

BEYOND WORDS: UNRAVELLING THE ESSENCE OF BAHINABAI CHAUDHARI'S POETRY IN CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

Rajesh Dhotre, Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole

Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Mumbai
Assistant Professor, S. K. Somaiya College, Somaiya Vidyavihar University,
Mumbai- 400077
Email ID: prof.rajeshdhotre@gmail.com

Head,
Department of English,
Changu Kana Thakur Arts, Commerce and Science College, New Panvel Autonomous
Dist: Raigad, Pin Code: 410206,
Email ID: rajesh.yeole001@gmail.com

Abstract

Bahinabai Chaudhari, a celebrated Marathi poet is renowned for her poignant Ahirani Marathi songs. Bahinabi, despite receiving no formal education contributed profoundly to Marathi literature. Her poetic work is an emblem of love, devotion, nature, family and universal values. She effectively draws images and symbols from mythology, rural life and everyday experiences to bring out emotional responses and convey deeper truths about human life. Showing great compassion towards humans and animals alike, Bahinabai delineates complex emotions through oral compositions that have lasting impact on her listeners. She has used various poetic devices to enhance the beauty of her artistic compositions immersing readers in the enthralling ethos of Marathi culture. The universal ideas reflected in her poems are relevant and source of inspiration to all the people in Maharashtra. This study aims a comprehensive understanding of the poetry of Bahinabai Chaudhari by going "beyond words", highlighting her literary artistry and a wealth of philosophy that is depicted in deceptively simple language. This research will help us appreciate Bahinabai's poetry and understand its everlasting impact on Marathi Literature today.

Keywords: Bahinabai Chaudhari, Marathi Poetry, literary Analysis, Indian Literature, Nature, Human Values

INTRODUCTION

A true poet does not necessarily need to have a formal education or training in poetry. A true poetic genius is born and later nurtured by nature. There is no direct relation between educated and principled in the same way, there is no relation between formal education and creativity (Pitre, Ruta). Bahinabai Chaudhari was born in 1880 in rural Maharashtra and learnt philosophy of life from her rustic environment. The trials and tribulations of a poor, a villager and a farmer's life taught her enough to know the true meaning of life. This is reflected in her epoch making poetry which was published as "*Bahinabaichi Gani*" in the year 1952 after her death.

Though, Balakavi and Mardhekar's father 'Aaba master' taught in Bahinabai's village school were in the family circle of Bahinabai, nobody knew the worth of her poetry until it fell on the eyes of P K Atre. Even Bahinabai never thought that her composition would be considered as poetry. Her poetry came naturally to her. Her feelings and thoughts cascaded like fresh spring water into poetry as they flowed. She literally sang her life as witnessed in the following lines of her poem.

अरे, घरोटा घरोटा (Arey, gharota gharota)
माझे दुखता रे हात (Majhe dukhata re haat)
तसं संसाराचं गानं (tasa sansaracha gana)
माझं बसते मी गात. (majha basate me gaat)

O my hand grinder
My arms are aching now
Let me now sing by myself
The song of my lot

The following lines accentuate the theory that Bahinabai's poetry came naturally to her.

अरे, घरोटा घरोटा (Arey, gharota gharota)
तुझ्यातून पडे पीठी (Tujhyatun pade pithi)
तसं तसं माझं गानं (Tasa tasa majha gana)

पोटातून येतं व्होटी (*potatun yeta vhati*)

O my grinding stone
Just as the flour falls off you
My songs pour out from my heart

Bahinabai's son Sopandeo Chaudhari, an acclaimed Marathi poet published these poems after receiving encouraging words from Marathi literary stalwart P K Atre. Bahinabai Chaudhari's journey of literary luminary from humble agrarian background without formal education is remarkable. Bahinabai's profound poetry reflects her life experience, cultural milieu, and sincere emotions replete with love for humanity. The present study is an endeavour to explore themes, imagery, and symbolism and conduct thorough literary analysis of Bahinabai's poetry highlighting the importance of her contribution to Marathi literature.

LIFE AND BACKGROUND

A poet is influenced by socio-political, cultural and several other important aspects around him/her. In order to understand Bahinabai's poetry, it is imperative to know and understand the circumstances which shaped her life and its philosophy. She was born into a farmer's family in Asode (District Ahemdanagar). As per the social customs of the time, at the age of 13, she was married to Nathuji Chaudhari. She faced the challenges of rural life since her childhood which was filled with poverty and hardship. Due to draught, the hands that were used to hold sickle had to use hammer to break stones as she started working as a labourer. Grief struck her as she became widow at the age of thirty due to untimely demise of her husband. True poetry springs from the heart when it goes through sadness. Amidst the struggle of life, she found solace in her expression of thoughts and feelings through poetry.

THEMES

Bahinabai's poetry depicts wide range of themes of love, devotion, optimism, nature, humanism, egalitarianism, spirituality etc. which reflect her in depth understanding of human life. Without facing the emotional turmoil, the poet may have only hollow word to be put on paper.

She knows the importance of companion in life. She laments the death of her husband and evokes deep sense of longing and appreciates loving memory of her husband. She wonders at the mysterious working of nature and these lines show us the transcendental of love. The memories and profound love transcend the physical boundaries.

She says,

सांग सांग धरती माता (*Sang sang dharati mata*)

अशी कशी जादू झाली (*Ashi kasha jaadu jhali*)

झाडं गेलं निचीसनी (*Jhad gela nighisani*)

मांचे सावली उरली (*Maghe savali urali*)

Tell me, O mother earth
What magic did you conjure
The tree is long gone
But the shadow is there to endure

The poet's world is not different from others but the view of the world is different from the rest. Our perspective of the life makes it easy or difficult for us. Bahinabai had very optimistic point of view towards life even though she had to suffer a lot in her life. She did not lose her nerves even though she lost her husband early in the life. She raised her children facing all the obstacles alone.

She sings,

“Even if I have lost everything
I am strong enough
Even if I have lost my companion
I have promises to keep
O my dear ones
Don't pity me
I am content with my lot
I am my own companion now”

She did not ask anything to God as she felt God has given home, farm and limbs to do our own work.

Her optimism seeps in the following words:
O traveller

The road is arduous one
Full of hurdles
Boulders and thorns...
A violent storm awaits you
Don't bow before it
Don't lose your way
Steep valley on both the sides
Take support of the bushes
Don't lose patience
No matter what calamity
Experience- understand
Whatever fate ordains

Her poetry shows window to the life of rural Maharashtra of yesteryears. Bahinabai was enchanted by the sky, the earth and the man and the intricate relationship among them. Her poetry expressed human philosophy of mind, man and mankind. Human life is full of suffering. As Sant Tukaram says, "Sukha pahata javapade, dukh parvata evadhe". "In life, we get happiness of the size of a flaxseed (very small) and unhappiness of the scale of the mountains."

Many a times she wrote spontaneously. After observing a situation, she would immediately compose a song. Sopandev narrates that she told the difference between life and death in a song after looking at a goat getting killed.

She broods in the following manner:

आला सास, गेला सास (*Aala saas, gela saas*)

जीवा तुझं रे तंतर (*Jeeva tujha re tantar*)

अरे जगन-मरन (*Arey jagan-maran*)

एका सासाचं अंतर (*Eka sasacha antar*)

Breathing begins – breathing ends

That's what life means

What separates life and death

But a mere breath!

As a keen observer and listener Bahinabai studied her surrounding minutely. She listened to *Kirtan* in temples. The stories and poems from these sittings would inspire her to compose her own songs. She composed song on *Aadimaya* after hearing a Bharuda of Sant Eknatha. Bahinabai depicts and celebrates beauty of nature as she sings about trees, fruits, seasons, birds and animals. Her poetry is full of imagery derived and inspired from nature. One can see great connection between her and nature as we listen to her songs. She is considered as nature's child.

Once, while completing a task in the field she had to wait for wind to blow.

She says,

चल ये रे येरे वाच्या, (*Chal ye re yere varya*)

ये रे मारोतीच्या बापा (*Ye re Marotichya bapa*)

नको देउ रे गुंगारा (*Nako deu re gungara*)

पुऱ्या झाल्या तुझ्या थापा (*Purya jhalya tujhya thapa*)

In the above lines she requests the wind god Pavandev, father of Maruti, the monkey god to aid her in her field work by blowing the wind.

The subject of man and nature was close to heart. She says that everything that is created by God in nature has some purpose. When a relative asks her about her views about royal Poinciana (Gulmohar) she replies that God has created many trees to feed us but this tree is to nourish our mind. She gave as much importance to mind as stomach. For her nature provided not only food and shelter but also solace to her heart. Bahinabai also asks us to learn from nature as she thinks nature to be great teacher. She asks us not to be selfish in the following lines:

नको लागू जीवा (*Nako lagu jeeva*)

सदा मललबापाठी (*Sada matalapathi*)

हिरिताच देनं घेनं (*Hiritach dena ghen*)

नही पोटासाठी (*Nahi potasathi*)

उभे शेतामधी पिक (*Ubhe shetamadhi peek*)

ऊन वर खात खात (*Una var khat khat*)

तरसती —कव्हा जाउ (*Tarasti- kavha jau*)

देवा, भुकेल्या पोटात (Deva, bhueklya potat)

Don't be selfish, my soul
In the matters of heart,
There's no place for greed

Crop in the field
Beneath the sun
Swaying with wind
Yearning to be food
For the hungry ones

In the poem 'Arey Sansar Sansar' she tells about the importance of hardwork in our life. Her poetry also explores the themes of mind, consciousness, generosity, selflessness, humanism, egalitarianism, spirituality etc. It delineates her love for family, home, nature, and yearning for her mother's home. She is also critical of social discrimination, gender biases and becomes the voice of marginalized section of the society through her poetry.

Bahinabai did not have formal education but she knew how to play with the words. In casual conversation with her son Sopandeo, she tells the importance of paying attention to minute details of language. She asks Sopandeo, "Do you ever chat with the word you speak?" She says, "As with fire- one should play with words too". She employs poetic devices in her poetry effortlessly. In the words of Keats, "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all". These words fit rightly to the poetry of Bahinabai. She uses symbols of natural elements, animals, birds, everyday objects, etc. with great ease. The symbols have allegorical importance and profound meaning. Bahinabai's poetry is characterized by sincere emotions in simple language that express profound human philosophy. She talks about universal human values in poetry. She employs imagery, metaphors, repetition, and parallelism masterfully.

In her words, "Majhi Mai Sarsoti..." Sarswati is her mother who taught her how to sing.

In the poem *Vaatachya Vaatasara (O Traveller)* she uses imagery in the words hurdles, boulders and thorns, scorching sun, steep valley and violent storm which symbolize obstacles in one's life. In the poem *Dharatichya Kushimandi* she uses images of seeds asleep in earth's womb, velvety blanket of soil, sprouts emerging like hands in prayer, field feeling like goose bumps. This nature imagery highlights her love for nature and her mastery over the language. In the poem *Man Vadhay Vadhay* she beautifully compares chaotic state of mind with cattle breaking in the field. The waves on water evoke the sense of unpredictability of thoughts. She uses repetition and alliteration very effectively to bring natural rhythm to her poems which were basically meant to be sung. She uses personification effectively to show the connection between nature and man.

SIGNIFICANCE OF BAHINBAI'S POETRY

Maharashtra possess rich heritage of saint poetry, folk songs, traditional poetry, theatre and classic literature. Marathi poetry is known for its diverse subjects ranging from spiritual, socio-political to romantic. Bahinabai's poetry adds significantly to the rich heritage of Marathi poetry. Her verse is an appeal for hard work, humanism, social justice, environmental concern, preservation of culture, women empowerment and spiritual reflection. It talks about rich cultural heritage and tradition of rural Maharashtra. It highlights the importance of preserving indigenous culture against cultural homogenization happening at global level in present day. In a dominant patriarchal society today, her poetry is an embodiment of female voice against the injustices meted out against women. It describes domestic life, struggles of women and societal pressure of expectation on women. Her life and songs become a beacon of inspiration for all women today. Bahinabai's poetry is replete with themes of human condition, nature of truth, nature of existence, transcendentalism. She speaks about importance of nurturing the spiritual dimension of life as she speaks against greed, lethargy, pride, and several other vices. Her depiction of compassion, empathy and love for mankind and inclusivity is admirable. By admiring nature and connecting it man's life constantly in her poetry, she stresses on the importance of preservation of environment which is being damaged by humans for materialistic gains.

Though she toiled in field like any other women of the time, her perception towards life was different. She was not disheartened by the hardships. She never complained about her problems to God or fate. She always tried to find meaning of life. She used to sing what she felt.

Bahinabai knew that "...poetry was a way to liberate one's mind and to enrich it too."

REFERENCES

- [1] Bhagwat, Durta. *Lokshahityachi Ruparekha*. Varada Prakashan, 2023.
- [2] Chaudhari, Bahinabai. *Bahinabaichi Gani*. Sahitya Prasar Kendra, 2021.

- [3] Chaudhari, Bahinabai, et al. "SĀMSĀR." Journal of South Asian Literature, vol. 17, no. 1, 1982, pp. 103-104. MARATHI SAMPLER: VariedVoices in Contemporary Marathi Short Stories and Poetry, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40874020>.
- [4] Chaudhari, Bahinabai, et al. "THE MIND." Journal of South Asian Literature, vol. 17, no. 1, 1982, pp. 103. MARATHI SAMPLER: VariedVoices in Contemporary Marathi Short Stories and Poetry, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40874020>.
- [5] Chaudhari, Bahinabai, et al. "WHAT IT SHOULD NOT BE CALLED." Journal of South Asian Literature, vol. 17, no. 1, 1982, pp. 104–105. MARATHI SAMPLER: VariedVoices in Contemporary Marathi Short Stories and Poetry, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40874020>.
- [6] Pitre, Ruta. 'Bahinaichi Gani'- Ek Abhyas. Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture. Second, 2002. E-book. dgps.maharashtra.gov.in
- [7] Puranik, M. P. Uttar Maharashtraatil Stri Sahitikanchya Lalit Sahityacha Abhyas Vishesh Sandharbh Bahinabai Chaudhari Sushil Pagariya Sulbha Bhangaonkar Najubai Gaviti Alka Kulkarni. Department of Comparative Languages & Lit. North Maharashtra University, 2019. <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/307267>.
- [8] *Tukaram Gatha*. Edited by Bhalchandra Nemade, Sahitya Akademi, 2013.
- [9] <https://santwani.blogspot.com/2016/06/blog-post.html>
- [10] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6totsJkVk>
- [11] <https://englishliteraturezone.com/now-i-remain-for-myself-bahinabai-poem/>
- [12] <https://www.usawa.in/issue-2/song-of-the-soil-ovis-by-bahinabai-chaudhary/>
- [13] <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/100615#>