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Sant Chokhamela

योग याग, तप, व्रत आणि दान। करीता साधन नाना कष्ट।।

सुलभ सोपे रे नाम विठोबाचे। सकळ साधनांचे मूळ बीज।।

येणे भव व्यथा तुटेल जीवाची। प्रतिज्ञा संतांची हीच असे।

म्हणोनि नामाचा करा गदारोळ। म्हणे चोखामेळा विठ्ठल वाचे।।

There is no need to perform various methods like yoga, yagya, fasting and charity to attain God. It is easiest to pronounce the name of Vitthal and perform its sankirtana. By which all the troubles of man will be removed. Sants hope to meet their God by remembering this name sant Chokhamela (Ref. Sant Chokhamela Abhanggatha Saptarshi Prakashan)



In the Bhakti tradition, Sant Chokhamela is a thirteenth to fourteenth century Maharashtrian Sant. Devotees sing their songs on the pilgrimage and in bhajan sessions. Sant Chokhamela was a Mahar by caste. Sant Eknath wrote about Sant Chokhamela, ate with Mahars, allowed untouchables into his bhajans, and wrote poems in the persona of an untouchable who was wiser in spiritual matters than the Brahmans. Sant Chokhamela achieved sanctity and a place among the bhakti pantheon of Sants.

Sant Chokhamela offers models for protests against Untouchability. Sant Chokhamela, who was untouchable himself, reached a respected place among the saints of Maharashtra. Sant Chokhamela was born in the second half of the 13th century. He and his family followed the traditional village duties of the community of Maharashtra. There are legends regarding his birth that show that he was born out of the grace of Lord Vitthal.

Sant Chokhamela's abhangs are mainly highly devotional poems expressing his deep devotion and love for Lord Vitthal. They reveal his deep pity as a true Bhakta, but there are some protest suggestions against Untouchability.

भगवान, मेरी जाति नीची है; मैं आपकी सेवा कैसे कर सकता हूँ? सब कहते हैं कि चले जाओ; मैं कैसे आपको देख सकता हूँ? जब मैं किसी को छूता हूँ तो वे नाराज हो जाते हैं, चोखामेला आपकी दया चाहता है।

“O God, my caste is low; how can I serve you? Everyone tells me to go away; how can I see you? When I touch anyone, they take offence. Chokhamela wants your mercy.”

Though the abhang, as mentioned above, expresses his acceptance of low caste, there is a palpable tinge of complaints. He is fully convinced that he might be untouchable for his worldly fellowmen, but for God, he is his beloved. The defect of the body and the lowliness of the caste are all external things. Even the ugly, the deformed, and outwardly rejected can be holy and lovable to God. Sant Chokhamela says;

उस डोंगा परी रस नोहे डोंगा। काय भुललासी वरलिया रंगा ॥

कमान डोंगी परी रस नोहे डोंगा। काय भुललासी वरलिया रंगा॥

नदी डोंगी परी रस नोहे डोंगा। काय भुललासी वरलिया रंगा॥

चोख डोंगी परी रस नोहे डोंगा। काय भुललासी वरलिया रंगा॥

Cane is crooked, but its juice is not crooked; why be fooled by outward appearance?

The bow is crooked, but the arrow is not crooked; why be fooled by outward appearance?

The river is twisting, but its water is not crooked; why be fooled by outward appearance?

Chokha is ugly, but his feeling isn't ugly; why be fooled by outward appearance? (Ref. Sant Chokhamela Abhanggatha)

Sant Chokhamela uses the symbols of his community to reinforce the idea of his deep devotion to Vithoba. He even uses the customary right of the community to receive any discarded food as a way to worship Lord Vitthal. He also uses the customary address to the superior 'Johar' as a salutation to Vitthal. It is true that though Sant Chokhamela used his abhangs to give voice to his feelings against Untouchability, his protest is subdued and overshadowed by his devotion to Lord Vitthal. He probably has accepted the limitations of his caste. Still, the essence of the entire body of the abhangs is that people rejected Mahars as untouchables, but God embraced Sant Chokhamela with love. This is a very idea that expresses the rejection of Untouchability.

Though Chokhamela's voice is perhaps the first Dalit voice to interrogate the caste structure, his protest is contained in bhakti. The contemporary Dalit movement could not trace the trajectory of its history from this early fourteenth poet, rejecting as it did the social and

religious underpinnings of the Hindu caste structure; its vision is to claim a secular political and cultural space uncontested by dogma.

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Reference

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