

ISSN 2347 – 503X

Research Chronicler

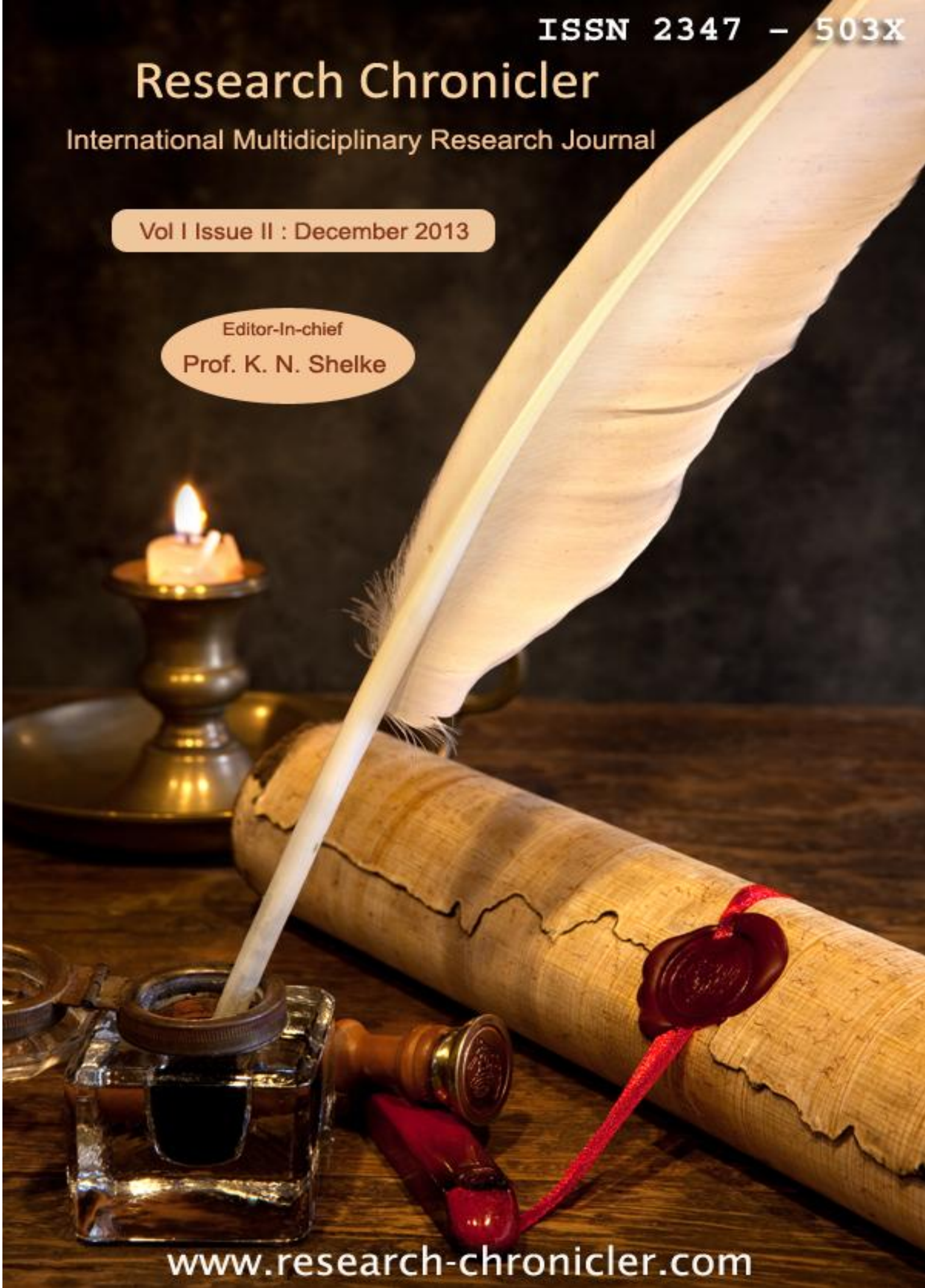
International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol I Issue II : December 2013

Editor-In-chief

Prof. K. N. Shelke

www.research-chronicler.com



Research Chronicler

A peer-reviewed refereed and indexed international multidisciplinary research journal

Volume I Issue II: December – 2013

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Bahinabai Chaudhari – A Multidimensional Poet**Maushmi Thombare***Modern College, Pune. (M.S.) India***ABSTRACT**

Bahinabai Chaudhari- One of the greatest poetess in Marathi from Maharashtra, India. Being an illiterate woman, it seems that she had profound knowledge about life and its nature. Her minute observations, way of presentation, meters and rhyming style is amazing. Her philosophy of life and extraordinary capacity of its expression is mind blowing. She found life's meaning in the womb of the nature and her usage of colloquial language makes her poems very realistic and natural. She explored the village life and its people and their manners through her poems aptly. While taking a journey through her poems she naturally reminds us of the great poets in English like Wordsworth, Frost and many other nature poets, though keeping her own specific identity. She renders life's approach in a positive and playful way where really lie her strength. This research paper is written with the motive to recall and salute such a great poetess and to explore her sapience which is still unknown to the world.

Key Terms: Bahinabai Chaudhari, multilingual, tradition, feminism, modernism

Bahinabai Nathaji Chaudhari (1880-1951) was a prominent poetess of Maharashtra, India. She was born on 24th August 1880 in Asoda village, Jalgaon district in a farmer's family. Hence, she was very close to the nature and her love for it is reflected in her literature, prominently in her poems. She got married at a very tender age of 13 to a *Vatandar*, Nathaji Chaudhari, who was 30 years old. Due to some family disputes they were in debts and had to face many financial difficulties and hardships, but it did not deter Bahinabai. At the early age of 30 she became widow, which was considered as an ill-fate. As a woman she had to depend on her husband to lead a life. She was very strong and faced life's challenges along with her three sons and two

daughters. She also came to know about Saint Tukaram. Impressed with his *abhangas*, she became his disciple. She had great faith in God Vitthala. She also praised great Saints like Namdev, Dnyaneshwar and Muktabai. She was a born poetess and used to chant her verses all the time, for which people taunted her. Though she was illiterate, she composed poems of great literary merit and encapsulated the life's philosophy in her quadruplets. She was of the age of eminent Marathi poets like Keshavsut, Kusumagraj, Tambe, and Govindagraj. Consequently, nobody paid any attention towards her poems. She chanted her poems in Ahirani dialect (dialect of Marathi spoken in North Maharashtra) in the form of meter or *ovis*. Her poetry was

very philosophical and unique in itself. She created her own linguistic competency through which she explored her own philosophy of life. More than 350 verbal poems of her were penned down by her son, Sopan Chaudhari in the collection *Bahinaichi Gaani* published by Suchitra publishers in 1952. It is said that the goddess of knowledge Saraswati rolled on her tongue while she was speaking. That's what she says in these lines:

*“Mazi mai Saraswati, Male shikvate
boli,
lek bahinachya mani kiti gupit
perali.”*(p.113)

(My mother Saraswati teaches me to chant, she knows all the secrets of her daughter's heart.)

Though she could never go to formal school, Lord Rama and Lord Vithoba were her teachers in the life's school. She had deep emotions to Lord Vitthala. Although she was illiterate and couldn't read a single word, her thoughts were much more advanced and of far more excellent than the age she lived in. She was so great in her thoughts that she used to say:

*“Are gharota gharota, tujyatun pade pith,
tasa tasa maja gaan potatun yete
vhati.”*(p.126)

(As the flour freely flows through the grinder, so her lips drop thoughts and words in meter.)

With regard to this, she can be compared to a prolific poet William Wordsworth who said that 'poetry is the emission of continuous flow of emotions.' In order to understand this, one needs to be well-read, having thorough knowledge of rules of

poetry. But she could understand this hence, this shows that poetry was flowing all through her nerves. Wordsworth is also of the view that poetry should be in simple language so that common people could understand it. This was true with Bahinabai as her poems are in the local language, i.e. Ahirani and common people could understand it. I think she can also be compared to the great American poet, Robert Frost, Pulitzer Prize winner for four times, as he also depicted the rural life in his poems with realistic rural settings. He also had command on colloquial speech. His poems are also philosophical like Bahinabai depicting the life's reality through nature and his own experiences. But Frost's poems show despair and pessimism whereas Bahinabai's poems gives life's philosophy in an optimistic tone sometimes even in humor.

It also seems that she was a very keen observer of linguistic functions of language when she says;

*“Mai mhanata mhanata vhat vhatalagi
bhide,
Atya mhanata mhanata, kevadha antar
pade.”*(pg.43)

It means that while calling the word mother or mummy, lips get very close to each other but while calling the word aunt the same lips gets apart. This shows that despite being illiterate she had awareness of linguistic functions of words which add beauty and spontaneity to poetic expression.

She was not less than all those great poets who argued about what poetry is and what it should be. She was beyond all these things merged with the music of life. Her

thoughts are so relevant to life that even today they are equally applicable. It is a great fortune of the land of Maharashtra to get such a gifted poet.

She used to sing ovis while doing her domestic works at home and in the farm. She is also called as the ‘Nisargakanya’(as appropriately said by the eminent Marathi writer Indira Sant) means nature’s daughter,. She derives life’s philosophy from nature as if one removes sweet water from the coconut. She was so involved in nature that she used to say that “she could see heaven in the mirror of the Earth.” Looking at the cotton seeds she says that, ‘God had sent her with clothes, but man has made her nude, for him to get clothed’.

Her famous poem *Khopa* teaches how birds from the nature can weave their nest with the long paddy leaves so finely with their beak. In this poem she describes the skills of the ‘Baya’ bird of weaving nest for its eggs. Here, she presents nature as a teacher and tells us that this bird takes so much efforts to weave a beautiful nest just with its beak, but man is gifted with two hands and ten fingers so he has to work really very hard for his children and his livelihood instead of wasting time. This is how she was so close to the nature as if one with it and always found Mother Nature as the teacher of mankind. She could understand nature’s emotions. She says:

“*Beeya tarare bhuit, survey komb ale varhe;
guhyarala shet jasa angavarti shahare.*” (p. 141)

(In the womb of the Earth, so slept the seeds, covering themselves with sand sheets

popped up germinating the sprouts, shows farms’ emotions like goose bumps out.)

Once she was told that it was futile to plant Gulmohor trees; instead one should plant mango trees as it at least fills one’s belly. To this she replies by saying that mango trees definitely satisfy one’s belly but Gulmohor satisfies one’s heart and soul. It shows her wide and deep poetic perception. Along with knowing nature keenly, she was a good observer that fathoms her poetic perspective when she says, ‘Oh royal farmer, walking barefooted, look under his feet, the thorns are bent.’

Along with the nature it seems that Bahinabai was also very deeply aware of human nature. She was aware of the selfish and covetous nature of man. In her poems she says that don’t chase behind venal desires as the exchange of souls is not a business of livelihood. This thought dives us in the deep sea of her philosophy and gifts us the knowledge of the message of love which is precious and immortal. Even in those days she knew the mystery and purpose of life. Her mind blowing poem *Manus* tells the message of humanity. She straightway asks:

“*Mansa, Mansa; kadhi vhashil Manus.*”(p.187)

(Oh Man! Oh Man Being! When will you become a Human Being?)

Further, she says,

“*Manus, Manus, matlabi re manasa.....
tuji niyat bekar, tujyahun bara gothyatla janavar.*”(pg.187)

This line shows that she craves for mankind to become a human being first,

which is a very profound thought and shows her social awareness. She further tells about the selfish nature of man and says that an animal is better than a mankind. Especially, during the modern days, it is very apt as we see a man turning into demon (de-man) or devil and doing all the vicious acts.

Pralhad Keshav Atre, a great writer and critic, said that after reading her poems it seems that, “The future critics of literature will compel to say that this poetry collection of Bahinabai – a treasure of ancient Marathi literature – has definitely enriched the modern Marathi literature.” This remark by such an eminent personality is an award in itself.

She was born at the time when Bhakti cult was at its peak and Maharashtra was flourishing with the abhangas and ovis of the great saint-poets like Tukaram, Namdev, and Janabai. Bahinabai became the disciple of Saint Tukaram and firmly believed in the existence of God. She advices not to try to find God in temple or anywhere else as he is in your own eyes, heart and soul. He is there where you look with your heart. She aptly explains the existence of God as:

*“Dev kuthe, Dev kuthe? Tujhya bubuya majhar;
Dev kuthe, Dev kuthe, abhayachya aarpaar.”*(p.186)

(Where is God, Where is God? In your eyes; Where is God, Where is God, Beyond the skies.)

She further says;

*“Are Devache darshan, Zale zale apasuk,
Hiridat surya baapa, daavi arupache rupa.”*(pg.113)

(It means, I could see God reflexively, the Sun in the heart shows face of God.)

This shows that she is not the blind believer of God, in fact she sees God in the face of Sun who is the life giver and can be seen by our eyes.

*“Male Kayale gupit, kaay tuji karamat;
Are andharana keli, ujedachya varhe maat.”*(p.186)

(I got to know your secret; the darkness has conquered the vivid.)

Though, she believed in God, she advocated practical life. She did not believe in any kind of superstitions or religious dogmas. She says one cannot find God just by clapping hands but could only get to those rough hands of hardships. She did not believe and rely on fate and fortune kind of things. She says:

*“Baapa, nako maaru thapa, aso kharya aso khotya;
Nahi nashib nashib tayahatachya reghotya.”*(p.131)

(Oh, Astrologer! Don't lie oh liar, may it be true, or false, fate does not remain in the lines of palm.)

She further says that:

*“Nako nako re jyotisha, asa haath maja pahu;
Majha daiva mala kaye, majya daari nako yeu.”*(p.131)

(Oh! Astrologer, don't read my palm, I know my own fate, don't come at my gate again.)

When her husband passed away she was 30 years. At that time when people came for condolence, instead of crying, she said that though the bindi or the kumkum has vanished and her bangles are broken, there is strength in her wrist. This shows her modern and extraordinary thoughts in her

ordinary and simple life. Being a woman she did not show her dependency on her husband. Instead she carried all the responsibility of her family on her shoulders and faced her remaining life strongly and courageously. Such a great philosopher and guide of the common people knew the grievances especially of women. She advocated duty towards family along with devotion.

P.L. Deshpande, a prolific writer of Marathi literature rightly said that Bahinabai's ovis are like farm of Basil plants and she has given butter of life's philosophy on the bread.

Through her poems we can also find women's social life of her age. In those days women were illiterate and household work and farm was her only world in which she had to cope-up with the in-laws. The outer world was ignorant to them. She could hardly visit her mother's place which was the only place where she could tell her feelings and grievances. It was the age when a son was considered as the source of continuation of hierarchy and a matter of pride, but she indirectly indicated the importance of a daughter or a girl child by saying the following lines;

*"Are lagale dohaye, sange shetatli maati,
gaate maherache gaane, lek yeil re poti."*(pg.104)

(It means that she is getting an intuition and even the soil in the farm is telling that she is going to get a girl child and she is happy singing the maternal song.)

This shows that Bahinabai along with the nature i.e. the soil tells the importance of

a daughter which is the symbol of Goddess of life. As life flourishes and gets birth only through a woman. As the soil in the farm that gives birth to plants, and sweet fruits are reaped later same as the girl child and later a woman is the source of giving birth to life and is the only source of happiness, and hence her birth should be celebrated. She herself wishes to get a girl child. This shows that she advocated a girl child in those days and considered no difference between a boy and a girl child. This shows her human touch and her modern thoughts.

She knew the heart of woman through her heart. She knew the importance of a woman's parental home ('Maher' in Marathi) and she knew how dear it was to her. She says that the way towards her maternal mansion is very hard; she has to tread barefooted to reach there. On her way she gets hurt with sharp stones but the stones towards her mother's place get converted into flowers. Such is the significance of her Maher. She says:

"Lekichya maherasathi, maay saasri nandate." (pg. 154)

(It means the mother abides in her in-laws only to create parental mansion for her daughter.)

She tells the significance of 'Maher' for women in following words;

"Majya maherachya vaate, jari aale paayi phod;

Paaya chalale chalale; ashi maherachi odh." (pg.118)

(It means that even her legs get boils while walking towards her parental mansion, she does not feel any pains and get tired, such is her affection towards her Maher.)

So sentimental and tender thoughts touch our hearts and provoke us to retrospect on the social life of women in those days. Such is her attraction and love and so is of all women. She also teaches the common women the philosophy of life through common examples of married life, as the married life itself is the whole world for a common Indian woman.

Hence, in her famous poem ‘Sansar’ (World or married life) she succinctly explains what life is through this ingenious example:

*‘Are sansar sansar, jasa tava chulyavar
Adhi hatala chatake, Tevha milte
bhakar.’*(pg.121)

(Ugh! This married life! It’s like a pan on the hearth; first it scalds the hands, and then you get the bread.)

She further says:

*“Dekha sansar sansar, sheng vartun kate;
Are vartun kate, madhi chikne
sagargote.”*(p.121)

(Oh, this married life is just a nut, covered with thorns. But the thorns are only on the outer side, inside it is like the smooth stones.)

This shows how she explains the importance of the married life which indirectly has compared with this worldly life in a very simple and local language and that too in minimum words, embellished with day-to-day examples. She could render life’s complex philosophy in a simplified way. She wants to explain that initially one has to struggle and then only one can reap sweet fruits of life. This is applicable in all situations. This shows her keen observations towards life and her strong base of

philosophy. She explores the universal love of Earth and how she can fill the stomach or satisfy the hunger of the whole world. It can be compared to a woman’s love.

She says;

*“Ashi dharitrichi maya, are tila nahi
seema,
duniyache sarva pota, tichyamadhi zale
jama.”*(pg.105)

She is not only aware of the physical and the outer life but she is also very sensational and emotional about psychological status. She sings about how one’s heart, soul or mind is and praises that how God has made such a trivial thing in her famous poem, ‘Man Vadhay, Vadhay’. She talks about how a person’s mind is like an animal in the farm, you cast it away a lot of times but it comes back again. She puts it in these words:

*“Man vadhay, vadhay, ubhya pikatla
dhor;
Kiti hakala, hakala, Phiri yet pikavar.”*
(p.128)

(Mind is fickle, like the animal in a crop; the more you cast it away; it turns back again to it.)

She also says that mind is unpredictable; nobody can catch it; it flows along with the drift of the wind. She compares mind with bird and says that sometimes mind is so small like Popeye seeds and sometimes it is so big that it cannot even fit in the sky in following words;

*“Man evadha evadha, jasa khaksacha
dana,
Man kevdha kevdha, abhayat bi
mayena.”*(pg.128)

While praising the qualities of mind she also focuses on the grey side of mind.

She says that;

“*Man jahyari jahyari, tyache nyare re tantar*’,
Are ichu saap bara tyale utare mantara.”
 (p.128)

This means that, this cheerful mind sometimes becomes so cruel or toxic like poisonous snake that even the poison of the scorpion has remedy of mantras or medicines (may be herbal) but for the poison of mind there is no remedy at all. In this way very skillfully Bahinabai explains the qualities of mind. She meant that there is no way or any solution for a contaminated mind to get purified.

She also wrote abhangas in praise of Lord Vitthala. She also praised the Warkari sect who takes the palanquins of Saint Tukaram and Dnyaneshwar to Pandharpur without bothering rain, wind, and sun.

She praises Saint Tukaram’s abhangas in following words;

“*Tayakaryacha jamava dangala,*
dangala
Tukaramacha abhanga rangala,
rangala.”(p.182)

She is of the view that one has to go along with these palanquins at least once as there is nothing beyond this in life. She also praises Saint Muktabai, sister of Great Saint Dnyaneshwar. This shows that she had a versatile genius and she could think very wisely on every aspect. She had such an excellence of thoughts and their best ways of emission, which is beyond imagination. She had all the qualities of a prolific writer but unfortunately she couldn’t reach the print media during her life time and hence remained unknown to the world. Satish Ketkar rightly says that “The impact of the

print capitalism and the western education on Marathi language gave birth to new kind of Marathi which did not exist earlier. The birth of a new nation was actually a birth of a new language. Marathi poetry of this period, as characterized by the poetry of Keshavsuta (1866-1905) and Balakavi (1890-1918) is reformist, idealist, and influenced by the Anglo American romanticism. The exception to this paradigm was the poetry of Bahinabai Chaoudhari (1807-1882), an illiterate genius whose brilliant works were unavailable to the community’ as they were orally composed, and hence outside of the print-capitalism of literary culture of the time.”(Blog. Satish Ketkar)

Hence, we can call Bahinabai as a Nightingale of Maharashtra. She is not much known to people except her few beautiful and famous songs. The motive of this paper is to recall and praise this great poetess who taught the philosophy of life to the common people, though she herself was illiterate. She is not less than the eminent English poets like William Wordsworth, Robert Frost, Coleridge and other great poets who rendered the life’s philosophy through the significance of nature. She was illiterate and still could understand life’s philosophy and nature so well and expressed it in a very apt manner in minimum of words. Reading all her poems shows that she is very optimistic towards life and simplifies it’s complexities in humorous ways. Her poems always emits life’s message very positively and in a very playful and skillful way. I think this was her strong point. Her poems like ‘Nahi Diya Madhe Tel’, Anagondi Karbhar’, ‘Yedimay’, etc. shows her humor. She could

feel the grievances of poor and common people and especially of women in India. She could adroitly incorporate in them her teachings through her songs. She has taught to respect nature and make it your mentor. She was very practical minded and very positive about life. About God she says that one cannot find God by just praising and applauding him but one has to work hard and find his God in that work.

Although, she was illiterate she knew the significance of literacy. She says,

*“Manasapari manus rahto yeda
jana;*

*Are hoto chapisani, kora kagad
shahana.”(p. 20)*

This means that a blank paper also gets literate after getting printed but a man remains illiterate.

Her usage of vocabulary is very perfect and appropriate. She always used lucid and simple language. The flow of her thoughts was like a boat sailing on soft waves of water reaching very smoothly to its bank. In the same way it seems that her poems have the ability to reach the readers heart and mind very smoothly but effectively. The imagery used by her is very symbolic. The images are so factual that they stand in front

of us unknowingly while reading the poems and create the desired effect on the readers. Her keen observation makes her characters live in front of our eyes. The characters in her poems are common people from village. She uttered everything relevant to the flow of life. Hence, her poems are also very natural and innocent like nature.

She seems to be a very accomplished poetess with modern thoughts and wisdom of humanity. As Hon. Atre rightly said after reading her poems that “It is really a 24 carat pure gold (Bavankashi Sone) and to hide it from Maharashtra is a sin.” (P. 8). Such a prominent poetess talked about various themes and concepts. She talked about life’s philosophy. She can also be called as a Philosopher of Maharashtra. She was a very ardent admirer of nature and a devotional poetess too. Modernity also reflects in her poems very strongly. This shows that she was a multi-faceted poetess and hence can be called as a multi-dimensional personality. Bahinabai and her poems show the roots towards modernism. Such a genius personality and her wisdom were camouflaged like rust on the metal. But it has to get polished again to shine brightly.

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