Sublimity of Thought and Expression in Mira Bai

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ABSTRACT

Mira’s poetry stands unique in the long tradition of Indian religious poetry. Mira’s spiritual yearning, condensed effort and perfectly calibrated inquiry on the spiritual path presents her life as a convincing story of struggle and determination to reach and achieve the divine like the crystal-clear drew drop on the lotus petal. Mira carved a niche in the history of religion and she became an icon of supreme devotion and submission to God. Her poetry abounds with the āgār (dwelling) of pain and the ocean of rasa (essence) which make it sublime.

The present paper explores the sublimity of thought and expression in Mira’s poetry. The first section details with Mira’s life and Bhakti movement; the second, defines ‘sublime’ with special reference to Bhamaha and the third describes sublimity in Mira’s poetry and the fourth concludes the discussion.

Keywords: Mira, Poetry, Sublimity.

I

Introduction

Mira Bai is an important figure in medieval Hindi literature. She is known to have crossed boundaries of caste, creed, colour showing great courage to become a bhakta (devotee) renouncing family honour and comfort. She earns a special honour incomparable with any other saint-poet of North India. Mira’s fame spread far and wide. Her dauntless devotion and surrender to Lord Krishna; her radiance of spirit, self-confidence; evolved consciousness, concentrated effort to achieve the divine – is outstanding.

Mira Bai, a 16th century Indian princess was an exclusive aficionado of Sri Krishna. She was spiritual aspirant of love; the most celebrated of the women poets of medieval times. She is placed in the era of 1300 A.D. to 1650 A.D. known as the Bhakti movement. Most historians believe that Mira was born in (Vikram Samvat 1555) 1498 A.D. in village Kudaki, near Medata, a small state in Marwad, Rajasthan. Mira was the daughter of Ratan Singh Rathod and the grand-daughter of Dudaji of Medata. The Rathods of Medata were great devotees of Lord Vishnu. Mira Bai grew up amidst Vaishnava (devoted to Lord Vishnu) influence which moulded her life towards devotion for Lord Krishna. Etymologically, Mira means ‘light’ in Hindi; ‘sea’ or ‘ocean’ in Sanskrit; used as a short form of names beginning with the Slavic element mîr, meaning ‘peace’. Mira started to worship Sri Krishna since her childhood. She has also been regarded as an incarnation of Radha. Krishna P. Bahadur opines “Mira did not deliberately choose her words to create an effect” but measured her poetry to be “the spontaneous outburst of her heart” which “achieved perfection because of her artless
and deep emotions” (Bahadur 31). She herself believed to have been a *Gopī* (cowherd maid driven mad on hearing the sweet melody of Lord Krishna’s flute) in a former birth like the Ālvār poetess Goda.

**Mira Bai: A Saint of Bhakti Movement**

The glory of *Bhakti* movement is most resplendent in the history of religion in India. Saints of *Bhakti* movement like Ramananda, Kabir, Mira, and Vallabhacharya in North, Chaitanya in Bengal, Vedanta Desika and many others in South gave strength to Hinduism.

It is pertinent to note here that the liberal nature of this religious movement ignored the restraints of caste, gender, and creed. The emphasis of *Bhakti* movement was on the equality of all castes. There is no distinction between high or low class. Another prominent feature of the movement has been Hindu-Muslim unity.

Mira’s *bhakti* is manifested through public, ecstatic, religious songs and dance. *Bhakti* (devotion), etymologically, germinates from the root ‘√bhaj’ (to share). *Bhakti* is love for love’s sake. According to Narada,

“all human striving should be a constant and unbroken offering

to God whose memory should never lapse even for the briefest interval…”

(Kumar 9)

Lord Krishna defines doctrine of *Bhakti* in the 18th chapter of *Bhagvad Gita* as:

“manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī māṁ namaskuru
māṁ evaṁyasi satyaṁ te pratijāne priyo ‘si me.’
(Always fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me and prostrate (bow)
unto Me. Thus you shall come to Me without fail. I truly promise you this,
for you are very dear to Me.)

(Gita, 18.65)

One of the chief characteristics of *Bhakti* movement is the monistic belief in God. *Atharva Veda* (13.4, 16-21) also puts the monistic belief very clearly:

Neither second, nor third, nor yet fourth is he called;
He is called neither fifth, nor sixth, nor yet seventh
He is called neither eighth, nor ninth, nor yet tenth.
He watcheth over creatures, all that breatheth and that breatheth not.
This conquering might hath entered him. He is the sole, the simple One, the One
alone,

In him these Deities become simple and One. (Griffith 124)

*Bhakti* opens the door to divinity. It elevates the spirit of persona and creates sublimity of thought and expression. It is love for love’s sake. It is a sacred feeling with
sublime sentiments that unites the devotees with the Lord. The ultimate aim of life is to attain salvation, possible through sublime acquisition, bhakti. Bhakti period certainly provided a platform for Mira Bai to rise as a poet-saint through her bhajan-s (religious songs). She participated whole-heartedly in this movement.

II

What is Sublime?

Aesthetics, from Latin sūlīmis, describes ‘sublime’ as the quality of greatness or vast magnitude, whether physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual or artistic. The term refers to the incomparable greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement or imitation. It is evident in the plethora of literary discourse that the question of how to achieve sublimity has been a primary concern in the oriental and the occidental. Poets, critics, rhetoricians, linguists, grammarians, stylisticians etc. have talked about the element of sublimity in their own way. “Otto wrote about the connection between paradox and sublime in 1923. Jahan Ramazani explains the interdisciplinary character of the theory of the sublime: The sublime is not a genre, and its theorists are happy to emphasize its fluid movement across generic boundaries” (Holmqvist, 6).

An early Indian poetician of sixth century, Bhamaha wrote Kāvyālankāra. Bhamaha, an Indian thinker emphasises in Kāvyālankāra that word and meaning taken together constitute kāvya. He asserted that poets should use elegant words. He tells about the doṣa generally found in poetry and gives instructions for the poets. Bhamaha discusses various aspects, attributes, rules, principles and theories related to kāvya which indirectly show the features of sublime kāvya.

On the other hand, in the West, “the idea of sublimity stems from the rhetoricians’ distinctions of various styles of speech: namely, high, middle and low. From the 17th century onwards it held a particular fascination for people. As an intellectual concept and as an attainable quality in art and literature it was equally attractive to writers of the romantic period. Edumnd Burke’s A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757) was an important contribution on the subject and the ideas were of great interest to literary critics and those concerned with aesthetics. Burke distinguished between the sublime and the beautiful” (Cuddon 875). Sublimity is a quality of both mind and soul. It is a fusion of different elements in a single whole.

“Miscellaneous approaches to the sublime have been given by Blake, Wordsworth, Schiller, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Mallarme, Freud, and Benjamin, however, these authors do not always refer directly to the sublime. The picture is clouded because the sublime can be found, according to some scholars, in theological and religious conceptions of different cultures and epochs. The theme of the sublime might be discovered for instance in the Tao te Ching, in the tradition of Zen Buddhism, or in the Revelations of St. Teresa (cf. Sircello). Some philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, are engaged in the theme of presenting the unpresentable” (Holmqvist 4).
III

Sublimity in Mira Bai’s Verses

Mira’s poems display sublimity of thought and sublimity of expression outstandingly linked with each other. For example,

“Snārupāṁ sūm kāṃ nā mahāre, hīrāṁ ro baupārāṁri
bhāg hamāro jāgyāṁ re, ratṇākar mahārī sīryāṁri.” (Chaturvedi 101)

(Gold and silver are of no use to me,
I am a dealer in diamonds,
I am lucky indeed!
I am connected with the Ratnākar.) (Kumar, K. 48)

This striking linguistic expression coupled with elevated thought of true love for Lord Krishna results in an elevating effect morally, linguistically and artistically. The choice of such linguistic expression exhibits that her love for Lord Krishna is platonic not carnal. This builds a platform of divine understanding of the nature of love. Mira is the moth that burnt itself on the flame of love for Giridhar. She pines for meeting with Giridhar and burns herself like incense which fills the temple of devotion with the fragrance of love. Some of the main traits which make Mira’s poetry sublime are as follows:

1. Elegant words and elegant ideas –

A very important quality of sublimity is pratibhā (genius). Indian rhetoricians and poeticians have argued at length the significance of poetic genius. It is pratibhā which provides the vision and chiselled linguistic expression. The attribute of pratibhā empowers a poet/poetress to make the language a transparent garb of thoughts and not like tedious dross. Bhamaha speaks:

“Poets do not employ (language susceptible of the following defects, viz.,) - Neyārtha (non-sense expression), Klīṣta (conduit expression), Anyārtha (obtruse expression), Avācaka (profane expression), Ayuktimat (absurd expression) and Gūḍhasabdābhidhāna (incomprehensible expression)” (Sastry 13).

He also declares four other defects of speech - Śrutiduṣṭa (offensive to the ear), Arthaduṣṭa (of improper meaning), Kalpanāduṣṭa (objectionable construction), and Śrutiakaṣṭa (painful to the ear).

Mira Bai was undoubtedly an inherited expert. Her verses are free from poetic flaws. Her poetry stands appropriate on all the aforesaid grounds. Mira Bai is able to distinguish between celestial (God) and territorial being (Rana, an ordinary being) as she says:

“Gaj se utar ke khar nahi chaṛṣayām, ye to bāt ne hoī.” (Chaturvedi 103)
“I will not descend from the back of an elephant
To ride upon an ass.” (Alston 43)

Her graceful words express her graceful ideas. The words used in the poem are so elegant and simple that even an amateur person can comprehend them easily.

2. Inspiration –

Mira’s poetry displays her spiritual intensity springing from poetic inspiration.

Bhāmaṇa in his treatise Kāvyalāṅkāra, describes three basic qualities of a good poet viz: pratibhā (poetic genius), abhyāsa (practice) and vyutapatti (absolute proficiency). He also talks about prairnā-pakś (faculty of inspiration). Bhāmaṇa emphasises that pratibhā, abhyāsa and vyutapatti remain passive until there is no prairnā-lehar (fountain of inspiration) in a poet.

Mira is an inborn genius. She is cognizant of the fact that bhakti and jñān are not separate from one another. These are the two wings of transcendence and when love attains fruition, bhakti is born. Mira knows that one who loves God attains salvation. The verse 9.26 of Bhagvad Gita states:

“Patraṃ puṣpaṃ phalaṃ toyaṃ yo me bhaktyā pravacchati
   tad ahaṃ bhatyupahṛtam aśnāmi prayatāmanah”
   (If anyone offers me with love and devotion, a leaf, a flower,
   a fruit or even water, I accept such devotional offerings that
   are offered with love). (9.26)

She was well versed in music due to abhyāsa (practice) at home required for her as a princess. She has vyutapatti because of having inspiration from her inner soul for love and devotion to God. She knows that love is the door and chanting is the key to attain the Divine. She says:

“jahaṃ baiṭhāve tīthī baiṭūṃ, baiche to bik jāū.
Mirāṃ ke prabhu Giridhar Nagar, bār bār bali jāū.” (Chaturvedi 101)

(I sit where He commands me to sit, I would let myself
be sold if He sold me. Mira’s Lord is Giridhar Nagar, I
offer myself to Him again and again.) (Kumar, K. 48)

Mādhurya Bhāva (melody; harmony) is prominent in her poetry which is one of the most sublime and sweetest of all the bhāva-s. “Mira’s bhajan-s, in Indian and Western notation are offered as a melodic outline of suggestion” (Levi 72). “According to Vallabha, a master of Poetics --- there are three levels of literary expression in Indian system: anu bhāva (ensuant suggestion), bhāva bhāvī (intense emotional disposition) and kalpanā
(imagination). Mira’s work considered to be of the first order, the *anu bhāva* which means the text written or recorded by one who has attained the supreme understanding and whose language is, thus, revered as a manifestation of his or her enlightened mind” (Levi 62-3).

Just as the fragrance is the most important out of the four qualities of flowers for the Garland-Maker — so is meaning (*arthatatva*) - the soul of the word for the poet, says Bhamaha. The poet must know which words are *prayojya* (usable) and *aprayojya* (unusable). Three factors are important for both the Garland-Maker & the poet:

i. The Science of Beauty
ii. The Cultural Values
iii. The human Psychology

(Sastri 50)

We can see the beauty of Mira’s poem which depicts Indian culture:

“My Dearest, come grant me your vision…
In the month of *Jeṭh*,
The birds are suffering without water…
The showers come in *Sāvan*,,
My friends celebrate the festival of *Tīj*…
The *Basant Pancāmi* comes in *Māgh*…
The longing arose in my heart in *Cait*
Grant me your vision, please!…”

(Kumar, K. 81)

This poem is beautifully organized which depicts Indian names of months describing festivals associated with them. It also suggests the metaphor of life in which Mira is longing to meet the divine.

3. Diction –

Diction refers to the choice of words. It conveys a certain mood and atmosphere through a particular choice of words. Mira used everyday vocabulary for singing *bhajan*-s. She did not write to show her poetic talents but sang for self-attainment. Bhamaha also emphasises that diction needs to be simple. Before unfolding his opinion on metre, he divides *kāvyā* on four bases (Sastri 13-14):

1. On the basis of metre:   (a) Poetry   (b) Prose
2. On the basis of language:   (a) Sanskrit   (b) Pradesh   (c) Abhhrans
3. On the basis of subject:   (a) Khayātvrit (famous; celebrated)   (b) Kalpit (imaginary)   (c) Kalāśrit (relative of arts)   (d) Shāstrāśrits (literature based on sciences)
4. On the basis of nature and form:   (a) Mahākāvyā   (b) Rupak   (c) Ākāyikā   (d) Kathā   (e) Muktak

Mira used at least fifteen types of metre in her poetry: *Sār chand, Sarsī chand, Vishnūpad, Dohā chand, Upmān chand, Samān savauyā, Shobhan chand, tāṇṭ chand, kuṭal chand*, etc. (Chaturvedi 2008).

Most of Mira’s poems available are in Western Rajasthani — the dialect spoken in the area where she originally lived. But we find some traces of Braj *Bhāṣā* (language), Gujarati,
Rajasthani and Panjabi in some poems as she has spent some time in Vrindaban and Gujarat also. She accompanied sādhu-s of various places; so she may have borrowed some words and sentences from their languages. For instance,

- **Braj Bhāṣā:** “Sakhīrī lāj bairāṅ bhai
  Śrīlāḥ Gopāl ke saṅg, kāhe nāhī gaṅ.”
  (“O friend, my modesty became my enemy.
  Why did I not go with Śri Lāl Gopāl.”) (Chaturvedi 149)

- **Gujarati:** “Premnī Premnī Premnī re, mane lāgī katārī premnī
  Jal Jamunā mānī bhavāṁ gayāṁ tāṁ hatī āgar māthe hemanī re.”
  (“The dagger of love, of love, of love,
  The dagger of love has pierced my heart through.
  I was on my way to Jamunā to fetch water,
  A golden pitcher was on my head.”) (Chaturvedi 146)

- **Rajasthani:** “The to palak ughāro Dīnānāth, main hājīr nājīr kab kī khārī
  sājīyāṁ dusmaṅ hoy baithyā sabne lagūṁ kaṛī.”
  (“O Lord of the Destitute, open Your eyes,
  Since long I have been standing,
  Waiting to serve and obey.
  My relatives have turned my enemies;
  I am disliked by one and all.”) (Kumar, K. 83)

- **Panjabi:** “Ho kānāṁ kin gūṅāṁ julfāṁ kārīyāṁ.”
  (“O Kānhā, who plaited your dark black locks?”) (Chaturvedi 143)

We can bifurcate Mira’s poetry according to different themes as: *Satutī-vandanā* (praise and prayer of God), *premāsaktī* and *premābhilāsā* (Love for Lord Krishna), *apnā mārga* (her own way of thinking and living), *Pārīksā* (Test of God), viyoga (separation from God), āśā kiraṇ (a ray of hope), viśvās (belief in God), etc. (Chaturvedi 2008).

4. Figures of speech –

Judicious use of figures of speech make a literary discourse sublime (cf. Longinus). Quintilian makes a distinction between figures of sound and figures of sense in his *Institutio Oratoria* (9.1.17). Classical Indian Poetician also talk “Ālaṅkāra is the super-dominant school, and Rīti and Vakrokti are its off-shoots” (Suresh Kumar 40).

Bhamaha also classifies literary embellishments into two classes- Śabdāṅkāra (figures of sound) and *Arthāṅkāra* (figures of speech). Alliteration, zeugma, chasms and other charming arrangements of sound come under Śabdāṅkāra. Simile, metaphor and other tropes come under Arthāṅkāra. Bhamaha talks of five figures of speech (Sastry 22):

1. *Anuprāsa* (alliteration)
2. *Yamak* (pun)
3. *Rūpaka* (metaphor)
4. *Dīpak* (illuminator)
5. *Upmā* (simile)
Bhamaha places *Anuprāsa* (alliteration) and *Yamaka* (repetition of word/syllable) in śabādālāṁkāra (a literary embellishment bearing upon sound) and Rūpak (metaphor), Dīpak (predicative attribution) and Upmā (simile) in arthālāṁkāra (a literary embellishment bearing upon sense). These five figures of speech are further divided into a number of parts by Bhamaha. He elaborates the types of alāṅkā-r-s in chapters third and fourth of Kāvyalāṅkāra. These figures of speech are necessary for the creation of a sublime kāvyā. They are “pollinate of language”.

The language of Mira’s verses is orchestrated with proper choice of words, use of similes, metaphors etc. being the language of vehement expression and reverence for the Lord. For instance:

- **Anuprāsa**: “Sūno gāvin des sab sūno, sūnī sej atārī.” (Chaturvedi 118)
  
  “Lifeless is the village, 
  Lifeless the entire land, 
  Lifeless the bed and the attic.” (Kumar, K. 68)

- **Rūpaka**: “Lāl Giridhar taraṇ taraṇ, veg karsayo pār.” (Chaturvedi 153)
  
  “O Lāl Girdhar, the navigator of human life 
  Quickly take me across.” (Alston 110)

- **Upmā**: “Pana jyun pili paṭī rī, log kahe pinḍvāy.” (Chaturvedi 117)
  
  “I turned yellow like a leaf, 
  And people thought I had jaundice.” (Kumar, K. 66)

- **Utprekṣā** (Hyperbole): “Dhartī rūp navāṁ navāṁ dharyā Indra milaṇ re kāj.” (Chaturvedi 138)
  
  “Earth assumes ever-new forms 
  For meeting and greeting Indra.” (Kumar, K. 92)

Mira’s poems have rhythm and harmony which make them sublime. Taking an example from Mira’s Padāvalī:

“Mira lāgo raṅg Hari, aurān anītak pari
Chūdo mahāṁr tilak arū mālā, sīl barat sinṅgārī
Aur singār mahāṁre dāy ne āvai, yo gūrū gyān hamārī…” (Chaturvedi 103)

5. **Style**

“Longinus distinguishes between ‘persuasive style’ and ‘sublime style’. The sublime is evocative, transporting and overwhelms us with its power of wonder. It is a product of both nature and art” (Kapoor 128). Bhamaha does not use the term rītī but he talks about two types of styles: Vaidarbhi and Gaudī. “In comparing the style ‘Vaidarbhi’ with ‘Gaudī’ he calls the former ‘Avakrokti’. According to him strikingness of meaning is at the root of all Poetic Figures” (Sastry XV). In chapter 5th also, verse 66th, he says that the employment of words or meanings out of the fashion imparts beauty to the statement.
By analysing Mira’s poetry, it can be said that she breaks the tradition of Siddha-s writing. In the verses of Siddha-s, there is no ‘tek’ (refrain) and there is one simple metre throughout the whole pada (song). But in Mira’s poetry there is one ‘tek’ and then three or four foots or quarters are added to it which shows the deviation in her poetry, an important factor of creating style. For instance:

Sithāyī: Pag Bāṁdh Ghūṁghrṇāṁ nācḥyāṁ rī. (Tek)
Antarā: Log kahāṁ Mira bāvarī, sāsu kahāṁ kulnāsī rī
Vikh ro payālo sRāṇā bhājyāṁ, pīvāṁ Mīrāṁ hāṁsāṁ rī…

(Chaturvedi 207)

There were different musical styles in which bhajan-s were sung at that time but some styles were prominent. “Anthologies of the sixteenth century list the poetry of the period according to the raga-s which were employed and not according to the individual poets, which is a clear indication of the great importance which music had for the sensibility of the time” (Levi 71). Mira modifies some words to make her poetry more musical. For instance:

- Papaiyā rather than Papīha (Common Hawk cuckoo)
- Kivario rather than Kivāra (door)
- Nehrā rather than Sanaha (love)
- Kipānīdhān rather than Kripānīdhān (Merciful Lord) etc.

(Sharma, K. 75)

The qualities of sublime poetry possessed by a poet can be seen in Mira. Levi remarks:

“Educated to be the first Hindu Queen of the sixteenth century, Mira had been trained in poetics, music and dance” (61). Her bhajan-s composed centuries ago still capture the thoughts and emotions of devotees today. Her songs, highly regarded for the mystic quality as well as rich inherent meanings make them sublime. “Millions have memorized and sung the poems of Mirabai’s passion, each finding in her words some intimate and individual truth, and also some companionship along the path of awakening. To read Mirabai is to awaken more deeply into your own life” (Bly and Hirshfield xiii).

6. Theme: It is one of the important elements to make any literary discourse sublime. The main elements which make Mira’s poetry sublime are as follows:

(i) Love:

Sublimity, generally speaking, depends on grandeur of thought and nobility of nature. Nobility and sublimity in love take a person to the higher path of consciousness and unite man to God. Love is one thing which everybody craves for and Mira Bai is no exception. In fact, Mira’s love for Lord Krishna is unsurpassable. Mira’s expression of her love and the agony of separation from Lord Krishna through her poetry are ethereal. During the month of Chaitra (March-April) she feels despondent and says:

KEN sang khelāṁ holī, piyā tājī gaye hein akelī

(The Beloved has abandoned me, With whom could I play Holi?)

(Chaturvedi 119)

(ii) Mysticism:

Mira Bai’s poetry is full of mystic elements. Her poetry reveals love independent of logic, senses and reason consequently entering the realm of mysticism through spiritual
insights. There are traces of supernaturalism too. Rān̄ā was always busy in inventing new forms of torture for her. Rān̄ā sent her a basket containing snake with a message that it contained a garland of flowers. Mira, after performing her ablutions, sat before it. On opening it she discovered Śālīgrām (a beautiful image of her Divine Beloved). When Rān̄ā sent her a poisoned drink, she drank it as Charnāmṛta (the water in which Lord Krishna’s idol had been bathed; equivalent to nectar). Due to the grace of Lord Krishna, that poisoned drink transformed into nectar and did not harm Mira at all.

“Rāno bhaijayā vikh ro payālo, Charnāmṛt pī jānā
Kālā nāg pitāraymā bhaijayā, sālgrām pichānā.” (Chaturvedi 109)

In the absence of reliable information about Mira’s death, there is a legend which tells that her body melted physically into the image of the deity in the temple of Raṇ̄achor (Alston 2008). The poet Iqbal’s lines appropriately support this legend:

“Tū hai muhīte bēkarām, main hūṁ jarā-sī ābhū
yā mujhe humkinār kar, yā mujhe bekinār kar.” (Osho 26)

(You are a vast ocean, and I am but a meagre stream
Drown me or let me be unfathomed.)

(iii) A Voice for Social Equality:

Mira Bai discarded the caste system and worked for the liberation of women from the pardā (veil) system that prevailed at that time in Rajasthan. She believes that all are equal in God’s eyes as it is stated in Bhagvad Gita:

“māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya ye ’pi syuḥ pāpayonayaḥ striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās te ’pi yānti parāṁ gātim.”

(Because O Partha! Even women, Vaishyas (merchants), Śudras (laborers) and those of the sinful clan, whoever they may be, they also can attain the Supreme goal by surrendering unto Me). (9.32)

“The sociologist Parita Mukta said that Mira Bai was at the core of things. When Mira snubbed the Raṇ̄ā, it was not just a rejection of patriarchal conventions but a rejection of social injustice broadly – of caste” (90-110).

Mira’s poetry highlights the voice of common man and talks about the injustice against females by the male chauvinists. This trait makes her poetry sublime.

(iv) Perpetual Bliss and Relevance (to the Modern World):

Mira’s songs are pure bliss. Though, some songs of Mira show her struggle in life yet the utter joy, melody and delight of all her bhajan-s is par excellence. To borrow from P.B. Shelley’s ‘To the Skylark’:

“Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.” (306)
In an era when the minds of the people are pre-occupied for power and pelf, it is high
time to return to the Bhakti literature to repose. In the present time, when technology has
robbed man of the joy of reading poetry, there is still an escape route for the seekers of the
peace of mind. Listening or singing these bhajan-s certainly work as a stress buster for the
new generation. Mira’s poems can not only restore the equilibrium of the mind of the modern
reader but it will also keep the young minds in touch with our rich heritage. The new
generation can be conversant with the legends and myths related to their culture and they
would also not feel helpless in the hazy world of doubts and fears. The relevance of her
bhajan-s is universal as well as eternal.

In this way, this important feature makes Mira’s poetry sublime.

7. Avant-garde and Revolutionary Approach:
An emancipated soul, Mira, emerged out of a Rājpūt family (an environment of
inequality for women) was very strong and a revolutionary woman. The details of Mira’s life
reveals that she violated the rules of Manu according to which a woman was not allowed to
go outside the home or to refuse conjugal rights to her husband. She refused to adopt the
religion of her husband’s family as they were devotees of Devī (Hindu Goddess). She
challenged the existing ill-adapted rules for women, for instance, she discarded Satī Prathā
(the burning of widows on the husband’s funeral pyre). She discarded all the ill-adapted
moral duties of so-called bhū (daughter-in-law) of Rajpūt family and paved the way for
women to speak for their rights.

She is the role model of today’s women who are fighting for their empowerment. She
did not represent only her own problems through poetry but also of all women of the
medieval time. She had sown the seeds of revolt against injustice towards women in a time
when the questions related to patriarchal system was unheard of. She did not care for society
and said:

“Koī nindo koī bindo mahe to, guṇ Govind kā gāsaya
jin mārg mharā sādh padhārai, uṇ mārg mahe jāsaya.” (Chaturvedī 103)

(Some blame me, some praise me, But I will only sing
The praise of Govind. The path that the saints have
trodden upon, That path I will follow.) (Kumar 49)

“Mira did not want to marry Bhoj Raj, a worldly bridegroom but there is no monastic
structure in Hinduism, for either men or women. The religious life is lived as a wandering
holy man (sādhu) or renunciate (samyāsī), and is for the most part only available to men;
there are some women samyāsīn-s but only very few” (Klostermaier 1998).

IV

Conclusion

Mira’s poetry stands apart in Indian religious literary tradition by its sublimity of
thought and expression. Since aesthetic goals in Indian literature are not determined by mere
linguistic devices or figures of speech, it goes to the credit of saint-poets like Mira for the effulgence of spirit and elevated style marked by an individual identification with the higher consciousness in the form of God. Mira’s poetry evokes through her sublime ideas and style.

Her poetry is a proof that emotions can take one to the stage of bhakti, elevated thoughts to the stage of transcendence and expression to the stage of knowledge. Her bhajan-s, highly regarded for the mystic qualities and rich inherent meanings make them sublime.

These are the basic foundations of Mira’s poetry, which make her a saint for all times and all places.

REFERENCES


