

Classic Poetry Series

Sant Tukaram

- poems -

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Sant Tukaram(1608 - 1650)

Sant Tukaram (Hindi: तुकाराम) was a prominent Varkari Sant (Saint) and spiritual poet during a Bhakti movement in India.

 Birth and Early Life

Tukaram was born in the small village of Dehu in the West Indian state of Maharashtra to Bolhoba and Kanakai a couple belonging to the lower Sudra class. His real name is Tukaram Vhilhoba Aambe. Rather, in accord with another tradition in India of assigning the epithet "sant" (संत) to persons regarded as thoroughly saintly, Tukaram is commonly known in Maharashtra as Sant Tukaram (संत तुकाराम). He is known as Bhakta Tukaram to southern Indian people. He had two other brothers. Despite their lower class status the family was well to do and enjoyed good social standing in the village. Tukaram's troubles started with the illness of his father, due to which he had to start supporting his family at the tender age of thirteen. Shortly thereafter, both his parents died. Tukaram's problems only mounted; death of his family members and economic hardship seemed to plague him.

Scholars assign various birth years to Sant Tukaram: 1577, 1598, 1608 and 1609 CE. The year of Sant Tukaram's death —1650 CE— is much more certain.

 Family Life

Tukaram was married twice, his first wife Rakhumabai died in 1602 in her early youth due to starvation during a famine, his second wife Jijabai or Avali as she was called, was much younger than his first had been and had little patience with his devotion and for God and she nagged him continuously. Sant Tukaram and his second wife, Jijabai had three sons: Santu or Mahadev, Vithoba, and Narayan.

 Spiritual Life and Poetry

Sant Tukaram was initiated without any intermediaries as the other saints usually were. He dreamt that he was initiated by the Lord Hari himself dressed as a Brahman.

Tukaram continuously sang the praises of the Lord, he sang it in the form of abhangs which he wrote. These were in his mother tongue Marathi. The abhangs express his feelings and philosophical outlook. During his 41 years, Tukaram

composed over 5,000 abhangs. Many of them speak of events in his life, which make them somewhat autobiographical. Yet, they are focused on God, Pandurang, and not Tukaram. His abhangs became very popular with the masses of common people. It was this very popularity that caused the religious establishment (the high caste Brahmins) to hate and persecute Tukaram. as, he was causing them to lose their power over the people.

There are many miracles attributed to Tukaram.

Abhangs (A Short Collection)

1

I was sleeping when Namdeo and Vitthal Stepped into my dream.
'Your job is to make poems. Stop wasting time,' Namdeo said.
Vitthal gave me the measure and gently aroused me from a dream inside a dream.
Namdeo vowed to write one billion poems.
'Tuka, all the unwritten ones are your responsibility.'

2

To repeat Your name is to string pearls together.
The pleasure in your manifested form is always new.
I have ceased to desire the unembodied God.
Your worshippers do not seek liberation.
With You, it is still possible to give and to receive.
What use is the place where a dish sat when it is taken away?
Tuka says, 'Give me the gift of freedom from fear.
After all, O Lord who pervades the world, I have given the world You.'

3

Without a worshipper, how can God assume a form and accept service?
The one makes the other beautiful, as a gold setting shows off a jewel.
Who but God can make the worshipper free from desires?
Tuka says, 'They are drawn to each other like mother and child.'

4

I am not starved for want of food, but it is Janardana who deserves my reverence.
I have looked on God as one who sees everything, on bright and dark days, alike.
God is like a father with his child,
who both feels and gives pleasure at the same time.
Good acts and bad acts vanish.
Tuka says, 'God's glory alone is left.'

5

This is why I have left my house and gone to the forest.
My love will be spoiled by the evil eye.
I will lose my love for Him.
I will not listen to this doctrine of unity.

Tuka says, 'This doctrine that God and I are one is false.
I will not let it interfere with me.'

6

Just beyond us we see that purple luster - how glorious!
With His noble crown of peacock feathers stitched together.
As you look upon Him, fever and illusion vanish
Adore then the Prince of the Yadavas, the Lord of Yogis.
He who filled with passion the sixteen thousand royal damsels,
Fair Creatures, divine maidens.
He stands upon the river bank with the luster of one million moons.
It is fastened in jewels on His neck
And merges into the luster of His form.

This God who bears the wheel is the chief of the Yadavas.
Him the thirty three crores of demigods adore.
The demons tremble before Him.
His dark blue countenance destroys sin.
How fair are His feet with saffron stained!
How fortunate is the brick that is grasped by His feet!
The very thought of Him makes fire cool.
Therefore embrace Him with experience of your own.
The sages, as they see His face, contemplate Him in the spirit,
The Father of the World stands before them in bodily shape.
Tuka is frenzied after Him; His purple form ravages the mind

7

If men are habitations of God, we should fall at their feet
But we should leave alone their habits and goals.
Fire is good to drive away cold
But you must not tie it up
And carry it around in a cloth.
Tuka says, 'A scorpion or a snake is a habitation of Narayana;
You may worship Him from afar, but you must not touch Him.'

Sant Tukaram

All Blest Are They

All blest are they whose heart with pity grows.
Who left home, to serve mankind;
Who slight their person's needs (it is not myth)
Whose hearts are broad ; Whose lips with honey flow .

Sant Tukaram

All Men To Me Are God-Like Gods!

All men to me are god-like Gods!
My eyes no longer see
vice or fault.

Life on this suffering earth
is now endless delight;
the heart at rest, full,
overflowing.

In the mirror, the face and its reflection --
they watch each other;
different, but one.

And, when the stream pours into the ocean...
no more stream!

Sant Tukaram

Alone At Your Feet

Consider me yours;
for I worship You, Lord.
In the company of saints,
my spirit soared.

Now I need nothing.
My thoughts are of You.
My faith is complete.
My devotion is true.

Distractions are many.
Friends say, 'Grab this world.'
They love worthless things
and call them their pearls.

Now I can see
those people are clowns,
since death sets a trap
and they just fall down.

Here I sit
alone at your feet.
Give me your patience
to become complete.

To my old friends
I will not respond;
for You are the one
of whom I am fond.

If I deal with the world
for advantage or gain,
the saints will laugh;
They'll know I'm insane.

But if I give You faith,
forevermore,
I'll sit with the heroes
of ancient lore.

Sant Tukaram

Argue No More About It

Argue no more about it,
Man's crude and foolish mind, and that alone,
Hath taught this tale of many gods:

It is a lie:

For God is One,
One only:

And unto Him,
The One,
My soul shall sing her praise.

Sant Tukaram

Can Water Drink Itself?

Can water drink itself?

Can a tree taste its own fruit?

The worshiper of God must
remain distinct from Him.

Only thus will he come to
know God's joyful love.

But if he were to say that God
and he are one,
that joy and love would
vanish instantly.

Sant Tukaram

Children Dressed In Tatters

We're sorry!
We have no manners!
But ...
We're your children and you're our Mom!

Send us food on golden platters.
Give us love
amidst life's storms.

If our faith is
less-than-perfect,
do not notice;
We are yours!

Errant children,
dressed in tatters,
Tuka says,
You can't ignore.

Sant Tukaram

First He Looked Confused

I could not lie anymore so I started to call my dog 'God.'
First he looked
confused,

then he started smiling, then he even
danced.

I kept at it: now he doesn't even
bite.

I am wondering if this
might work on
people?

Sant Tukaram

How Could A Lover Fall?

What could have caused your grip to weaken
that allowed creation to be?

How could a lover fall to his death
from the arms of infinite
strength?

How active you are in the mind sustaining such a great wall
that the sun can cast a frightening shadow
the world believes.

No one has ever really known sadness. No real God
would ever allow pain.

How then can a heart feel it is broken and in need
If we are held in the arms of infinite
compassion and
strength?

The mirror you (God) stand before -
we need to gaze into it also.

That name you called Beloved
as I fell from your lips -
I suffer

because I did not quite
hear it;

so tell me again dear One
so clear:

I am
you.

Sant Tukaram

I Speak Yet Am I Silent

I speak,
Yet am I silent:
I am dead,
Yet do I live:
I am in the world,
Yet do I dwell beyond the world:

I have surrendered all things,
yet am I rich and joyful:

I am lonely
Yet am I not alone:

I am not what I seem to be:
If you would know what I am
Ask Him, my Lord.

Sant Tukaram

If Men

If men are habitations of God, we should fall at their feet
But we should leave alone their habits and goals.
Fire is good to drive away cold
But you must not tie it up
And carry it around in a cloth.
Tuka says, 'A scorpion or a snake is a habitation of Narayana;
You may worship Him from afar, but you must not touch Him.'

Sant Tukaram

If Only You Would

If Only you would
Give me refuge O Lord
To stay at your feet
In a line of saints.

I've already left behind
The world I loved.
Don't stand still:
It's your move now.

My caste is low;
My origins humble.
A little help from you
Will go a long way.

Thanks to Namdeo
You visited me
In a dream that left me
Poetry.

Sant Tukaram

In Me Thou Livest

Take, Lord, unto Thyself
My sense of self; and let it vanish utterly.

Take, Lord, my life,
Live Thou my life through me.

I live no longer, Lord,
But in me now
Thou livest.

Aye, between Thee and me, my God,
There is no longer room for "I" and "mine."

Sant Tukaram

Mother God

Mother-God,
Set me within the safe defences of Thy pity:

In ignorance and folly I have wasted all my days,
My soul is base:

Thy gift of life is squandered,
My latest days go fleeting by,
And fear grips hard upon me:

Far have I travelled,
Yet little fruit have I of all my wandering:

I have forgotten Thee,
Forgive me, save me
Show me Thy love,
And set me close by Thee, sure fenced from fear and doubt.

Sant Tukaram

Name Of God

He who utters the Name of God while walking
gets the merit of a sacrifice at every step
His body becomes a place of pilgrimage.

He who repeats God's Name while working
always finds perfect peace.

He who utters the Name of God while eating
gets the merit of a fast
even though he has taken his meals.

Even if one were to give in charity
the whole world encircled by the seas
it would not equal the merit of repeating the Name,

By the power of the Name
one will know what cannot be known,

One will see what cannot be seen,

One will speak what cannot be spoken,

One will meet what cannot be met.

Tuka says.

Incalculable is the gain that comes
From repeating the Name of God.

Sant Tukaram

None See Me Off

None see me off. Let those go home who will
Receive this blessing from a loosing heart
Let righteous deed secure you all good weal
Ye brought me up and gave me to one
who will not give you cause for anxious thoughts
I must now walk with my dear Lord of Life
Whom have I followed with inborn love.
If your love for me I give free scope
'T will cause calm, allay your grief
who take each other by the hand secure
full purpose of this life - as Laws assert
we part for good; reserve for talk the past.

Sant Tukaram

Smaller Than The Smallest Atom

Smaller than the smallest atom,
All embracing as the heavens,
Tuka views the world objective -
Name and form as all delusion -
Realising its true nature
Serpent like, he drops his cover,
Far is left the triple range,
Which the soul has just passed o'er
Light the jar of dull clay brightens!
Shining in that light doth Tuka
Live on earth to serve the mankind.

Sant Tukaram

The Chief Of The Yadavas

Just beyond us we see that purple luster - how glorious!
With His noble crown of peacock feathers stitched together.
As you look upon Him, fever and illusion vanish
Adore then the Prince of the Yadavas, the Lord of Yogis.
He who filled with passion the sixteen thousand royal damsels,
Fair Creatures, divine maidens.
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Therefore embrace Him with experience of your own.
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The Father of the World stands before them in bodily shape.
Tuka is frenzied after Him; His purple form ravages the mind.

Sant Tukaram

The Price?

If you treat the opposite sex with reverence
will you pay a price?

If you stop your fault-finding and covetous ways
will your earnings not suffice?

If you sit in prayer and meditation
will it cost a living wage?

If you trust the words of realized souls
will your boss forget your pay?

Is it a burden to pursue wisdom?
Do you fear the price it brings?
Tuka says,
Fools worry about the little stuff.
Don't they know? God brings everything!

Sant Tukaram

Thou Art More Kind Than Mother Dear

Thou art more kind than mother dear,
More soothing than the rays of moon
Thy love an ever flowing tide,
Sinks deeper than a common stream
I know of none that equals Thee -
Thou best of all immortal Gods
I wave my name above Thy head,
And part it at thy holy feet.
Ah! Sweeter than sweetest things,
And mightier than all the elements,
Thou rulest O'er the Universe,
And seest that it goes all right,
In silence do I lay my head
upon thy feet , and pray 'Forgive'

Sant Tukaram

To Arrange Words

To arrange words
In some order
Is not the same thing
As the inner poise
That's poetry.

The truth of poetry
Is the truth
Of being.
It's an experience
Of truth.

No ornaments
Survive
A crucible.
Fire reveals
Only molten
Gold.

Says Tuka
We are here
To reveal.
We do not waste
Words.

Sant Tukaram

When I Lose Myself

When thus I lose myself in Thee, my God,
Then do I see, and know,
That all Thy universe reveals Thy beauty,
All living beings, and all lifeless things,
Exist through Thee.

This whole vast world is but the form
In which Thou showest us Thyself,
Is but the voice
In which Thyself Thou speakest unto us.

What need of words?
Come, Master, come,
And fill me wholly with Thyself.

Sant Tukaram

Where Does One Begin With You?

Where does one begin with you?
O Lord, you have no opening line
It's so hard to get you started.

Everything I tried went wrong.
You've used up all my faculties.

What I just said vanished in the sky
And I've fallen on the ground again.

Says Tuka my mind is stunned:
I can't find a word to say.

Sant Tukaram