



Mirabai: The Renunciation, the Rebellion and the Sainthood

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Abstract— *Mirabai is a household name for all the devotees of Lord Krishna across Bharat. Her name has become synonymous with devotion and rebellion. Mira transcends time as a pivotal figure in Indian history and spirituality. This research paper delves into the life of this enigmatic saint-poet, exploring the key events that shaped her legacy. After discussing Mirabai's renunciation this paper will examine her unwavering dedication to Lord Krishna, a love that defied societal expectations placed upon a Rajput princess. This absolute devotion to Lord Krishna led her to embrace a life of piety and austerity in great contrast to the royal life she had inherited, being born a princess. The paper will also shed light on Mirabai's meeting with the revered saint Raidas. This meeting is believed to have significantly influenced her bhakti (devotional) path and challenged the rigid caste system of the times. This paper also aims to explore Mirabai's rebellious nature. Her unconventional expressions of devotion, including singing and dancing in public, clashed with the conservative Rajput court. This defiance will be analyzed in the context of the prevailing social norms and her unwavering commitment to Krishna. The research paper will not shy away from discussing the persecution Mirabai faced. We will delve into the conflicts that arose due to her unconventional practices and beliefs. This section will explore the challenges she endured and how she navigated them. Finally, the paper will culminate in examining Mirabai's ultimate triumph. Despite persecution, Mirabai's devotion remained unshakeable. We will explore how she is revered as one of the greatest devotees of Lord Krishna (Shyam) and how her legacy continues to inspire generations through her powerful poetry and unwavering faith.*



Keywords— *Krishna, Mirabai, Sainthood, Rebellion, Renunciation, Rana.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mira, popularly known as Sant Mirabai, was a charismatic figure who was born during a dynamic period in Indian history, a period known for the continuous tussle between the Rajputs and the Mughals. Unknown to most of her family, this child Mira, born a princess, would bring renown to her parents, not as a great warrior but as one of the greatest of poet saints that the country Bharat has ever witnessed. Kings of Rajputana warred against the Mughals but Mira was one who would wage the greatest war against oppression, inequality, casteism and intolerance. She was born to be a revolutionary who would shake at the roots of blind beliefs and practices and make society

realize that devotion to God is not to be confined only to temples but that it could be practised in all and sundry places. Through her tumultuous life, she taught that each human had a direct link to God and that no intermediary was required to communicate one's feelings towards God.

Being born a princess, Mira was naturally privileged but she hardly took any undue advantage of it. On the other hand, she had a free mind that was unwilling to be bound by societal norms and therefore most of the times she would be rebellious and this non-conformity to society continued even to the very end of her mortal existence. Of course, being a princess, the most beloved of her grandfather Dudaji, she was educated in music, the arts,

dance and literary expression. But Mira's sole passion, since her very childhood, remained the one pointed devotion to Lord Krishna whom she took to be her husband since the time her mother had jovially told her so.

When Mira came of age, she was married off, as is usual in a Hindu household, to Bhojraj the crown prince of Mewar. Mira was ever defiant, even towards her mother-in-law. During the initial days, when her mother-in-law asked her to worship Gauri, during one of the battles against the Mughals, Prince Bhojraj succumbed to grievous injuries and breathed his last in the year 1526. Mira thus lost a husband who had been a friend to her. The renunciation of Mira multiplied with the loss of her husband and at the same time she did not give into societal norms and pressures. In those days, particularly in Rajasthan, it was a practice that the wife would immolate herself in the burning pyre of her husband and thus would be declared Sati. Mira, by this time, already had her firm roots in Krishna - to whom she had devoted her life till then. For Mira, her husband in reality was Shyam Sundara himself and therefore she was defiant towards society and hence did not jump in the funeral pyre of her husband. For this she became, for a long time, the object of major criticism from the elders of the court and also became a talk of the nearby villages. Mira, devoted now only to the worship of Krishna, knew that as long as she was devoted to her Shyam, He would always save her from all calamities and therefore, despite societal pressures, Mira remained calm and unmoved by various provocations from different quarters.

Mira's devotion to her beloved Shyam expressed itself through her soulful poetry that was in the form of padas. All her compositions are replete with intense longing and passionate devotion towards her Beloved Lord Krishna. These verses of Mira often challenged social norms and the discipline of courtly life in the contemporary Rajputana. These mellifluous compositions of Mira reverberate, even today, in the hearts of millions of Krishna devotees across Bharat and make Mira the beloved saint of every seeker of Shyam Sundara.

Mira's life may be partially shrouded in some mystery on account of the absence of strict historical documentation of the contemporary period. At the same time, a few of her verses, mentioned in this paper later, throw some light on the persecution she faced from her in-laws and the attempts to poison her are clearly indicated by Mira herself in some of her own verse compositions.

Most of the study done on Mira points to the fact that she left the kingdom and embarked on pilgrimages, going to Kashi and Vrindavan, where she spent many years in austerity, satsang, serving the poor and composing her

verses drenched in the eulogy of her Beloved Shyam. Mira's life and work have left an indelible mark on the Indian way of thinking and worship. She is celebrated as a courageous mystic, a powerful poet, and a symbol of unwavering devotion.

This is what the celebrated author Bankey Behari observes in his introductory lines about Mirabai, "To me Mira is the moth that burnt itself in the candle of love for Girdhar and for all times filled the Temple of Devotion with fragrance. Undaunted by fire or frown, unperturbed by persecutions, this devotee of Sri Krsna sang her songs of princely renunciation and self-surrender, that shall infuse courage in the aspirant on the Path of Love." (Behari 5)

II. RENUNCIATION, THE SOUL SONG

Mirabai's renunciation represents the most significant event in the life of a princess who, leaving aside all palatial luxury and comfort, sets out on a spiritual quest severing all royal ties with a boldness never before observed in history (except in the case of Gautam Buddha). She breaks the bondage of her royal upbringing and embraces the path of austerity seeking nearness and dearness to her Beloved Shyam. This act of hers is not mere relinquishment of body comforts but a profound act of self-discovery and an announcement of her unwavering love towards Krishna.

Mira, born a Rajput Princess, was expected to conform to the norms laid down at the Royal Court. Once the spark of devotion for Krishna ignited in her heart, it took the form of a great conflagration in the years to come. These flames of devotion burnt so bright and brilliant that they inspired devotion in the hearts of millions of devotees seeking the love of Lord Krishna.

Every act of Mira was considered an act of defiance from the point of view of the right conduct for a princess in her position. Her marriage, which was supposed to strengthen the alliance with the Mewar family, did nothing of the sort. On the other hand, this marriage with Raja Bhoj, resulted only in Mira's expression of unconventional faith, not in her husband but in Lord Krishna whom she had adored since her childhood. The royal environs echoed with her soul-stirring compositions - songs that expressed her pure and unsullied love for Krishna. Mira's public displays of ecstatic dancing always challenged the social order but these expressions of her devotion, more than being defiance, were outpourings of her soul that was thirsting for her Beloved Shyam. Mirabai's renunciation was not an immediate reaction to calamities or a sudden withdrawal from the world around. It was a gradual process, a slow but sure awakening of the soul to the reality of the transience of worldly ties and the pain associated with it.

This renunciation would have had its beginnings, perhaps, from a stolen glance at Krishna's idol, a verse that she might have read from a holy text, or even on hearing of an intoxicating melody of a devotional song that brought tears to her eyes. The spark of love thus ignited for Krishna burnt away even the least of worldly desires that might have left their traces in her pure mind.

Mira's renunciation wasn't a shirking of her responsibilities as the member of a great Rajput clan but it was a conscious choice to pursue a higher calling which led her gradually to the path of mysticism. This act of renunciation was not just about severing worldly ties; it was about becoming a new person altogether by giving up royal garments for simple clothing, abandoning the luxury of a royal couch for the hard ground; and finally it was the deliberate act of stripping away all distractions and concentrating on her Beloved Shyam.

The renunciation of Mirabai was significant on account of the personal transformation it resulted in and the message it gave out to those looking up to her. It challenged not just the rigid social hierarchy and the limitations placed upon women; it also inspired fellow travelers on the path to attaining God the way Mira was doing. By placing her spiritual journey over societal pressures and norms, Mira became a guiding light to those who were in search of an authentic path to God realization. Her renunciation wasn't just a personal act; it was a silent rebellion that resonated with countless souls. Mirabai's renunciation is captured beautifully by Basu Ananth Nath in his book where he says, "And, at length, Mira left the palace in quest of her Lord, wandering alone in the wide world, among the lowly and the poor. It is said that after leaving the palace she went to Merta and then to the banks of the Banas river where she spent some time in meditation. But where was her Lord for whose sake she had left the palace, renounced her royal state, given up her kith and kin, - where was He to be found?"

For thee, have I forsaken all pleasures, —

Why dost thou now keep me waiting?" (Basu 13)

Mira, therefore, waits with agony in her heart to meet her Shyam for whom she has renounced everything.

III. MEETING WITH RAIDAS: A BRIDGE ACROSS DIVIDES

Mirabai's life took a decisive turn when she met Raidas, a saint-poet known for his great wisdom and unconventional approach to spirituality. A cobbler by profession, Raidas belonged to the Chamar caste, considered "untouchable" by the rigid caste system of the time. This very meeting

transcended social limits, becoming a proof to the universality of true devotion.

This meeting, hidden in some historical ambiguity, is believed to have taken place in one of two ways. Mira herself, having heard of the piety of this saint, might have ventured out to meet the cobbler saint in his own humble abode. Or Raidas himself, hearing of the devotion of Mira, who danced in the streets in ecstasy of her beloved, might have crossed the boundaries of societal norms to come and see his future disciple, who was already so full of devotion to her beloved Shyam.

Regardless of the setting, the meeting itself was a powerful symbol. Here was a princess, defying the constraints of her caste and upbringing, seeking spiritual guidance from a man deemed "impure" by social standards. This act of humility on Mirabai's part shattered the illusion of superiority and underlined the core principle of Bhakti – that true devotion transcends social constructs.

Raidas, observing the fire of devotion burning within Mirabai, became her guru, her spiritual guide. He didn't attempt to mold her into a conventional devotee, but rather nurtured the unique expression of her love for Krishna. He is likely to have imparted to Mira the wisdom from the rich tapestry of the Bhakti movement, emphasizing the importance of personal connection with the divine.

This meeting had a profound influence on Mirabai's life and compositions. Her bhajans, already suffused with fervent devotion, began to reflect a deeper understanding of love and longing. Raidas' teachings may have inspired in her a sense of inclusivity, a belief that caste or social standing had no bearing on the path to bhakti.

Mirabai's poetry started to be populated with imagery that transcended the literal. Krishna, who was initially depicted as a playful and mischievous deity, began to represent the ultimate reality, the divine beloved. Her yearning for Krishna became a metaphor for the soul's longing for the divine essence.

The influence of Raidas' teachings extended beyond the realm of spirituality. Their meeting served as a powerful social commentary. By choosing a guru from a marginalized caste, Mirabai challenged the very foundation of the hierarchical system. Her act of defiance resonated with those yearning for a more equitable society, where devotion, not birth, determined one's spiritual standing. This is what Mirabai has to say about her initial meeting with her Guru Raidas:

नहि मै पीहर सासरे , नहि पीयाजी री साथ ।मीरा ने गोविन्द मिल्या जी, गुरु मिलिया रेदास ॥
(Sethi 19)

In conclusion, Mirabai's meeting with Raidas was more than just a chance encounter. It was a bridge across

societal divides, a testament to the power of true devotion, and a catalyst for Mirabai's spiritual transformation. The lessons learned from Raidas found voice in her powerful bhajans, inspiring generations and serving as a beacon of hope for those seeking a more authentic path to the divine.

IV. REBELLIOUS NATURE: A DANCE DEFYING NORMS

Mirabai's life was a vibrant tapestry woven with threads of unwavering devotion and an audacious spirit that challenged the rigid norms of her time. Unlike the stereotypical image of a docile princess, Mirabai embodied rebellion in its purest form. Her defiance wasn't fueled by anger or a desire for power; it stemmed from a love for Krishna that burned so brightly that it consumed any desire to conform.

The very essence of her rebellion lay in her public displays of devotion. Temples, meant for quiet contemplation, became stages for her ecstatic dances. The air vibrated with the soulful melodies of her bhajans, sung with a fervor that captivated hearts across the land. These weren't performances; they were expressions of a love that transcended the confines of propriety expected by society.

Mirabai's defiance extended beyond the walls of temples. She shattered social barriers by associating freely with people from all walks of life. Instead of cloistering herself within the confines of the royal court, she sought the company of mendicants, musicians, and even those deemed "untouchable" by the caste system prevalent in Bharat. Even her Guru Raidas was an untouchable by birth and a cobbler by profession. In all of them, Mira saw, not low caste people, but fellow pilgrims - all brothers and sisters, bound on a journey to the Lotus Feet of Lord Krishna.

This blatant disregard for social norms naturally irked the ruler of Mewar and compelled him to take such steps that would curb Mira's free ways. Perhaps it was the fear of scandal, the discomfort with her unconventional practices, or simply the clash between tradition and a burgeoning spiritual movement. Whatever the reason, attempts were made to suppress Mirabai's expressions of devotion. Threats, isolation, and even attempts to poison her – the ruler employed various tactics to silence this rebellious princess.

But Mirabai remained undeterred. Her spirit, like the flame of a devotional diya, burned brighter with each attempt to extinguish it. She saw these persecutions not as setbacks, but as tests of her faith. Her bhajans, infused with a newfound resilience, spoke of her unwavering devotion to Shyam in the face of adversity.

The significance of Mirabai's rebellious nature lies not just in her defiance of social norms, but in the message it conveyed to people at large. She became a symbol of hope for those yearning for a more authentic spiritual experience which other gurus had promised them but had failed to fulfil. Through her intensity of yearning for Krishna resulting in her blissful outpourings of bhajans, she inspired millions wherever she went. Her life challenged the notion that devotion could only be practiced within the confines of tradition. She showed that true love for the divine could blossom even in the most unexpected places, defying societal beliefs and practices of her times.

The awakening and spiritual rebellion that Mirabai inspired, resonated not just in her time, but continues to inspire generations to this day. She serves as a reminder that the path to the divine is not paved with conformity, but with the courage to express one's love in a way that feels most authentic. Mira says, "I care not for societal norms; my heart belongs to Krishna."

V. PERSECUTION: A CRUCIBLE OF FAITH FORGED IN FIRE

Mirabai's life, once a vibrant tapestry of devotion and rebellion, became a battleground as the ruler of Mewar intensified his persecution. Fear, perhaps of scandal, or perhaps of the burgeoning Bhakti movement challenging traditional power structures, fueled his attempts to silence this audacious princess. The opulent palace that once echoed with her soulful melodies now reverberated with the tension of escalating conflict.

The tactics employed were calculated to break her spirit. A chalice of poison, disguised as holy water, arrived as an offering – a chilling attempt to extinguish the very flame of devotion that burned within her. But Mirabai, with a heart fortified by unwavering faith, saw through the deception. Legends whisper of her offering the poisoned chalice to an idol of Krishna. Upon drinking the offering, she remained unharmed.

This is what Mira herself observes:

मीरा मगन भई हरि के गुण गाय । सांप पिटारा राणा भेज्या, मीरा हाथ वदयो जाय । न्हाय धोय जब देखन लागी, सालिगराम गई पाय ॥ 1 ॥ जहर का प्याला राणा भेज्या, अमृत दीन्ह बनाय । न्हाय धोय जब पिन लागी, हो गई अमर पचाय ॥ 2 ॥ (Brahmachari 103,104)

The foregoing verses could be translated as follows:

Mira was ever immersed in singing the glory of Lord Krishna. In the meanwhile, the King sent a basket enclosing a venomous snake to Mira which she took in her hands and when, after her bath, as she opened it before her worship she found in the basket the sacred Salagrama

stone (which is used for worship of Vishnu). This trick of killing her having failed, another day, the king sent her a cup of poison which the Lord turned into ambrosia. After bath when Mira drank it, it assimilated into her and made her immortal.

Whether this was a miraculous intervention or a testament to her resolute spirit that rendered the poison inert, the event solidified her image as a divinely protected devotee.

The ruler's attempts continued, relentless and ever-escalating. Threats of exile loomed, the palace walls became a gilded cage, and a constant undercurrent of fear threatened to suffocate her spirit. Yet, Mirabai remained undeterred. Her bhajans, once filled with joyous yearning, now resonated with a profound depth, reflecting the crucible of faith she endured. They echoed with the unwavering resolve of a soul tested by fire, yet clinging to its devotion. They spoke of the unshakeable belief that true love for Krishna transcended earthly tribulations.

The significance of Mirabai's persecution extends far beyond her personal suffering. It serves as a beacon of hope for those facing trials on their spiritual path. Her unwavering faith in the face of adversity reminds us that true devotion is not a fragile flower, but a mighty tree with roots that burrow deep into the bedrock of belief. The attempts to silence her only amplified her voice, making her message of love and longing for Krishna resonate far and wide.

Mirabai's story transcends the boundaries of history and geography. She embodies the enduring human spirit, the wellspring of strength that emerges when faith is tested. Her experience reminds us that the path to the divine is rarely smooth, paved with thorns and trials. Yet, it is in these crucibles that faith is forged into something even more potent, a radiant flame that cannot be extinguished. The persecutions she faced did not break her; they refined her devotion, transforming her into a legend whose bhajans continue to inspire generations to seek the divine with unwavering faith. "The poison could not harm me; my Beloved protects me."

VI. VISIT TO VRINDAVAN

Driven by her desire to be closer to Krishna, Mirabai arrived in Vrindavan around 1524. This was a pivotal point in her life, a time when she had chosen the path of a devotee over the confines of her royal life. Vrindavan, with its rich history and atmosphere steeped in Krishna lore, offered the perfect sanctuary.

Here, Mirabai immersed herself in the world of Krishna. She spent her days composing beautiful bhajans (devotional songs) expressing her love for Krishna. These

songs, characterized by their passionate imagery and lyrical beauty, transcended the boundaries of social norms. Mirabai saw Krishna not just as a god, but as her beloved. This unconventional approach to devotion often brought her into conflict with the conservative society of the time.

However, Vrindavan embraced Mirabai. She found solace and acceptance among the saints and devotees who resided there. It is believed that she spent around fifteen years in Vrindavan, composing some of her most famous works during this period. The land of Vrindavan served as a muse, its sights and sounds weaving themselves into the tapestry of her poetry.

The legacy of Mirabai's stay in Vrindavan lives on. A temple dedicated to her stands as a testament to her time there. Even today, devotees flock to this temple to feel a connection with the mystic poet and immerse themselves in the devotional atmosphere she cultivated.

Mirabai's journey to Vrindavan was not merely a geographical move; it was a spiritual pilgrimage. In the land of Krishna, she found not just a place to reside, but a place to belong, a place where her love for Krishna could resonate and find its truest expression.

Mirabai was so impressed by Vrindavan that she wrote the following verse:

आली म्हाने लागे वृन्दावन नीकौ।

घर घर तुलसी ठाकुर पूजा, दरसन गोविन्द जी को ॥

निर्मल नीर बहत जमुना में, भोजन दूध दही को।

रतनसिंघासन आप विराजे, मुकट धर्यो तुलसी को।

कुंजन कुंजन फिरत राधिका, सबद सुगत मुरली को।

मीरा के प्रभु गिरधर नागर, भजन बिना नर फीको।।

(Lahoti 15)

VII. ULTIMATE TRIUMPH: A DANCE BEYOND TIME

Mirabai's story doesn't culminate in the bleakness of persecution. Her true triumph lies in the enduring legacy she carved, a testament to the power of unwavering devotion. Her bhajans, infused with the essence of love and longing, transcend the limitations of time and geography. They continue to resonate with listeners across centuries, serving as a bridge between the human heart and the divine.

Mirabai's triumph wasn't a victory over the ruler of Mewar or a societal validation of her unconventional practices. Her true victory lay in the complete merging of her soul with Krishna. Through her unwavering devotion, she blurred the lines between the devotee and the beloved. Her

bhajans aren't mere songs of love; they are a tapestry woven with the threads of her own yearning, reflecting the experience of a soul consumed by divine love.

This merging with Krishna wasn't a literal event, but a metaphorical one. Through her complete surrender to devotion, she transcended the limitations of the physical world. The opulent palace walls, the threats of exile, the poisoned chalice – none of it held power over her spirit. Her focus remained fixed on Krishna, and in that unwavering focus, she found a liberation that transcended earthly boundaries.

Mirabai's triumph is a testament to the transformative power of bhakti. Through her passionate outpourings of love, she not only transformed herself but also inspired countless others. Her bhajans became a rallying cry for the Bhakti movement, a beacon of hope for those yearning for a more direct and personal connection with the divine.

Perhaps the most potent symbol of Mirabai's triumph is the image of her dancing in ecstatic devotion. This isn't a mere physical act, but a representation of her soul in constant communion with Krishna. The rhythmic steps, the whirling dervish of her emotions, all represent the joyous surrender of her being to the divine.

This dance doesn't end with her earthly existence. Mirabai's legacy ensures that her dance continues, albeit in a different form. Every time a bhajan is sung, every time a listener connects with the depth of her emotions, the dance is rekindled. Her words become the bridge, transporting listeners to a realm where love for the divine transcends all limitations.

Mirabai's ultimate triumph lies not in worldly success but in the eternal union she achieved with her Beloved Shyam. She became more than just a princess; she became a symbol of unwavering devotion, a testament to the transformative power of love, and a voice that continues to inspire generations to seek the divine with an open heart and a relentless spirit. In the tapestry of Indian history and spirituality, Mirabai's name is forever etched, a vibrant thread woven with the colors of love, rebellion, and the eternal dance of the soul.

VIII. CONCLUSION: A SYMPHONY OF DEVOTION

Mirabai's life wasn't a neatly composed ballad, but a symphony – a complex and powerful composition that resonates even centuries later. It's a story woven with threads of unwavering devotion, unwavering resilience in the face of persecution, and a rebellious spirit that challenged societal norms. As we delve deeper into her journey, we find ourselves not just studying a historical

figure, but encountering a timeless embodiment of the human spirit's yearning for the divine.

The Song of Devotion

At the heart of Mirabai's symphony lies the powerful melody of devotion. Her love for Krishna wasn't a fleeting infatuation, but a consuming fire that burned with unwavering intensity. It transcended the confines of social expectations and religious rituals, blossoming into a vibrant expression of the Bhakti movement. Her bhajans, imbued with raw emotion and profound longing, became a testament to the transformative power of true devotion.

The Rhythm of Resilience

The symphony doesn't shy away from the harsh notes of adversity. Mirabai's life was a constant battle against societal disapproval, the constraints of her royal lineage, and even attempts to silence her voice. Yet, she faced these challenges with unwavering resilience. Her spirit, like a sturdy oak weathered by storms, remained rooted in her devotion. The persecutions she endured only served to refine her faith, adding a depth and resonance to her bhajans that continues to inspire generations.

The Rebellious Chords

A distinct counterpoint in Mirabai's symphony is the rebellious spirit that challenged the status quo. She defied the rigid expectations placed upon a Rajput princess, refusing to be confined by the walls of the palace or the limitations of societal norms. Her public displays of devotion, her association with people from all walks of life, and her unwavering focus on Krishna were all acts of rebellion against a system that prioritized social standing over spiritual connection. This defiance became a beacon of hope for those yearning for a more authentic spiritual path.

The Everlasting Harmony

As the final notes fade, the true essence of Mirabai's life story emerges – a harmonious blend of devotion, resilience, and rebellion. These elements, seemingly disparate, come together to create a powerful testament to the human spirit's capacity for love, perseverance, and the pursuit of the divine. Her legacy transcends the boundaries of time and geography, inspiring generations of seekers, artists, and devotees.

Honoring the Greatest Devotee

By exploring Mirabai's journey, we don't merely pay homage to a historical figure; we honor the very essence of bhakti. We celebrate the transformative power of love, the unwavering strength found in faith, and the courage to challenge societal norms in pursuit of a deeper connection with the divine. Mirabai's story reminds us that true love

knows no bounds, that devotion can blossom even in the most unexpected places, and that the path to the divine is often paved with challenges and triumphs in equal measure.

As long as there are those who yearn for a deeper connection with the divine, as long as there are those who find solace in the power of music and poetry, Mirabai's legacy will endure. Her voice, echoing through the ages in her soul-stirring bhajans, will continue to inspire us to dance to the rhythm of our own devotion, to face adversity with unwavering resilience, and to chase after the divine with the relentless spirit of a true rebel.

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