

Mira Bai.*

BY EDMUND RUSSEL.

One who wanders from the Ganges to the Indus, the Himalayas to the Vindhya, will notice in the popular songs of the Hindi language, if he catch no other word, the repetition of a particular name.

The cow-herd boys in their noonday rest, religious devotees in their psalms, celebrated songsters in musical soirees, nautchis in private entertainments, all sing the name of Mira—above the clash of silver anklets—Mira Bai! Mira Bai!

Who was she?

Ask whom you may meet; he or she, boy or girl, old man or woman, all will know—love, admire, adore, worship her as one of the angels of the human race.

Her soul was the jewel of a hundred births.

She was the holiest devotee amongst women.

She was one of the greatest poets of India.

The loveliest flower of Rajputana always graced the palace of the Maharana of Chittor, so the lily-of-lilies, Mira Bai, was married to its Raj Kumar, and at the death of the old Rana would become Queen of Mewar.

Both she and her husband were poets, and spent most of their time composing and reciting. Gradually the style of husband and wife began to differ. The prince grovelled in carnal description whilst the princess soared higher and higher in celestial realms. She read much of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She felt the presence of the living God in the person of the beautiful cow-herd boy of Brindaban. She felt that none could be happy in this world or in the next without loving the Fountain of Love. She saw God in-flesh-and-blood in Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She felt that she was one of the Gopīs of Gokula. She embraced the real meaning of the allegory, grasped the soul-life of the love-life, and all her compositions turned on God—the loving Hari.

Time wore on. The tiara of empire fell upon her brow. She was queen.* She became more independent than before, and her husband allowed her all scope to pursue her studies.

Religious fervour, the divine love that dwelt within her, the great devotion

* We are indebted to the *Leader*, January 7, 1922 for a reprint of the above article.

* Recent researches into the life of Mira Bai have established that Mira was never a queen of Mewar. Her husband, Bhojraj, eldest son of Rana Sanga, died during the life-time of his father. The persecution of Mira is believed to have taken place during the reign of her brother-in-law, Rana Vikramjit.

which inspired her, carried her gradually far away from the world. She began to forget household duties, dress, worldly affairs. Day after day, night after night was passed with her maids singing the name of the resplendent one. They were Gopīs adoring an invisible Govind—to them visible—with her they forgot the world.

Her composition was exquisite, and tradition still dwells on the glories of her voice, but says that with all the natural qualification of style, tone and mode of singing one was most touched and thrilled at the great love breathed through her songs, the charming pathos, the deep feeling with which her heart was filled.

But how long could such a spirit remain in prison in the court of Chittor? One in whom the universal love had grown could dwell in no house. She was drawn to the lotus shrine in which was the great image of Kṛṣṇa. There she sang and sang until she lost herself. The spirit of the Lord was in her. She swooned in ecstasy.

From that day daily went she to the place of prayer and sang in her sweet way the name of her loving God.

Whoever heard her songs was melted to love God and to love her—from ten to hundreds—from hundreds to thousands they came.

She almost left the palace and lived in the temple of the God who was her heart's idol.

Her name and fame were carried to the remotest parts of India.

The tale reached the Great Mogul, the world-renowned Akbar, Emperor of Delhi, whose like history has never told.

Himself a poet he knew how to appreciate other great natures. His court was a seat of all glorious in art, science and learning.

When he heard of Mira Bai he was anxious to drink the music of her songs.

Though Chittor did not bow its head to his throne at that time the Maharana was not in deadly enmity to him. But he knew the pride of the Hindu race and dared not openly propose to see Mira and hear songs lest he inflame another great war in Rajputana.

Mira was not alone the Maharani of a kingdom—she was of greater sanctity—a Hindu woman.

He knew that Chittor and its Rajputs once fought to the last because an emperor wanted to gaze upon their queen. He knew that that queen and all the women of her court had burnt to escape the dishonour of being seen or touched by infidels.

At last he called the musician Tan Sen, and it was settled that the emperor, in the disguise of a Hindu mendicant, should go to the temple where Mira Bai daily sang.

They came alone and unattended—they saw—heard her songs—the Emperor was so carried away that he fell at her feet and implored her to teach him the means of attaining salvation.

A mad infatuation possessed him from the unspeakable pathos of her charm. Her glances fell upon him like the filaments of some exquisite flower. He took the jewelled necklace from beneath his rags and said: 'Most respected lady, accept this humble token for the god of your temple.'

Mira held the chain and looked at the emperor in disguise, 'Beloved sir, this seems of great value; may I ask how men who appear to me ascetics could possess such a thing?'

'I found it in the Jamuna whilst bathing', replied Akbar, 'and could not do better than present it to you and to your god.'

Mira thanked the two for their love of God and Emperor and musician returned to Delhi.

But the diamond necklace, with the curse of jewels was death to lotus-love. It brought misery into her happy life. It destroyed her domestic happiness. It cost her the love of her husband.

The jewel was so valuable that it was noised abroad, and thousands came to see it gleam on the blue body of sapphire Hari. One identified it as having been sold to Akbar, Emperor of Delhi—its cost many lakhs of rupees. The two strangers were traced. Who can cover royal foot-prints? The king came to know that the Great Mogul had seen his wife, had touched her and presented her with treasures.

She had lost her honour. She had brought shame and disgrace

upon the house of Mewar. She had become an outcast through an outcast's touch. Order was at once passed that she should die.

None was found to execute the royal command. One after another of the officers of state refused to obey. A death warrant was then drawn and signed by the Maharana asking the queen to do away with herself. When she was returning from the temple after her daily Pūjā it was placed in her hands. She glanced and asked if she could see her husband. 'Your majesty,' replied the officer, 'will notice in the paper the Maharana distinctly states that he cannot see you.'

'A Hindu wife obeys her lord' was all that Mira said.

She was followed, as always, by many devotees. Knowing how they would be grieved and aroused by the royal order, she mentioned nothing to them, and silently went to prepare herself for death.

She changed her royal dress wrapping herself in an old yellow cloth. All were asleep and none knew when she left. The night was filled with nautch of whirling stars behind their saris of nebulous gold.

She came to the river bank and stood for a few minutes in deep prayer, then leaped into the raging torrent. As she fell she saw before her eyes a supernatural light and lost consciousness, but not before a vision, a creature of radiant brightness, an angel, bent down and kissed her saying, 'Mira, you have obeyed your

husband, you have killed yourself, but you have a higher task to perform, a higher duty calls you to arise, to live again, to teach the world.'

When Mira opened her eyes it was day: she was lying on the bank of the river in the full blaze of the noontide sun. She rose and wandered through the fields, singing the song of God. She walked on till she met some cowherds:—

'My beloved sons, can you tell me the way by which I may make the great pilgrimage?'

The boys gave her milk, called her 'Mother,' and led her to Brindaban.

She went on singing the name of Hari. Her songs filled with celestial sweetness all the villages through which she passed. Men and women started from their work, children from play—all followed singing Hari! Hari!

They offered her presents which she would not accept. Many came with choicest foods. Some left their homes and, in spite of repeated requests, followed in her footsteps. When she entered the city of Brindaban it appeared as if Umā herself, the great goddess of Kailash, had come with all her attendant train.

The news of her appearance in Brindaban spread all over the country, where her sweet songs already had passed from mouth to mouth. Those who admired her in Chittore hastened to Brindaban and those who never saw her before were

attracted by this new inspiration. She was no longer the mighty Maharani of Mewar, but as a beggar woman wrapped in a cloth and holding the beggar's bowl she was the ruler of a wider kingdom, the kingdom of love which gives mankind salvation and ultimate peace.

There was a great saint in Brindaban named Rup Gosain.* A man of vast learning and deep thought, but severe ascetic and woman-hater. He had taken for his motto—'Never see face of woman or coin if you want salvation.'

Mira heard this and wrote to him:—

'There is only one man in Brindaban, and that man is Śrī Kṛṣṇa. All other beings dwell in his love and therefore are his brides—one flesh with him. Rup Gosain must know this essence of the esoteric teaching and if Rup Gosain being a male, has stealthily entered the ladies' apartments of the palace of our Lord Kṛṣṇa, it is high time for him to fly lest he be found out and chastised by the king.'

This so much pleased the saint that he invited her to his temple where he lived, knowing she could be no ordinary woman. Mira fell at his feet and asked his blessing.

* The interview referred to here was sought by Mira with the celebrated Vaishnava philosopher Sri Jiva Goswami, nephew and disciple of Sri Rupa Goswami, probably after the death of Sri Rupa Goswami. —*Editor.*

'What can I do for you, daughter?'

'Father, allow me to dwell so that I may hear from your lips the words of God.'

Thereafter she lived in the temple.

Rup Gosain said he had become her disciple.

Mira said she was the disciple of the saint.

Time went on. Her songs of God and her love filled Brindaban with the sweetness of heaven, and thousands came to join her in singing the Name of Hari.

Far in the Himalayas, the abode of snow—on the banks of the Jamuna and Ganges—in the land of five rivers—in distant Maharashtra—nay, even on the coast of the Hari-blue ocean were repeated the songs sung by Mira on the steps of the temple at Brindaban.

Chittore was no exception. In every street and lane and house, high or low, were heard the words—'Mira says so and so'.

Wherever the Rana turned he heard her name.

At last the light came. He knew that Mira had risen to a higher kingdom than that of which she had been dispossessed—a kingdom to which his sovereignty was nothing. He had banished her. He had ordered her death lest the people should cry shame on his family for the unholy touch of an

emperor. But she had not disgraced the house of Mewar. She had bestowed upon it the greatest honour. All the world loved her. He still loved. He left the palace in disguise and walked all the way to Brindaban.

He found Mira sitting on the steps of the temple, her cheeks like the withering petals of the faded lotus but he knew her smile.

He begged for alms.

'I am a beggar woman, you should go to some rich man.'

Said the king: 'An honest beggar comes to a beggar for help.'

'But what can I give?'

'Pardon', prayed the kneeling king.

She fell at his feet a woman still.

'Dear Lord, my husband, you have at last remembered me!'

Happy their reconciliation. He brought her back in triumph as his queen. But Mira insisted on living half of the year in the temple of Brindaban.

Her admonitions are not for stern asceticism. That belongs to Buddhistic, not Krishnaic doctrine. She asked with Hari men to live their lives, doing their ordinary duties, but always filled with the love of God.

From her life and teachings we may gather what an oriental religion

is to an oriental, and we feel the divine spirit in all as we never can in the way 'heathen goods' are usually presented.

This reality did not come to me until once dining in London at the house of Sri Jagadish Chandra Bose with Swami Vivekananda, a young Hindu student said in intensest reverence:—

'I always feel when I see him that Śiva must look like that.'

Such light in his eyes, such veneration on his lips that I felt the living God in the name, and Śiva has been a reality to me ever since.

This we feel in every song of Mira, in the sweet smile of every Hindu woman.

'Hold fast to Kṛṣṇa, says the bard; and wear him as a precious stone.'

My Master.

BY I. B. SAXENA, M. A.

There comes a tinkling noise. Surely it is He. It is more distinct. Yes, He has come nearer. Look, He must be there. Ah He is!

How beautiful are the hair, curly, wavering, silky and shining. There is a soft tenderness. Sweetly scented, nicely combed they move with every whisper of the wind. Light and shade, darker and darker they dazzle when the leaves allow the rays to play. They cover the head which is immensely beautiful. Broad forehead penetrating eyes, a manly determination and a glow—it is immensely handsome. Kindness, mercy, loving care and forgiveness all blend into one and make the face austere, sincere, bewitching and benign.

Broad shoulders, long arms and soft hands, able to reach everybody, ready to console everybody—that is

the Grace. He is my Master. I love Him for His brave deeds, I worship Him for His sacrifices, I adore Him for His kindness. Who is so merciful as to forgive my sins? Who is so kind as to pick me up from the mire? Certainly my Master.

Ah the shadows fade but the Reality remains! Call Him He will come. Love Him He will love. So simple is my Master. A few flowers of affection, a few tears of renunciation and a sigh for the wrongs will capture Him. He is with you—a constant friend—ever truthful, ever helpful. Know His Name, realize His virtues, you will see my Master.

When I walk and fall down He laughs and helps me up. He tickles me and I bow to my Lord. So glorious is He—my Master.
