda in his commentary on Bh. P. X skandha has explained the words *Vidhi-vat* in describing the details of the marriage ceremony, in hundreds of Ovis.

The RS consists of 18 *Prasargas* (chapters). Out of them Prasargas 1-7 describe the story upto Rukmini's abduction and Prasargas 8-18, the description of the fight between the Yadavas and the allies of Rukmi and the marriage ceremony at Moola-Madhava. The *Bhagavata* and *Harivamsha*, however, state that "Krishna brought Rukmini to his capital and married her as per prescribed procedure there."

Eknath used these two sources of Puranas according to his convenience. The influence of the *Bhagavata* on the RS upto the abduction of Rukmini, is obvious. But the battle that ensued is from the *Harivamsha Purana*. Balarama's reasoning and advice to Krishna after Rukmi's humiliation and the fact that King Parikshit forgot his thirst while listening to Shuka's narration show the influence of the *Bhagavata*. Prasargas 14-18 (description of marriage etc.) - are Eknath's independent contribution. As Eknath does not mention Bahira Jataveda, he might not have seen his RS. The similarity between Bahira Jataveda and Eknath is due to similarity of occasion and the sameness of the community of both the authors.

Eknath did not refer to the RS of Mahanubhav writers. The similarity between Eknath's RS and those of Mahanubhavi RS is due to their common source viz. the *Bhagavata* and *Harivamsha Purana*. The miraculous episode of Gandharvas found in RS of Mahanubhavas is conspicuous by its absence in Eknath. Eknath must have attended marriage functions in his life. So there is no need to copy a Mahanubhava work for knowing the marriage formalities and dishes served in such ceremonies. The most

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important point is that old Indian writers do not refer to similar works of other sects. In writing the Life of Rama (Padma, as Jainas call him) Shvetambara poets refer to previous Shevtambara authors and not to Digambara ones even though both of them are Jainas. Digambara authors do the same. Eknath had no need to refer to Mahanubhavas for whom he entertained no great respect.

Eknath is at his best in drawing pen pictures. In RS 7th (Prasanga) Eknath describes every part of Rukmini's person poetically :

“The bluish hair on her head was the blue sky under which rose her moonlike face, but this was always the full moon. The longish tilak of musk on her forehead was the dark part (of the moon). Just as there is the rainbow in the sky, red lead (*shendur*) powder looked in the parting of the hair (*Bhanga*, which is bowlike). Just as there are clusters of stars in the sky, pearls (a web of pearls) covered her head.”

The whole chapter is devoted to create a picture of an ideal beauty (of the 16th century Maharashtra). But (at least from our point of view) Eknath crosses the limits of decency. For example the description of Rukmini's protruding breasts. Purana writers and mediaeval Sanskrit and Prakrit poets also do the same. It appears that in those days, even decent people were more frank in speech. We find indecent words used in the quarrel between Bheemaka and Rukmi. Rukmi calls his father “dullard, senile old man,” while Bheemaka raps him as “most wretched” “impotent” and some more impritable words (RS 6.42-45)

Eknath had some experience of fighting. His description of fighting not only in the Bhavartha Ramayana but even in a romance like RS are so realistic, thrilling and “audible” due to the use of onomatopoeic words. Prasangas 8, 9 and 10 are overflowing with heroic sentiment (*Veera ñasa*). We hear the whizzing (*Su, Su*) sound of arrows, “*Khan Khan*” of swords crossing each other, heavy blows of mace-fighters. The description of Balarama's fight is so vivid that we feel that we are seeing it on the T. V.

Eknath, a keen observer of human nature softly depicts the pangs

and yearnings of Rukmini for Krishna - especially when her emissary Sudeva to Krishna did not return :

“Krishna is not interested in sensual objects. To him I wrote that I shall be happy to be his wife. Has (he come to) dislike me thereby” and such a series of doubts. (RS 5.45)

The love-lorn girl (Rukmini) requests her friends :

“I do not want to be fanned (with chowries) it intensifies my bodily temperature. My vital breath is completely going out without (for want of meeting) Krishna. Do not apply sandal-paste to my body. It increases heat (scalding effect) all the more. My life is about to cease for not being able to see the feet of Krishna.” (RS.5.72-73)

The whole passage (5.43-76) shows Eknath's knowledge of human (here women) psychology. Strangely enough, Eknath's Krishna, (the supreme soul), jumps down from his gold throne at the arrival of Rukmini's emissary, kneads his feet as a part of hospitality (RS.3.24-28) and lovingly kisses the love-letter of Rukmini (RS.3.53). It is however, understandable that God in the human form must act like a man. But after defeating Rukmi and disfiguring him, he sarcastically tells Rukmini :

“Look at the face of your brother. Quickly perform “*Limba-lona*” (a mystic act to protect a baby or a person from evil eyes)” (RS.12.150)

Does this insensitive remark add to the glory of God and that too addressed to his devotee beloved wife ? And Eknath defends this as this was done for the spiritual welfare of Rukmini. (RS.13.46-60) ! Balarama is more sensible. He tries to mollify the feeling of Rukmi and Rukmini.

Prasangas (chapters) 14-18 are very important as social history. Eknath gives all the customs then prevalent in the marriage ceremony of Deshastha Brahmins. A peculiar custom (now impossible) was

Dhenda Nritya - dancing by an elderly relative of each side while carrying on his shoulders the bride and the bridegroom (RS.17). The variety of ornaments and dishes (all vegetarian, though Krishna and the Kshattriya guests were non-vegetarians) also take us to the time of Eknath.

The RS is an immortal romance in Marathi. It became an abiding source of inspiration to future saint-poets (like Venabai, Ramadasa's disciple) and Pandit poets like Samaraja, Moropant and others.

BHAVARTHA RAMAYANA

It was the evening of Eknath's life. Till then he laid down the philosophical foundation of the Varakari Cult by his lucid exposition of the XI Skandha of the *Bhagavata Purana* and bringing out an authentic edition of the *Jnaneshvari*. With his songs (Abhangas) overflowing with devotion and love unto God, he enriched the Bhakti-lyrical-section of Marathi. But the fall of Vijayanagar Kingdom in A. D. 1565 worsened the socio-political condition. Masses were groaning under the Jack-boots of Muslim rulers. To inspire hope in a demoralised society, it was necessary to project a hero capable of setting the subject people free from alien rulers and protecting the down-trodden masses. Who else could be such a hero except Rama who liberated Devas from the tyranny of Ravana ? The idea of presenting Rama as the saviour of the downtrodden haunted him. "If I present the significance of the exploits of Rama along with their spiritual significance, it may give the public hope and courage here and solace hereafter", he must have thought. And Eknath's obsession with this idea was so powerful that he felt that it was Rama himself who was delineating the significance of his life to the public while he (Eknath) was only the medium.

Confesses Eknath :

"Shree Rama of his own accord urges me to write..... In (my) dream Rama explains the Ramayana in details..... He rides over my head and forces me to narrate the story (Ramayana)..... While I am asleep Shree Rama strikes me in order to wake me up and says,"Get up. Write the Ramayana". Under these circumstances who am I to disobey ? The credit or otherwise of this book is not attributable to me as Shree Rama himself is the author of this work".

- (Balakanda 4.8-16).

Eknath repeats this mystical experience in details later in the *Kishkindha Kanda* (1. 1-11) and in the *Yuddha Kanda* (1.6-20).

Naturally the unique amalgamation of literary excellence, mystical depth and the consciousness of his self-imposed duty of enlightening the masses rendered this work an unsurpassed classic.

THE TITLE

The list of different Ramayanas given by Eknath in *Aranya Kanda* (20.140-151) shows that a number of Ramayana texts emphasising a particular aspect of the Rama story (e.g. *Adhyatma*, *Ananda*) were extant at the time of Eknath. Why then did he adopt the title "Bhavartha" to his Ramayana ? Some scholars believe that Eknath selected the adjective *Bhavartha* in imitation of *Bhavartha-Deepika*, the name of Jnanadeva's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. They cite the textual similarity in the first Ovi of Jnaneshvari and the first Ovi of the *Bhavartha Ramayana*, in support of their view.*

But there is a fundamental difference between these two works. Jnanadeva comments on each and every verse in the *Bhagavad Gita*, while Eknath takes full liberty with Valmiki's Rama story. Not only does he skip over a number of verses from *Valmiki Ramayana* but also modifies Valmiki's Rama story retaining merely the frame work of Valmiki.

For example, in the *Bala-Kanda*, Eknath introduced the following changes which are not found in Valmiki's *Bala Kanda* :

- (1) An imprecated heavenly damsel born as a bird (Kite) snatches away Kaikeyi's share of the holy Payasa.
-I.2.93-116 (*Bala Kanda*, chapter 2, Ovi-Verses 93-116).
- (2) Rama's Pilgrimage (I.7 *Bala Kanda*, chapter 7).
- (3) At the time of Vishvamitra's visit to seek Rama's help for the protection of his sacrifice, Rama was full of disaffection (वैराग्य -

* ॐ नमो अनादि आद्या । वेद वेदान्तवेद्या ।
बंद्याही परमबंद्या । स्वसंवेद्या श्रीगणेशा ॥

- भावार्थरामायण ।।।

ॐ नमोजी आद्या । वेद प्रतिपाद्या ।
जयजय स्वसंवेद्या । आत्मरूपा ॥ देवा तूचि गणेशु ।

- भावार्थदीपिका (ज्ञानेश्वरी) ।।

Vairagya) about Samsara (I.9).

(2) and (3) are adopted from the *Yoga-Vasistha*.

(4) and (5) - The episode of Shuka and the incorporation of 77 verses from the *Yoga Vasistha* explained in 310 Ovis

(I-chapter 10 and 11)

(6) details of Ahalya's curse by Gautama - especially Gautama's repentance (I.14.88-105) wherein he quotes Shankaracharya's famous verse :

Ka te kanta, kas te putrah.

का ते कान्ता, कस्ते पुत्रः ।

"What relation have you with your wife or son" (No relation what-so-ever).

He quotes another Subhashita blaming himself for cursing out of anger :

Apakarini Kopas'cet

अपकारिणी कोपश्चेत्

Kope Kopah katham na te.

कोपे कोपः कथं न ते ।

"If you entertain anger against an offender or detractor, why don't you do the same against anger itself".

(7) Story of Sita's previous birth as Padmavati (I.15). Eknath says he borrowed the above story from *Kalika Khanda*.

(8) The very beginning of Eknath's Rama Story is different from Valmiki. Valmiki begins his story autobiographically, how god Brahma advised him to use his newly acquired poetic faculty for composing the Rama story. So Valmiki tells us how King Dasharath being son-less performed a horse-sacrifice (Ashva-Medha) followed by a Putreshti (a sacrifice for getting a son).

Eknath begins his Ramayana with the episode of Dasharath getting cursed by Shravana's father for killing his son. Dasharath brings sage Rishyashringa to Ayodhya by enticing him with the

help of divine damsels, for performance of the Putra-Kameshti sacrifice.

Here Eknath digresses and gives a sermon on the evil effects of contact with women.

This is Eknath's discursive way of narration. His object is to offer moral and spiritual guidance whenever he gets an opportunity. He also tries to give the inner (spiritual) significance - the *Bhavartha* in episodes in the Ramayana. Eknath states his idea of a good composition in the very first chapter of his Ramayana as follows :

"There should be no prolixity in the book. The main substance should be spoken (delineated) in the book. The inner spiritual significance should be shown (explained). That is the real purpose of a poetic composition."
(I.1.118)

This discursiveness made Eknath's Ramayana interesting and instructive to the followers of the spiritual path. Later writers like Mukteshvara, Shreedhar followed Eknath's discursiveness in narration. Interestingly one learns that Eknath applies Pancha-ratriya Vyuha Theory to his Ramayana.*

THE SOURCES

Eknath was not writing a classical epic like the *Raghuvamsha* or a bardic one like *Valmiki Ramayana*. Like a learned Puranika (Purana-expounder), he composed his work as a Purana meant for the semi-literate or illiterate masses of his time. He based his Rama story mainly on Valmiki's epic. But in order to make it more lively, interesting and instructive, and to persuade people to take to the path of Bhakti, he garnered a number of episodes from other Ramayanas like *Shiva*, *Adhyatma* and others (as listed in the *Aranya Kanda* 20.140-151, but some of which are not extant today). He quotes the *Bhagavata Purana*, *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*, some Puranas like the *Renuka*, the *Padma*, and the *Skanda* (i.e. different *Sthala*-

* हे भावार्थरामायण । दावी लक्षण व्यूहचतुष्टयाचे ।

Puranas incorporated in the *Skanda*). He used works from classical Sk. (Sanskrit) like the *Hanuman-Nataka*. He has profusely quoted Sk. Subhashitas. Though he mentions his sources while digressing from Valmiki, sometimes he declines to do so. He argues :

"Mine is (after all) Bhavartha Ramayana.
Why should I disclose the source."

In such cases, the source is Eknath's fertile imagination.

But one fact regarding his sources deserves notice. Eknath nowhere mentions Tulasidas or his *Rama-charitamanasa*. It was natural. As Prof. Mataprasada Gupta points out in his paper on the "Biographical sketch of Tulasidas" it is also probable that he (Tulasidas) had reached Kashi sometimes before 1631 V.S. (Vikrama Samvat) - A.D. 1574)*

Eknath left Kashi in A.D. 1573. The possibility of the meeting of these two saints cannot be ruled out. But Tulasidas began his *Rama-Charita-Manasa* on the Rama Navami day V. S. 1631 (A.D. 1574) and completed it on 'the marriage-ceremony day of Sita' in Margasheersha. V.S. 1633 (A.D. 1576). We have no record of any contact between them (Eknath and Tulasidas).

Secondly, most of the similarities pointed out between the Ramayana works of Eknath and Tulsidas are due to their common source, the *Valmiki Ramayana*. But similarities not based on the Valmiki's text are more decisive to prove borrowals. For example : The meeting of Rama and Sita in a garden before their marriage (*Rama-charitamanasa*, *Balakanda Dohas* 226-236). Valmiki does not even hint at such a meeting. But Kampan describes it most romantically :

"Eye caught eye in pairs
and each the other devoured.
Their feelings brought to a stand-still.
The prince stood looking up at the princess.
And the princess stood looking at the Prince."

(S. Maharajan's translation).**

* *Tulasidas - His Mind and Art* (Editor - Dr. Nagendra, National Pub. House, Delhi, 1977, p.85).

** *Kampan - S. Maharajan, Makers of Indian Literature Series, Sahitya Akademi, 1972.*

As Valmiki does not mention such an event, Tulasidas's borrowal from Kamban can be presumed as Kamban's Ramayana is famous since the 10th century A.D.

Eknath (like Valmiki) does not mention this episode at all.

A BIRD'S EYEVUEW OF THE BHAVARTHA RAMAYANA*

I. THE BALA KANDA

As the title "Bhavartha" shows, Eknath wanted to give an "inner" spiritual interpretation of the Ramayana. The *Dramatis Personae* of the epic represent abstract concepts, qualities, virtues and vices. Thus Dasharatha is *Aham-atma* (one who identifies body with the soul); Kausalya is *Sad-vidya* (spiritual knowledge or lore); Sumitra, *Shuddha Vidya* (pure intelligence) and Kaikeyi, *Avidya* (nescience) (I.1.44-46-Bala Kanda, chapter 1, ovis 44-46). But such symbolic identification cannot be sustained in a historical epic like the Ramayana. Eknath's literary greatness lies in transforming a moralistic treatise in an enjoyable Mahapurana.

For example, according to Eknath, the marriage of Rama and Sita is the union between Prakriti and Purusha (I.20.119). The marriage of Rama and Sita (chapters 20-25) has a close similarity with the Rukmini-Svayamvara, which he wrote in A.D. 1571. It too symbolised the union between Jiva and Shiva. The pandal of Rama's marriage was supported by four columns of the Vedas; Smriti and Puranas were spread over with the cloth of Upanishads. The dishes served - all vegetarian - were those among the Brahmins of Maharashtra.

But "Nectar is the only Rasa in Shri Rama's feast,
He who has extreme hunger of (real) faith
Enjoys increasing pleasure and
Satisfaction while eating each morsel".

(I.23.120)

* In the reference, the Roman fig. indicates the number of the Kanda, next arabic numeral stands for chapter No. and the last arabic figs. indicate ovi-verses.

Eknath loses no opportunity to give a dig at Brahmanical Orthodoxy. When Rama and Sita returned to Ayodhya, the citizens gave them spontaneous reception. But a Sannyasi struck a harlot Pingala as she happened to touch him in the surging crowd.

Comments Eknath :

“Impurity flies away at the sight of Shri Rama.

It lies concealed in a Sannyasi.

(The boycotters of Rama)

The fire-worshippers (Agni-hotris),
cooks and sannyasis are the native
home of impurities.”

(I.27.38-47)

Eknath concludes the Bala Kanda giving the credit of writing the Ramayana to Shri Rama himself. (I.27.113-114)

II. THE AYODHYA KANDA

Eknath epitomized Valmiki's 119 *sargas* in 18 chapters. In the first chapter, Eknath justifies the title “Bhavartha” by introducing the Vyuha Theory of Pancharatriyas with reference to Rama (II.1.16-32). He slightly modifies Valmiki's story. When Dasharath died on Rama's departure due to Kaikeyi's obduracy, there was a public furor against Kaikeyi. The sarcastic condemnation of Kaikeyi by the public as recorded by Eknath (II.10.58-70) is not in good taste. But Eknath is at his best poetically and philosophically when he describes the meeting of Rama and Bharata (II.15.97-104) :

“Immediately at their close embrace, they merged into each other. Gratified in their one-ness, they became the embodiment of happiness. The embrace of camphor and flame is highly brilliant with utmost love. Pieces of wood embrace the fire and get transformed into fire. When Bharata and Shatrughna embraced Rama, they become merged into each other like salt and water.”

Rama, however, expressed his firm determination of not returning to Ayodhya even if :

“All the brilliance of the Moon disappears,
The Sun rises to the West
(and) Mount Meru submerges in mirage.”
(II.17.72-75).

III. THE ARANYA KANDA

This period of Rama's life is full of exploits. From Ayodhya Rama went to Chitrakoota. On his way to Nasik (the then Padmapura) he visited the hermitages of Atri and Agastya. At Nasik, temples of Sundara and Kapaleshvara were famous (obviously at Eknath's time). Rama's Ashrama was at the confluence of Aruna, Varuna & the Godavari. Birds in Rama's heritage discussed Vedanta like *Jahad-ajahad-Lakshana*. (III.8.2-9).

The Shoorpanakha episode which led to the abduction of Sita started accidentally. While collecting fruits in the forest, a divine sword came to Lakshmana's hand. As a trial, he struck a bush with it and inadvertently cut the head of Samba (Shambooka according to Jain Puranas), the son of Shoorpanakha. To avenge the death of her son, Shoorpanakha assumed the form of a beautiful woman. Here Eknath creates the picture of a *belle* of his period :

“She (Shoorpankha) assumed the form of a very beautiful woman decorated with excellent ornaments on the head and round her neck. (Here Eknath gives a list of ornaments used by fashionable women of his time). Her braid of hair let loose on her back was decked with flowers of gold. She applied collyrium to her eyes, turmeric-powder to her face, lips reddened with betel-leaves. She put on a silken saree of variegated colour, with a girdle studded with gems round her waist. Making a tinkling sound of her anklets, she came blushing, casting her amorous glances at Lakshmana.” (III.8.105-109).

Eknath loses no opportunity to criticize the avariciousness of Brahmanas. When Rama killed Khara and Dooshana, Brahmanas occupied their township, Janasthana. They looted clothes, ornaments, food-grains from the houses of Rakshasas. While Rakshasa women

were flying, the Brahmans deprived them of their clothes and ornaments.

Wailed the Rakshasa women :

“Brahmanas on the bank of the Ganga (Godavari) are extremely hard-hearted. They have reduced us to nudity.”

(III.11.180-181).

To make his Rama-Katha more interesting, Eknath uses popular etymologies. Thus at the place where the demon Maricha in the deer-form licked his back, it became known as Chatori (from Marathi root *chatne* ‘to lick’). Similarly the etymologies of the names of villages Chandori, Dehagava, Neur are given. (III.14.64-73).

But much more interesting is the etymology of the goddess Tukai of Tuljapur. After Sita’s abduction, Rama went on lamenting and embracing every bush and tree on the way. Parvati wanted to test the god-hood of Rama. She assumed the form of Sita and remonstrated Rama for his loud laments when she was present near him. Rama bowed to her and said, “Why you, oh mother” (Marathi- *Tu Ka Ai* - तू का आई). Hence the Goddess at Tuljapur came to be known as “Tukai”. Rama could never have spoken in Marathi which did not then exist. But it appealed to his Marathi listeners and is still believed in by masses. (III.20.37-70)

When Rama struck down demon Kabandha he directed Rama, while dying, to approach Sugriva at Pampa. (III.22.102-128)

The Aranya Kanda ends with the Shabari episode.

IV. THE KISHKINDHA KANDA

Eknath’s *Kishkindha Kanda* is an enlarged version of Valmiki’s work. He supplemented it with materials from other sources like *Shiva Ramayana*, *Kalika Purana*, *Uttara Kanda* of Valmiki’s *Ramayana* and sometimes his imagination. But he assures us that Rama is compelling him to write this (such ?) Rama story. (IV.1.2-11).

When Rama and Lakshmana came to Kishkindha, Sugriva deputed Maruti to enquire about these strangers. Maruti tested the extraordinary power of Rama (IV.1.64-77). Maruti told Rama the

story of the birth of Vali and Sugriva (as in Valmiki's *Uttara Kanda*). When Maruti brought Rama and Lakshmana to Sugriva, he tested Rama's strength. He then challenged Vali to fight. While they were fighting Rama hit Vali with an arrow. Vali blames Rama for this cowardice but realizing Rama's godhood, he requested Rama to extricate his arrow and when Rama complied, he went to moksha (IV.6.153-160). This is how Eknath defends Rama's cowardly act. But Kamban's Vali is more spirited. He severely remonstrates Rama. The climax of which is :

"Fie upon your wife, who has been annexed by another.

Fie upon your blooming bow, which stands sullied by your act".*

Eknath disapproved of the custom of Sati. When Tara decides to immolate herself to fire along with Vali, Vali gets revived and dissuades her, for "Satis who enter fire out of love for (their husband's) dead body become goblins. Dedicate your life to Rama." (IV.7.40-41).

Strangely, Eknath tells that the dead body of Vali was brought to Pampa in the Pushpaka Vimana (IV.7.101), when it (Pushpaka) was in the possession of Ravana. Stranger still is Rama's advice to Tara (Vali's wife) to get a son from Sugriva quoting a Smriti Text, (देवराच्च सुतोत्पत्तिः) when she had already a son Angada, from Vali. (IV.7.114).

After the rainy season Sugriva deputed monkeys in search of Sita Eknath exhibits considerable knowledge about India and its peoples. But one is amused when he includes Turks (Rumsham) and Europeans (Phiranga) in Treta yuga.

V. THE SUNDARA KANDA

The *Sundara Kanda* is probably the most delightful section in the *Valmiki Ramayana*. It starts with Maruti's jump across the Sea to Lanka and ends with Maruti's report of his mission to Rama at

* Kamban - S. Maharajan, op. cit. p.61.

Kishkindha.

Eknath's Maruti has already reached Lanka at the end of the last Kanda and we find him combing the city of Lanka in his search for Sita. He found the Brahmin locality full of non-vegetarian Agni-hotris, ruthless Brahmins and Sannyasis. (V.1.48-61) A compliment(!) to Brahmins orthodoxy.

When he went to Ravana's palace, he mistook Mandodari for Sita. Eknath digresses here and tells the story of the birth of Mandodari (chapter 6), to explain her semblance with Sita. Being eager for Sita, Ravana goes to Ashoka-Vana followed by Maruti (and Mandodari). Ravana boasted of his powers to Sita (V.8.17-38). In the spirited dialogue that followed, Ravana is shown to have spoken a SK verse predicting Rama's inability to face him and the destruction of the Vanara army. Sita turns the table against him by asking him to drop the seven syllable and recite it.* (V.8.89-97) The verse shows Eknath's intelligent interest in Subhashitas.

Ravana advanced to kill Sita but was prevented by Mandodari who pacified him by telling the story of the marriage of Dasharatha and Kausalya.

After Ravana's departure Maruti introduced himself by presenting Rama's ring. Sita hands over to him her Choodamani (gem-ornament of her head) for presenting to Rama to convey the successful completion of Maruti's mission.

Eknath follows Valmiki about the destruction of Ashok park and burning of Lanka. But Eknath's description (in V.19.49-151) reflects contemporary calamities befalling citizens of conquered towns. When Lanka was burnt, it was found to be of gold. To explain this Eknath narrates the story of Gajendra from the Bhagavata (V. chapters 21 and 22). To avoid self-adulation, Maruti requests god Brahma to report to Rama his exploits in Lanka (V.chapters 26-33). Many Ovis in Brahma's letter are repetitions from previous chapters. Maruti briefs Rama about the defence arrangement in

* The verse is as follows :

भवित्री रम्भोरु त्रिदशवदनग्लानिरघुना

स ते रामः स्याता न युधि पुरतो लक्ष्मणसखः ।

इयं स्यास्यत्युच्चैर्विपदमधुना वानरचमू -

लीधिष्ठेधं षष्ठाक्षर (?) विपरिलोपात् पठ पुनः ॥

Here षष्ठ (Shashtha) is a mistake. Eknath emends it as सप्ताक्षर (Saptakshara).

Lanka. Rama marched against Lanka on the Vijaya-dashami day (chapter 34).

In the meanwhile, at his mother's (Kekasi's) suggestion, Bibhishana requests Ravana to return Sita. Ravana being enraged kicks him. Bibhishana goes over to Rama who crowns him as the king of Lanka giving him the cartograph of Lanka drawn by Maruti. Eknath says it is still on the sea-shore (V.38.87).

Rama requested the sea-god to give him a passage to Lanka. When there was no response, Rama took out his arrow and uttered the Rajadharma : "Softness is all right in a sannyasin but it is derogatory to a King" (V.39.160-161). The sea-god yielded and allowed him to build a bridge. Rama used his arrow to kill demon Maru. The arrow dried up the sea-home of Maru and killed him. The dried up region became known as Marwad. Eknath gives compliments to Marwadis;

"Just as gingelly seed (i.e. sesamum) contains oil, hospitality is found in every house of Marwad." (V.39.147-148). At the end of Sundara Kanda Eknath says : "Rama crossed the sea with his army and Bibhishana joined him. Valmiki gives this event in the *Yuddha Kanda*."

VI.THE YUDDHA KANDA

Eknath could complete 44 chapters of the *Yuddha Kanda* after which he is reported to have taken *Jala-Samadhi* in the Godavari. Eknath's *Yuddha Kanda* begins with the arrest of Ravana's spies Shuka and Sarana. But Eknath differs from Valmiki's story. For example :

- (1) When Ravana tried to survey Rama's army from an elevated place, Rama shot down his royal umbrella, (VI.2.87-102).
- (2) Maruti recommends Angada's name as an envoy of Rama to Ravana. Angada narrates in Ravana's Durbar, all the occasions of Ravana's humiliations (VI.7. 72-167; 8.1-145). But this is from *Uttara Kanda* of Ramayana.
- (3) While returning to Rama, Angada brought Ravana's crown and his Durbar Hall as well. At the behest of Rama, Angada resettled the Hall as before. (VI.8.153-157).

- (4) Events recorded in chapter 23 (Dialogue between Ravana and Mandodari) and chapter 24 (Dialogue between Ravana and Narada) are Eknath's personal contribution.

The digressions and divergences, however, heighten the interest of the audience. Eknath's last chapter (No. 44) narrates expeditious departure of Maruti to bring medicinal herbs for Lakshmana before the end of the night. But Eknath, the devotee, makes Maruti to say that the name of Rama is the real resuscitating nectar. (VI.44.142)

There is no propriety of reviewing the remaining part of the *Bhavartha Ramayana*. The remaining chapters (with the exception of Jayarama Suta's Ahiravana story in chapter 54) are from the pen of one Gawba. But "Gawba" has mastered Eknath's style so well that an ordinary reader seldom feels the difference between Gawba and Eknath. I am inclined to believe that just as the son of Banabhatta completed his father's story, the *Kadambari*, Hari Pandit must have completed his father's work under the pen name "Gawba" due to his public prejudice against writing in Marathi & his private personal wish to complete his father's work.

Eknath's aim in writing the *Bhavartha Ramayana* was spread of Bhakti, an important aspect of the sentiment of quietism (Shanta Rasa). Eknath has depicted pictures of different Rasas in the *Bhavartha Ramayana*. To limit ourselves to the *Yuddha Kanda*, Maruti's exploits, especially his bringing a mountain full of medicinal herbs (and other exploits), certainly excite sentiment of Marvelousness (Adbhuta Rasa). Sita's lamentation on seeing Rama unconscious on the battlefield (VI.12.94-105) and the wailing of Sulochana after the death of Indrajit (VI.41.44-47) are full of pathetic sentiment (Karuna Rasa). The *Yuddha Kanda* is overflowing with heroic sentiment (Veera Rasa) as can be seen from the boastful speeches of Ravana, courageous behaviour of heroes on Rama's side like Sugriva, Angad and the description of the duels between Ravana and Sugriva, Rama and Ravana.

Eknath was not a scholar of Sahitya Shastra but canons of Rasa theory prevalent at the time of Eknath are worth studying.

VII. THE UTTARA KANDA

Different manuscripts of the *Uttara Kanda* written by different authors like Mukteshvar, Konerisuta Shesh have been now discovered and published. They show that followers of Eknath tried to complete the *Bhavartha Ramayana* as a tribute to him. The *Bhavartha Ramayana* has given impetus to narrative literature in Marathi. It influenced tremendously Mukteshvara, Krishna Dayarnava, Krishnadas Mudgala, Krishna Yajnavalki, Shìvakalyana and others. These contemporaries and junior contemporaries of Eknath have enriched Marathi with their valued works like the *Mahabharata*, the *Harivarada*, *Ramayana Yuddha Kanda*, *Katha Kalpataru* and others. These have still retained there popularity for four centuries or so - a proof of their intrinsic literary merit.

MISCELLANEOUS WORKS OF EKNATH

ABHANGAS*

Eknath was a great Keertana-kara or Haridasa. For Keertanas on special occasions, such as birth anniversaries of Rama or Krishna or for legendary biographies of mythological devotees like Dhruwa or Prahlada or saints of bygone days like Namadeva. Gora Kumbhar, Damaji, Eknath must have composed special Abhangas for their *Akhyanas*. But Abhangas and Ovis are so easy for composition that Eknath must have extemporaneously composed a number of Abhangas while performing Keertanas and delivering Pravachanas. The *Sakala Sant Gatha* (Vol. II) contains 4001 Abhangas of Eknath. They are classified under (1) *Bala Kreedā* or Abhangas on Krishna's sports as a child (2) Glorification of gods like Vitthal, Rama, Shiva and God's name (3) Vedantic and other teachings (4) Legends of Puranic devotees and (modern) saints (5) Roopakas or advice through analogies like Bharudas. Out of these (2) and (3) are not negligible but are repetition of his teaching in the Bhagavata & other works. Eknath as a literary artist is at his best in the remaining sections.

In Abhangas on Bala Kreedā, Eknath emulated the tradition of Jnanadeva, Namadeva and his great grand father Bhanudasa in singing of the early life of Krishna. He composed 317 Abhangas describing the events from the birth of Krishna to the release of Krishna's parents from Kamsa's jail. It is not a narration of events in chronological sequence. He composed these for different occasions in different Keertanas. So we find how cowherd-women of Gokul were enchanted with the charming beauty of the baby (Krishna). Later we find Krishna indulging in petty mischiefs and pranks, endearing himself to all. Krishna grows up and indulges in various

* Arabic figures in brackets indicate their number in *Sakala Sant Gatha* Vol. II.

games with cowherd boys and girls. Most of the games like Hututu, Hamama, Phugdi, Pinga are still current in Maharashtra. Then we find cowherd-girls enamoured of him and of his enchanting playing on the flute. Out of these, one cowherd-girl Radha (not mentioned in Vyasa's *Bhagavata*) and Krishna develop a special relationship. We find elderly cowherd-women complaining to Yashoda about Krishna's enchanting influence on their daughters and daughters-in-law which from the view of *Narada Bhakti Sutra* is the ideal devotion.

The general term for these Abhangas is *Gaulanees* (songs of cowherdesses) as cowherd girls and women played a prominent part in the early life of Krishna. Eroticism in Bhakti and Yoga has a long tradition. We find Shaiva and Bauddha Siddhas expressing their mystic experience in "Twilight Language" (*Sandhya Bhasha*). The apparent outer meaning of their Dohas or songs is erotical, even vulgar, but the inner meaning is esoterical and spiritual. The *Gaulanee* songs have a deeper significance.

The first and the most attractive feature of these songs of Eknath is the selection of appropriate inimitable onomatopoeic words and their sweet rhythm. Describing Krishna as a very young baby, Eknath says :

भिंगाचे भिंगुले खांचावर अंगुले ।
नाचत तान्हुले यशोदेचे ॥ (108)

"The young baby of Yashoda with a garment
studded with tiny mirror-lets is dancing."

But such translation can hardly convey the sweet soft music of tender words like *Bhingule* and *Tanhule*.

Like a great painter creating a picture within a few touches of his brush, Eknath creates a pen picture in minimum words. Look how Eknath creates the picture of a young damsel of seductive charm ogling at us while gliding ahead in consonance with the rhythm of the swinging of her ear-rings in gentle breeze :

वारियाने कुंडल हाले ।
डोळे मुरडत राधा चाले । (84)

“Casting her amorous glances Radha goes alread in consonance with the swinging of her ear-rings in gentle breeze.”

Small wonder that this song is immortalised not only in Keertanas and Bhajanas, but also in Tamashas (Folk-drama of the backward classes).

Both Krishna and Radha are bitten by the love-bug and Krishna with his mind lost in thoughts about Radha began to milk a bull, while Radha with her mind absorbed in Krishna began to churn an empty pot. (84)

Though Radha is not mentioned in the *Bhagavata*, Vaishnav saint-poets like Jayadeva created her as the *Ananda-shakti* (The power called Bliss) of Krishna. Even before Jayadeva, in the *Narada Purana*, she is a *Mantra devata* of great potentiality. Vaishnava saints extolled her as the most beloved companion of Krishna. She is *Madhura Bhakti* incarnate. Radha theme has richly contributed to Indian painting, music, dancing and other fine arts. Needless to say that the Gaulanee songs enshrined in inimitable, tendermost words of Eknath, form the most attractive and valuable treasure of Marathi poetry.

For example (Abhang 82) Radha takes Krishna to her house. Krishna softly approaches her, clasps round her neck and offers her a loving kiss and hypocritically begins to cry when he finds that Yashoda has seen the whole affair. Eknath with his comprehensive brevity and mastery over onomatopoeia describes :

थुरकत थुरकत चालतु । राधिकेचे गळा मिठी घालितु ।
तयेसी चुंबन आवडी देतु । पाहता यशोदेसी मग रडतु । (82)

We feel and visualize the stealthy approach of the lover in words (थुरकत थुरकत) “*Thurakat Thurakat*.” The words defy translation.

Separation (*Viraha*) is a poignant aspect of love. The courtings and games of Krishna and Gopis (cowherd-girls) have been romantically described by Eknath. He depicted as well the poignant feeling and wailings of love-lorn Gopis, in touching words. But Eknath’s Gopis are Vedantins. A love-lorn girl was eagerly waiting for Krishna at mid-night. But her love-lorn-ness disappears in association with saints. (132)

It must however be conceded that none of Eknath's *Viranees* "songs of love-lorn women" (Abhangas 119-138) reaches the intensity of poignance found in Jnanadeva's *Viranee* wherein the girl agonisingly expresses the scalding effect of cool sandal paste.

चंदनाची चोळी अंग अंग जाळी ।

Abhangas 166-173 give a beautiful picture of *Rasa Kreedā* and the games played by Krishna with cowherd boys and girls, (Abhangas 174-231) are obviously games played at Eknath's time (and are still popular) in Maharashtra.

The Gaulanee Abhangas describe the complaints of elderly Gopis about Krishna's pranks and mischiefs like stealthily eating butter, tying up the knot of a woman's hair with her husband's beard etc. It is these pranks and mischiefs which endeared Krishna to all.

Eknath was, however, motivated to write Gaulanee songs for popularising Krishna-bhakti and many of these songs are pregnant with Vedantic implications.

GLORIFICATION OF SAINTS

(ABHANGAS 3488-3694)

"Saints are God in human form. The glorification and Japa of the names of saints is meritorious like service rendered to God." That has been the faith of Marathi saints. Hence we find Namadeva, a prominent saint of Jnaneshvara group, eulogising Jnanadeva and other saints. Taking his cue from Namadeva, Eknath described the legends of puranic devotees like Dhruva, Prahalada and Sudama. This special contribution of Eknath inspired later poets and biographers of saints like Mahipati, Shreedhar and others to write works like *Bhakta-leelamrit*, *Bhakta-vijaya*. Eknath devoted 82 Abhangas to the life of Namadeva since his childhood. The Punjab chapter in Namadeva's life was then unknown. He regarded Nivrittinath, Jnanadeva, Sopandeva and Muktabai as the *Avataras* of god Shiva, Vishnu, Brahmadeva and Adi Shakti. But Jnanadeva commanded a special place of reverence and affection. Eknath calls Jnanadeva affectionately as "*Jnanabai*" as if he was his mother (Abhangas 3514, 3519,

3523).* Eknath had a parapsychologically interesting dream about Jnanadeva in A.D. 1583. Jnaneshvara, appeared resplendently beautiful like Madana. He informed Eknath that the root of the Ajanu tree reached his throat (3524). Eknath went to Alandi, then a deserted village. He had to search for Jnanadeva's Samadhi and discovered an entrance to it in the bed of the river Indrayani. There was no shrine over the Samadhi. He briefly mentions miraculous events in Jnanadeva's life such as the recitation of the Vedas through a buffalo (3516). But the greatest service Eknath rendered to Jnanadeva and more so to people and literature of Maharashtra was the preparation of an authentic edition of the Jnaneshvari in A.D. 1584. Eknath's belief that Jnanadeva was an incarnation of Vishnu was so deep that he assures that the *Japa* of the four letters (JNA-NA-DE-VA) constituting his name burns down all sins (3517).

EKNATH - THE SOCIAL THINKER

The Eknathi Gatha includes Abhangas 3689 to 4001 under the title *Upadeshapar Roopaka* (Analogical Abhangas for spiritual guidance) - this literal translation is a bit misleading. Eknath carefully observed the condition, customs and manners of different classes of the society, both Hindus and Muslims, gave a spiritual turn to their acts and usages. For example - men and women from Kolhatee community (a wandering tribe) earn livelihood by songs and acrobatic feats. Eknath's *Kolhateen* (a Kolhatee woman) is *saguna maya* who jumps above twentyone Svargas (3752). In Abhanga 3551 she tells that while taking a somersault, her saree (*lugde*) dropped down and her body became completely nude; but here the *saree* is illusion (*Bhranti*). The twentyfive *Dadules* (Paramours) of hers are the twentyfive tattvas of Sankhyas (3751). But a plain translation gives a realistic picture of the harsh, humiliating life of these poor downtrodden classes.

Most of these Abhangas are called *Bharudas*. The etymology of the term Bharuda is uncertain. A Bharuda is a synthesis of folk-song and folk-drama. It is generally presented by a single actor. Eknath's Bharudas are poems with *double entendre*, the outward or

* Henceforth simply the number of the Abhangas is given in the bracket. The word Abhanga or Abh. is omitted.

apparent meaning being secular, banal and even vulgar but the inner meaning is philosophical or spiritual. Let us take the Abhanga *Haladuli* (3773). It is based on the custom of applying turmeric powder to the bride and the bridegroom during the marriage ceremony - a record of a Hindu social custom.

Tells Eknath :

"After crushing turmeric to powder, the crushing stone is disposed off. The bridegroom is attributeless. Apply turmeric powder to him.

The bridegroom is naked and so is the bride. Both of them sat (are imminent) in the mobile and immobile universe.

The naked bridegroom covered himself with the (naked) bride. The naked bride has enveloped the bridegroom on all sides."

These lines obviously describe the Shiva-Shakti relation so poetically described by Jnanadeva in the first chapter of the *Amritanubhava*.

Let us take another illustration - an Abhanga (3906) called *Mahareena* (A Mahar woman).

With the usual "Johar" salutation, she reports:

"My master (husband) was all alone. He felt uneasy then. I came and stood before him. I put my husband to sleep. And created this vast universe. But it exists because of him."

This is a figurative translation of Upanishadic expressions : Eko'ham (एकोऽहम्), Ekakee na ramate (एकाकी न रमते !); Bahu syam Prajayaya. (बहु स्यां प्रजायेय).

Eknath's Mahareen clarified her identity :

"I am not an ordinary Mahareen, I endowed bodily

forms to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and others, who were devoid of forms and attributes." (Abhanga 3901).

TOPICS OF A BHARUDAS

Eknath wanted to attract and persuade all classes of people to adopt the path of Bhakti. He adopted a very broad social canvas. He wrote on down-trodden castes such as Mahars, Dowries, unrespected women like Bhandas, Kunteen, wandering tribes and caste such as Vasudeva, Garudi (snake charmers), Dombaree, Kolhatee who maintain themselves by their songs and acrobatic feats. Lower deities like Yellamma, Masai, Jokhai and their votaries like Gondhalis, Jogis, Jangam; physically handicapped persons like the blind, deaf, lame. Even non-human creatures like frogs, dogs, parrots, bats, scorpions and serpents form the subject of these poems. Eknath invested with philosophical significance games of boys and girls like Hututu, Phugdi, Pinga, Eki-beki.

Much more interesting are the spirited dialogues between a Hindu and a Turk in which the Hindu ably refutes the Turk's criticism of Hinduism by pointing out similar customs in Islam and the dialogue concludes with the mutual acceptance of equality of both the religions.

Due to a large variety of topics and a large number of Bharuda songs, books and articles have been written on Bharudas. I give here a few specimens of Bharudas :

(1) *Joharas* (3862-3899 and 3900-3909)

Johara was the salutation of Mahars in addressing members of the higher community. "*Johar maya-bapa johara*" (salute to you who are like parents) is the beginning of Eknath's every *Johara* song. Eknath had a soft corner for this intelligent but depressed community who formed an integral part of the old Grama-Panchayat system. Eknath proudly calls himself "the mahar of sadguru Janardana" (3891). Assuming this low profile Eknath exposes the weak points of the so-called high-caste-born people from Brahmins to Fakirs and tenders them sober advice to take to the path of Bhakti, lest they should suffer intolerable tortures after death.

The wretched life of the Mahar community - their dire poverty

and exploitations by higher communities - is narrated by Vivekanak Mahar :

"I guarded the houses of all people. I am exhausted with this bonded labour. (For collection of land-revenue) I have to pursue tax-evaders who have fled away. I must always lie at the door of the higher officer. I must thank them for the crumbs of bread they offer. I have to help Patil in ploughing and the merchant for weighing (commodities)."

The criticism of higher communities by a Mahar is given in the first chapter. The Mahars are given significant names such as Vivekanak, Atma-nak, Vitha-nak - *nak* was then usually applied to the names of Mahars. The human body was regarded as a village or a town. The names of the localities are given as "Shareerabad", "Kaya-pur", Deha-gava (Shareer, Kaya, Deha all mean a body). These are used in the various forms of official correspondence such as Arja (3852), Arjadast (3853), Takeed-patra (3856), Jabachitthi (3857), Jiva or Jivaji (individual soul) is the real officer (Patil). But his keep *Mamata* (sense of mineness) called by the Mahar as "*Patleen Ava*" rules with the help of goons (3882) - a realistic picture of Eknath's time.

There is such a variety in Bharuda that it is not possible even to give the gist of them all. But they deserve a detailed study.

APPEALS TO THE GODDESSES

According to Eknath, deities such as Mahalakshmi (and her various forms at Mahur, Kolhapur, Tuljapur etc.) are the manifestations of the Supreme Brahman. Jagadamba (the mother of the world) is identified with Vitthala (3915). Eknath's period was so terrible that he fervently appealed to the goddess "to open the door" (दार उघड बया) and to annihilate the wicked as she did in former Avatars (3914). The Jagadamba is identified with Yellamma (3918, 3919). He describes the modes of worshipping the Goddess such as Gondhal (3922-3933). Jogva (begging in the name of the goddess as in

3935). Ultimately Eknath got spiritual satisfaction when the mother quickly got up on hearing the Bhoopali (Awakening song in the morning).

PHILOSOPHICAL TREATISES*

Out of the miscellaneous philosophical treatises of Eknath, the following are important :

- (1) Chatuh-Shloki-Bhagavata
- (2) Hastamalaka
- (3) Shukashtaka
- (4) Svatmasukha
- (5) Ananda Lahari
- (6) Chiranjeeva Pada

(1) CHATUH-SHLOKI BHAGAVATA (CB)

Verses 32 to 35 (32-38 according to some) from the 9th chapter of the II Skandha of the *Bhagavata Purana* are regarded as the essence of the Bhagavata. These verses contain the spiritual knowledge imparted by Vishnu for the enlightenment of god Brahma (CB Ovis 32-35).

Eknath tells us that while they (Janardana and Eknath) camped at the house of Chandra Bhat at Chandvad (Dist. Nasik), Janardana heard the sermon of Chandra Bhat on the CB. Pleased with his exposition, Janardana told Eknath to elucidate the Sanskrit work in Marathi (CB 1018-1024). Though the title leads to believe that the CB is limited to four verses, Eknath expounded all the 45 verses of the 9th chapter of the *Bhagavata* in 1036 Ovi verses.

Though this is the first work of Eknath, it shows all the special features of Eknath's future work and style.

The first is a leisurely discursive style of exposition found in his commentary of the XI Skandha of the *Bhagavata* and the *Bhavartha Ramayana*. It shows a thorough grasp of the subject as well as his predilection to Bhakti. There is no word like *Bhakti* in the Sanskrit

* Text - *Shri Santa Eknath - Krita Atha Grantha* Edt : N. V. Panashikar, Yashwant Prakashan, Pune 30.

text of CB, but on the basis of two words “*Anvaya Vyatirekabhyam*” (अन्वय-व्यतिरेकाभ्याम्) in verse No. 35 of the Sk text, Eknath builds the edifice of Bhakti in 50 Ovi-verse (577-627). All the essentials of the path of devotion - greatness of Sadguru (spiritual preceptor), potentiality of God’s name, fundamentals of Jnana Marga (spiritual knowledge) are lucidly explained in the CB.

Secondly he establishes rapport with his audience. He declares that the object of his writing is to please saintly people (533) and notes the response - great satisfaction and encouragement - from the audience (534). We find a number of such appeals to the members of the audience and their encouraging response in the *Bhavartha Ramayana*.

Thirdly his devotion and gratitude to his guru (Janardan). It is due to his guru’s power that the meaning of the text of the Bhagavata manifested itself to him (1025-1034).

Eknath was simply the medium of Janardan in elucidating the CB. Eknath and Janardan are really one though their names differ (1036). This intense devotion to Janardan runs all through the works of Eknath.

Lastly Eknath’s whole - hearted devotion to the work in hand makes him feel “haunted” by CB (1028-29) – an experience repeated later even while writing his last work, the *Bhavartha Ramayana*.

(2) HASTAMALAKA

This is a conversation between Shankaracharya and Hastamalaka (a boy with inborn spiritual knowledge and mastery over it like an Amalaka - (Emblc Myrobalan) fruit on the palm of hand (Ovi 63). The conversation consists of 14 SK verses. Its gist is that the Atman is free from adventitious circumstances (*Upadhis*) and is of the nature of pure spiritual knowledge. He is unconcerned with the world and there is no bondage or liberation to the soul.

Eknath explained these fourteen SK verses in 674 Ovi-verses. He quotes from Upanishads like the *Brihadaranyaka*, the *Mundaka* and from the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Bhagavata* and the *Yoga-vasistha*. Eknath accepts the non-dualistic philosophy of Shankara to some extent, but he synthesizes Bhakti, Jnana and Karma, the importance of guru and God’s name for attaining the knowledge of the self.

Eknath concludes Hastamalaka by giving the genealogy of Shankaracharya, the mathas established by him and the ten orders of sannyasins such as giri, puri founded by him (634-644).

(3) SHUKASHTAKA

This Vedantic stotra of eight verses describes the nature of the soul as selfluminous and attributeless. Eknath explained it in 447 Ovi-verses of three and half feet. He composed two benedictory verses in Sanskrit in honour of his Guru.

Due to this new format, some scholars doubt the authorship of Eknath of this work. But Eknath's ability to compose two Sanskrit verses in Anushtubh metre and composing Ovis-verses of three and a half feet need not be doubted, though it is unusual in Eknath's other work.

(4) SVATMASUKHA (BLISS OF THE SOUL)

This small treatise of 511 Ovi-verses, is "an essence of Upanishadic wisdom brought into Marathi by the grace of Janardan" (400-411). It is written by Eknath for self-satisfaction "*Svatma Sukhaya*" (510). It describes the self realized by the grace of guru (101-135). He protects him (the disciple) from the evil powers of Maya (163-217).

Eknath seeks blessings of his guru for this treatise (457-461). He concludes with the wish that the audience be pleased with this work (510-511).

(5) ANANDA LAHARI

This poem of 154 Ovi-verses is not related to Shankaracharya's *Ananda Lahari*. Eknath explains the title thus : "When the mind is immersed into the bliss of the soul, waves of spiritual happiness surge forth." It emphasises the importance of resorting to Sadguru for Moksha.

This poem is highly praised by Justin E. Abbot, Gurudeva R. D. Ranade, N. R. Phatak and other scholars. As Justin E. Abbot remarks : "This small work is well-worth close study as showing the emphasis that Eknath placed on the joy of intense and true devotion of God."

(6) CHIRANJEEVA PADA

This small composition of 42 Ovi-verses is the essence of Eknath's teachings. It is meant for those who wish to attain "The Eternal seat" i.e. Moksha. For this disaffection (*vairagya* of the *sattvika* type) is the first step. Unswerving devotion to Krishna, complete dependence on him (*Prapatti*) is the way to Moksha. This is what Krishna advised to Uddhava (40).

It is in this birth as a man that one should try for *vairagya* (disaffection) and spiritual knowledge. There is no other way for Moksha says Eknath (42).

The above works are obviously philosophical. Eknath tries to elucidate the philosophy of Bhakti to uninitiated common men. No flights of poetic fancy are expected in such works. Eknath's faith in the grace of Guru as the only way to Moksha, his love for his mothertongue and his ardent desire that people should adopt the path of Bhakti are obvious in each of the miscellaneous works.

EKNATH PANCHAK

Eknath was not the only saint-poet who single-handedly strove to preserve our ancient culture. There was a galaxy of twelve to fifteen saint-poets who along with Eknath, determinantly countered the socio-political challenge of the 16th century Maharashtra. It will not be out of place to mention the contribution of a few contemporaries and followers of Eknath.

It is customary to mention the following five saints as the "Panchaka" (Pentad) of Eknath viz. Eknath (A.D. 1533-1599), Jani Janardana (d.1602), Rama Janardana (circa 1561), Vitha Renukanandan (circa 1578) and Dasopant (1551-1615). Out of these Jani Janardana, a sannyasin, was not the disciple of Janardana. Nor did he belong to the Datta cult. He belonged to the Ganesh cult. "Jani" is the name of his mother which he adopted in his *mudrika*. His famous literary contribution is "*Janaki-Svayamvara*" (Ovi-verses 2840). It gives the spiritual interpretation of that interesting episode. With the exception of two *Aratis* (of Jnaneshvar and of Janardana) no literary contribution of Rama Janardana has come down to us.

Dasopant was the most eminent Sanskrit scholar of this period. He wrote 10 Sanskrit works on Vedanta. But he was a staunch advocate of Marathi as against Sanskrit. In his apologia for Marathi (1200 Ovis), he showed how Marathi is superior to Sanskrit in richness of vocabulary and more conducive to express subtle nuances of speech. His contribution to Marathi is voluminous, most famous of which are "*Geetarnava*" (a commentary of more than one hundred thousand Ovis on the Bhagavad Gita), *Panchikarana*, *Padarnava* to mention a few. Much of his work is yet to be published. May be due to his deep absorption in writing, he remained aloof and indifferent to the public and hence possibly less popular and ineligible for public leadership. He had great regard for Eknath as "a great saint". They were life-long friends.

Dr. R. C. Dhere has shed considerable light on "Vitha

Renukanandan". He assumed this pen-name as he was a devotee of Renuka. The Goddess manifested herself after which "Renuka-nandan was filled with happiness. And thence forth remained in eternal bliss."

Not much of his work is published.

It was a period of intellectual awakening. A number of saintpoets contributed to this cultural revival. Eknath was a leader of this movement. His contribution as an epoch-maker is given in the next section.

EKNATH : AN EPOCH-MAKER

Eknath is a connecting link between two glorious periods in Marathi literature - the period of Jnanadeva and Namadeva and that of Tukarama and Ramadasa. Echoing Krishna's promise in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4.7), Eknath declared his mission of life viz. fighting against "irreligion which has reached its peak". With Jnanadeva as his ideal, Eknath tried to preserve the ancient culture through the medium of literature and by persuasive Keertanas and *Purana-pravachanas*. On the model of Jnanadeva's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, he wrote a detailed commentary on the "Uddhava-Gita" (XI Skandha of the *Bhagavata Purana*). In that illuminating commentary, he explained Bhakti Philosophy emphasising the importance of unswerving devotion to God, Godlike reverence to Guru (spiritual preceptor) and invaluable efficacy of God's name. It is true that due to his deep study of the Jnaneshvari, one hears a number of its echoes in *Eknathi Bhagavata*. It is however, not correct to say that *Eknathi Bhagavata* is "a running commentary on the *Jnaneshvari*".

It is customary among Varakaris to say "*Jnananacha Eka*" due to the similarity in the teachings of Jnanadeva and Eknath, and Eknath's service to Jnanadeva's Samadhi and his authentic edition of the *Jnaneshvari*. But Jnanadeva and Eknath were two different types of personalities, with different family background, social status and temperament. May be due to social ostracism suffered by Jnanadeva and the aloofness cultivated by his Yogic (Nath) Sampradaya, Jnanadeva appears like a beacon on a high pedestal - a profound thinker with excellent poetic gifts, adorable but not approachable to the common man. On the other hand, Eknath, a lucid interpreter of Bhakti philosophy, was a man of the masses, intensely interested in their spiritual welfare. As a house-holder and a saint, he accomplished a happy synthesis of the worldly and the spiritual life "not accomplished either by Jnanadeva and Namadeva

before him or by Tukarama and Ramadasa after him".* Namadeva and Tukarama were householders but they neglected their families. But Eknath was a successful householder and a saint. In philosophy Jnanadeva tilted to Vasugupta's *Ishvaradvaya-Vada* (popularly known as Kashmir Shaivism) while Eknath was a follower of Shankaracharya's Advaitism.

There is another difference between the followers and contemporary saints of Jnanadeva and Eknath. Followers of Jnanadeva were great devotees who expressed in Abhangas their fervid devotion to God and sublime spiritual experience. But they were not scholars.

May be due to the status of hereditary leadership of the Bhagavata Sampradaya since the days of Bhanudasa, his saintly behaviour, scholarship, outstanding literary contribution and the gift of excellent eloquence, Eknath was implicitly accepted as a friend, guide and philosopher by the scholarly saint-poets of his time. Even Dasopant, the proud Sanskrit scholar, a literary colossus of the century, who declared "never to see the face of audience" and disowned his allegiance to previous Acharyas, respectfully paid compliment to Eknath as "a great saint" (साधु भला रे).

Like Jnaneshvara, Eknath and his contemporaries who though Sanskrit scholars were proud of their mothertongue Marathi *vis-a-vis* Sanskrit. Eknath challenged the partisans of Sanskrit : "If Sanskrit is created by God, is Prakrit (Marathi) born of thieves ?" Dasopant wrote 1200 Ovi-verses to show the superiority of Marathi to Sanskrit in richness of vocabulary and in expressing the subtle nuances of the language. Krishnadas Mudgala (death A.D. 1598) says: "If Sanskrit is the moon, Marathi is the moonlight." Tryambakaraja regards Marathi better than Sanskrit.

Another salient feature of Eknath's Marathi, which is emulated by his contemporaries and followers, is his chaste, pro-Sanskrit Marathi, though the spoken language of that period was full of Perso-Arabic words and expressions. Even Muntoji, the Bahamani Prince of Bidar, mentioned as 'Mrutyunjaya, the great Yogi', by Mahipati, wrote Marathi like a Brahmin.

* R. D. Ranade - *Path Way to God in Marathi Literature*, p.203.

THE AGE OF EKNATH

In determining the 'Age' or 'Epoch' of Eknath, his contemporaries and authors who, like Eknath's grandson Mukteshvara, wrote after the death of Eknath but emulated him under the influence of his works, should be included. Thus in addition to the authors included in the 'Eknath Panchaka' we find a dozen other authors like Krishna Yajnavalki and Madhukara, the authors of *Katha-Kalpa-Taru*, Tryambakara the author of *Balabodha* or *Balavabodha*, Shiva-kalyana, the commentator of *Amritanubhava*, Madhavadasa, the writer of *Yogavasistha*, Vishnudasa Nama, the author of *Mahabharata* and a number of Abhangas, Krishnadasa Mudgal writer of *Ramayana Yuddha Kanda*, Ranganath Mogarekar, the author of *Yogavasistha* and others have emulated Eknath and have written under the influence of Eknath's works. Hence these may be regarded as belonging to the Age of Eknath.

The works of Eknath may broadly be classified as :
 (1) Commentaries on major and minor Vedantic works in Sanskrit
 (2) Narratives (i) on Epic works like the Bhavartha Ramayana
 (ii) Romances. (3) Folk-dance and Folk-drama. (4) Abhangas -
 Biographical, devotional and didactic.

1. COMMENTARIES ON VEDANTIC WORKS

Like Eknath's extensive commentary on the XI skandha of the Bhagavata, we find Dasopant's erudite and extensive commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is rightly called the "ocean of the Geeta" (*Geetarnava*). A few thousand verses of this voluminous Commentary are published. Dasopant is reported to have written some five commentaries on the *Geeta*, out of which *Geetarnava* and *Geetartha-chandrika* are available. In view of Dasopant's proud assertion that the exposition in his commentary is "Out of his experience"* (scholarship ?). I doubt if we can call him Eknath's follower though he is included in 'Eknath Panchaka'.

* Dasopanta's indifference to the audience is famous. He used to say :

"मानेल तेणे घ्यावे । नाबडे ते नेघावे ।"

"Accept it if you approve of it otherwise do not accept it."

But we can positively say that in their Vedantic works in Marathi such as Madhavadasa's *Yogavasistha* (A.D. 1592), Shivakalyana's commentary *Nityanandaikya-deepika* on Jnanadéva's *Amritanubhava*, Ranganath Mogarekar's *Yogavasisth* (A.D. 1608), Ramavallabhadasa's *Chamatkari Tika* on the *Bhagavad Geeta* do evince the influence of Eknath in style, elucidation etc. I doubt whether a secular writer like Mahalingadasa (A.D. 1525) or Tryambakaraja, the author of *Balabodha* (A.D. 1553) can be called followers of Eknath, though they were Eknath's contemporaries.

In minor works of Eknath, we have seen how he lucidly expounded *Chatuhshloki Bhagavata* and Vedanta Stotras of Shankaracharya like *Hastamalaka*. We find similar minor Vedantic works commented or composed by Shivakalyana on *Vedastuti*, Ramavallabhadasa on *Brihad-Vakya-Vritti* of Shankaracharya. Dasopant wrote on *Shivastotra* but I believe Dasopant was an independent author though an admirer of Eknath.

2. NARRATIVE LITERATURE

Though Bahira Jataveda, the author of the *Bhairavi Tika* on the X Skandha of the *Bhagavata*, has paved the way to future narrative writers of Krishna stories like Namadeva and others, it was however Eknath who gave more impetus to narrative literature in Marathi by his works like the *Rukmini Svayamavara*, the *Bhavartha Ramayana* and short narratives like the Biographical Abhangas on devotees and saints like Sudama, Namadeva, Gora Kumbhar, Damaji and others. Thus we find Krishna Yajnavalki (C.1570) writing *Katha-Kalpa-Taru* (A wish-yielding tree of Puranic stories) - a monumental collection of stories. It was due to his demise in A.D. 1613 that it came to be completed by his disciple Madhukara in A.D. 1623. These stories are told so fascinatingly and have such an abiding appeal that they are heard with deep interest by masses even today.

The next important poet is Krishna Dayarnava whose monumental commentary on the X Skandha of the *Bhagavata*, the *Harivarada*, is still unsurpassed in scholarship and poetic beauty. His inclusion of Eknath's *Rukmini Svayamvara* in *Hari-Varada* shows his deep respect

for Eknath.* Another important narrative poet is Vishnudasa Nama whose Abhangas are intermingled with those of saint Namadeva of the Jnaneshvara period. He wrote the story of the Mahabharata in about 13500 Ovi-verses.** He is probably the first author of the Mahabharata story in Marathi. Just as Eknath took liberties with Valmiki's Rama story Vishnudasa Nama did the same with the Mahabharata story by his deviations, digressions, omissions and additions to Vyasa's story. Vishnudasa Nama seems to have studied Sanskrit Mahakavyas carefully as can be seen from the use of figures of speech, and play on words in his writings.

A few minor works of Vishnudasa Nama such as *Aishika Parva* (about Ashvatthaman's use of Brahmastra against Pandava race), *Draupadi Svayamvara* are published but his *magnum opus*, the *Mahabharata*, awaits publication. Krishnadasa Mudgal is noted for his inspiring *Yuddha Kanda* of the Ramayana. Maratha garrisons in every fort used to listen to this inspiring work. As the legend goes, Eknath warded off his (Krishnadasa's) death till the completion of the *Yuddha Kanda*. (A.D. 1598).

There was, however, another poet of outstanding merit who, though a close contemporary of Eknath, was most probably not influenced by Eknath. He preferred to bring into Marathi secular stories from Sanskrit such as *Vetala Panchavishi*, *Simhasana Battishi*, *Panchatantra*. His motivation was secular - to introduce Sanskrit story literature to ignorant Marathi speakers. But the most outstanding contribution to narrative literature of this period comes from Eknath's grandson, Mukteshvara. As he lived probably in the first part of the 17th century, he belongs to the post-Eknath period. His works such as *Sankshepa Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Shuka-Rambha-Samvada* (the dialogue between Shuka and Rambha) show that Mukteshvara's lucid, classical style is influenced by Eknath with the difference that in narration Mukteshvara tilts to romanatic eroticism. He is credited to have completed the *Uttara Kanda* of Eknath's *Bhavartha Ramayana*.

* Ramavallabhadasa wrote his digest of the X skandha of the Bhagavata and called it *Dashaka-nirdhara* in A.D. 1633. Though his style shows the influence of Eknath, his source of inspiration was Bahira Jataveda's commentary on the X skandha.

** Dr. Sarojini Shende's Ph.D. dissertation, Bombay University.

2.2 ROMANCES

Strictly speaking, romances should be treated as a part of narrative literature. Eknath's *Rukmini Svayamvara* is a sustained analogy, the Vedantic concept of the merger of Jiva (Individual soul) with Shiva (Supreme soul). Despite this dead weight of Vedanta, Eknath wrote the story so beautifully that we forget its spiritual aspect and enjoy it like a secular romantic story. Jani Janardana wrote a very beautiful romance on *Janaki Svayamvara*. According to him "Janaki was an Avatara of Adimaya who has infinite Brahmandas in her womb, while Rama was the Avatara of Atma. Their union (in marriage) was (accomplished) as per Shiva's will". Jani Janardana, a sannyasi, expresses his inability to describe Sita's beauty as Rama was "the enjoyer of her lips". It is a beautiful romance of that period. As he died in A.D. 1601, it is not unlikely, that he must have read his friend's - Eknath's *Rukmini Svayamvara* (written in A.D. 1571). I believe Venabai (Ramadasa's lady disciple) must have read Eknath's work before writing her *Sita Svayamvara*. Later writers like Samaraj and Moropant belong to a much later date. The theme rather than Eknath's work must have inspired them to write their Svayamvara poems.

3. FOLK-DANCE AND FOLK-DRAMA

Bharuda songs are a unique contribution of Eknath to Marathi literature, folk-arts and social history. The Bharuda songs of Eknath are to be sung and acted. Some of the Bharudas are mystical i.e. spiritual riddles. They are still used in Tamashas (folk-dramas) for question-answer (*Sawal-Jabab*) competition.

This section of Eknath's contribution is not properly studied though it deserves in-depth study.

4. ABHANGAS - BIOGRAPHICAL, DEVOTIONAL AND DIDACTIC

A reference to SSg. Vol. II shows Eknath wrote Biographical Abhangas on Puranic devotees like Dhruva, Prahlad, Rukmangada (3411-3485), saints of previous generations like Jnanadeva, Namadeva

and others (3488-3684) and also didactic Abhangas inviting people to Bhakti. Most of the contemporaries and followers wrote Abhangas on these topics. Dasopant's *Padarnava* is said to be of a hundred thousand Padas, Gathas of Vitha Renukanandana, Vishnudas Nama and others disclose Eknath's influence. But the tradition of didactic and narrative Abhangas is tracable to the period of Jnanadeva.

Eknath has written some songs or Abhangas in the Dakhni dialect which editors of Gathas label "Hindi" (Dakhni contribution of Tukarma who never moved out of Pune-Sholapur districts and had no opportunity to visit the Hindi belt, is also labelled as "Hindi"). But the subjects dealt in the Dakhni songs of Eknath are the same as those in Marathi.

5. STYLE

Reference has already been made to Eknath's pro-Sanskrit chaste Marathi style. Due to his early training in music Eknath had an ear for sweet rhythm. Being a gifted poet, he uses the combination of vowels and consonants with such dexterity and magic that they create before the mind's eye a picture of any mood or emotion - be it pathetic yet self-controlled Sita, boastful Ravana or helpless Rukmini beseeching for the life of *Rukmee*. He is at his musical best in his songs like :

- (1) *Variyane Kundal Hale* (वारियाने कुंडल हाले) etc. (The earring is dangling with gentle breeze.) describing effect of the love-bug on Radha and Krishna.
- (2) *Radat majhe bala tanhe, Samajavita rahina.*
(रडत माझे बाळ तान्हे । समजावीता राहिना ॥)
(My young infant continues to cry, etc.) showing motherly anxiety and affection for young babies.
- (3) *Kasa devacha deva bai thakada* (कसा देवाचा देव बाई ठकडा)
How mischievously deceptive is the God of gods. It is while describing the mischievous pranks of Krishna.

A number of such songs have become immortal mainly due to their musical effect.

Eknath's followers emulated him even in this matter. Sings Rama-Vallabha-Dasa of the baby Krishna : *Chimanese mool tyacha chimanasa pava*

चिमणेसे मूल त्याचा चिमणासा पावा ।

(A tiny baby with a tiny flute).

Vishnudasa Nama describes : *Ratra kali, ghagar kali Yamunajale hi kali ho maya*

रात्र काळी, घागर काळी

यमुनाजळे ही काळी हो माय ॥

(Dark is the night, the (water) pitcher is black and even the waters of the Yamuna are dark.)

Translation of these songs cannot convey their musical effect of these songs unless they are sung in the proper tune.

The era of Jnaneshvara passed into history. Due to adverse socio-political condition, there was some sort of a break in Marathi literary tradition. Eknath by his varied, prolific writings in different branches of literature started a new literary era in Maharashtra. Still more important is the inspiration awakened by him in his contemporaries and followers to try different forms of literature. It is thus through their writings, Pravachanas, Keertanas and saintly behaviour that this galaxy of saint-poets of the 16th century A.D. gave solace and courage to the downtrodden masses and blazed a trail for generations to come.

Eknath was the leader - a loadstar unto them all. And as such he deserves to be called an epoch-maker in the history of Marathi literature.

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