

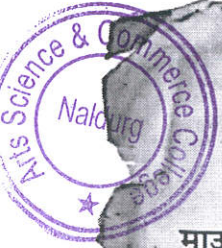
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ॐ श्री



श्री भारत शिक्षण प्रसारक मंडळ संचलित

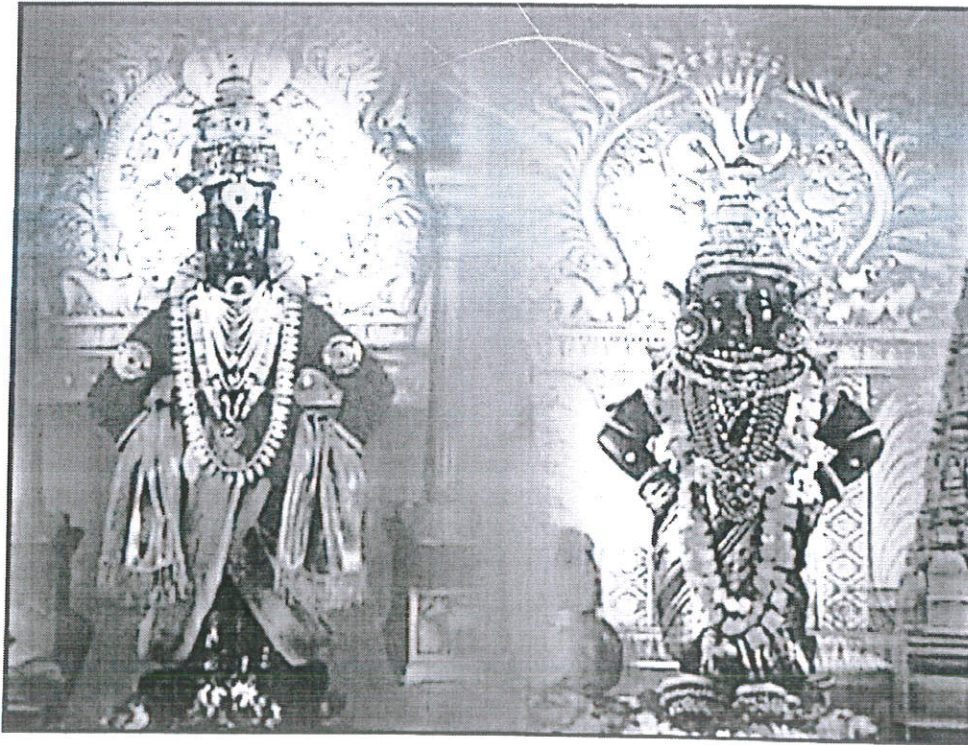
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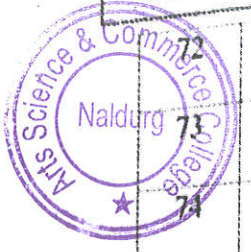
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॥ संत साहित्याचे योगदान ॥

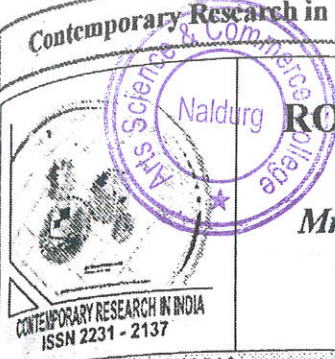
विशेष अंक

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ROLE OF VARKARI SAINTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract: The state of Maharashtra has a strong religious and cultural heritage. The religious studies and traditions are evident from the several temples and religious destinations in the state. Maharashtra is also popular for the long list of saints who hailed from the state. These saints have enlightened the masses from time to time with their discourse on humanity, equality, valor, brotherhoodness and harmony. Thus, the present paper aims to show the influence of some of the saints like, Sant Namdev, Sant Tukaram, Sant Dnyaneshwar, Sant Eknath, Sant Chokhamela, Sant Ramdas, Sant Janabai, Sant Sakhubai and Sant Soyarabai etc. on contemporary society and who played significant role in uplifting, the masses of people from their misery, predicament, and reforming society.

Keywords: Maharashtra, Heritage, Sant Dnyaneshwar, Religious, Masses.

Introduction:

The tradition of saints that began in Maharashtra with Shri. Chakradhar Swami, Sant Namdev, Sant Tukaram, Sant Dnyaneshwar, Sant Eknath, Sant Chokhamela, Sant Ramdas was continued by Sants coming from various strata of society. In this group of sants are included Sant Goroba Kaka, Sant Sawata Mali, Sant Narhari Sonar, Sant Shaikh Mahammed, Sant Niloba, Sant Kabir etc. Similarly, all these were considered as Varkari Saints. They were also considered as the hope of living for people with depressed souls and miseries. There were also some women saints like Sant Janabai, Sant Sakhubai and Sant Soyarabai, who influenced the society with their religious discourses.

Sant Namdev was its founder, Dnyaneshwar was its philosopher, Pandharpur became prominent. Paithan lost its importance. Saints agitation gave one God, one religion to the masses. It was humanitarian. As Sant Namdev was a great devotee of Lord Vitthal. He was a religious poet and is being respected followers of Maharashtra as well as Sikh religion. Sant Namdev composed numerous songs in praise of God,

performed 'Keertan'(songs and stories based on religious theme) everywhere and brought about general awakening among the people. He is remembered by every saint of 'Maharashtra, Hindustan, Rajputana and Punjabas the great historic name in the long list of Bhakta. He preached the sublime gospel of love and devotion and liberated the peoples from the shackles of rituals and caste system. He was opposed to idol worship and religious intolerance. He held that salvation could be achieved through Bhakti or devotion to God. He says in his one of the Abhangas:

In his one of r Abhangs he emphasized the same theme that is; one should repeat the name of Hari (Vitthal).

Harivin jine vyarthachi sansari |Jag alankari
mirvit||

Devavin Shabd latake karane |Bhanda
ranjvivane sabhe- majil|

Sant Dnyaneshwar was born in 1275 in Apegaon village on bank of river Godavari near Paithan. Nivruttinath and Sopandev were his brothers. Muktabai was his sister. Bigoted men of the time used to look down upon these children

because they were the offspring of 'Sanyasi'. It happened like this. Their father took 'Sanyas' and retired from worldly life. As a 'Sanyasi', he left home. But later on, obeying the order of his guru, he returned home and started living with his wife. Their four children were born afterwards. The narrow-minded religious leaders did not think it is right that a 'Sanyasi' should have children. People persecuted these children and banished them from their community. He wrote this was the gist of his advice to the people Sant Dnyaneshwar's words are heard in every nook and corner of Maharashtra for the last seven hundred years. The language of ordinary people was Marathi. Sant Dnyaneshwar wrote his outstanding book 'Dnyaneshwari' in Marathi. He thus opened wide for his people the doors of knowledge, where he preached the ideal of brotherhood among all men. He also wrote *Amrutanubhav* and *Hariptah* in praise of Vitthal. He believed in 'Amrutanubhav' "Reality is self-evident and does not require any proof". At a very early age, at Alandi near pune, Dnyaneshwar took 'Samadhi', that is put himself in trance from which he never came out. Even today, on the eleventh day of Ashadh and Kartik, lakhs of pilgrims go to Alandi-Pandhari with devotion.

Sant Eknath carried out the work started by Sant Dnyaneshwar and Sant Namdev. He preached that way the to reach God was through devotion - 'Bhaktimarg'. he wrote numerous songs- 'Abhangas', 'Owees' and 'Bharuds'. His advice to the people was not to accept any distinction of high and low. He made friendship with the poor and downtrodden and taught them devotion to God. His love extended even to the dumb animals. He exhorted the people to love all living beings and he practiced. 'Bhagwat' was written by Sant Eknath. 'Dnyaneshwari' was written 230 years before the birth of Sant Eknath. Eknathi Bhagwat is a lucid commentary on the Bhagwat Purana. Through his Abhangas Sant Eknath has given a simple and straightforward message to the people. For example Sant Eknath mobilized the masses to fight against injustice of dictatorial rulers by way of his 'Bharuds'.

"Eka Janardhani sopa, Vitthal Mantra Japa"

Sant Tukaram was one of the prominent saints in Maharashtra. He was born in Dehu, a town in Pune District. He owned a farm and also a grocery shop. His forefathers used to lend money to the needy people but Sant Tukaram drowned in the river Indrayani, all record of loan papers he had, thus giving relief to many. He would go to neighboring hill and sing songs in praise of God Vitthal. On the eleventh day, 'ekadashi' of the month of Ashad and Kartik, he would go to Pandharpur. He wrote devotional song- 'Abhangas' and performed 'Keertans'. Thousands of flocked to listen to him. Shivaji Maharaj also attended his keertans. Through his keertanas and Abhanga she preached people the virtues of pity, forgiveness and peace of mind. He also taught the simple way to reach the God. The Varkari sect never believed that the importance of knowledge is little. But they gave the top spot to 'Bhakti'. They promoted the idea that mere chanting of the Lord's name can take one closer to Him.

Varkari sect preached the people the equality, that all are equal. Doesn't matter whether they are from lower or upper caste. According to him, He alone is a saint, and God dwells with him who calls the weak and the downrodden as his own.

"Je ka ranjale ganjale ,tyasi mhane jo aapule,
Tochi Sadhu olkhava Dev tethechi janava"

The Varkari saints never expected royal patronage, as Sant Tukaram believes that one should not expectant of any worldly thing like money, wealth, property. Saint Tukaram's reputation eventually reached King Shivaji, who sent a messenger bearing valuable gifts, such as lamps, horses, and gems. Tukaram politely refused the gifts and responded to the king with four of his *abhangas*. In one of the verses, Saint Tukaram complained to King Shivaji: "You seem to provide me exactly the things that do not interest me."

King Shivaji was astounded by Saint Tukaram's attitude of renunciation. So later, the king decided to travel to Lohgaon, near Dehu, to see Saint Tukaram and seek his saintly association and advice. When the king presented more gifts, Tukaram said, "What use is this treasure to me; I want only

Lord Vithoba. Your gesture shows your generosity, but to me these gifts are like pebbles." Saint Tukaram politely asked Shivaji Maharaj to recite the names of God and become a servant of Lord Vithoba.

Another great saint of Maharashtra was Ramdas. Unlike Saint Tukaram, Saint Ramdas believed that only success in Samsara can lead to success in Parmartha and the former was a necessary condition for the latter. He tried to integrate different sciences and Arts of life with religious quest. He advised Shivaji Maharaj "to adorn his body not with clothes and ornaments but with shrewdness and wisdom." Shivaji

Maharaj was greatly inspired by the teachings of Swami Ramdas.

Sant Chokhamela lived in Mangalvedha near Pandharpur in 14th century. He was born in the lower caste family, but his devotion to Lord Vitthala was pure and unmatched. In one of his Abhangas says:

"Chokha donga par bhav novhe donga, kay bhullas varliya ranga"

Sant Sena was a barbar by profession, but his devotion for Lord Vitthal and Pandharpur was at great extent. He gave up his profession and created devotional Abhangas in praise of Vitthal and Pandharpur.

"Jata pandharishi sukhvatejiva, Anande Keshva Bhettachi"

In addition to these male saints there were also some women saints like Saint Janabai, Saint Muktabai, Saint Kanhopatra, Saint Soyarabi, etc., who influenced the society with their religious discourses.

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Muktabai, also known as Muktai, the younger sister of Sant Dnyaneshwar, belonged to the Deshastha Brahmin community. She has been eternalized here verses in her work 'Tatiche Abhang', in which she prompts Dnyaneshwar about his goal of the birth. The 1400 old yogi Changdev Maharaj, enlightened by her preachings, takes her as his spiritual guru. Changdev Maharaj notes Muktai's preaching in another literary work. Damasheti, a compassionate businessman adopts Janabai after seeing her alone in the Panduranga temple. She grows in the devotional environment, along with Saint Namdev, son of Damasheti. She was an excellent poet. Her poetic works are very profound. It was also said, that Lord Panduranga himself used to help her in her daily chores. Janabai belongs to the lowest caste.

A courtesan by caste, she was said to be attracted towards the Bhakti way of living. She was often forced by the Badshah of Bidar to dance for her. She kept on refusing, and completely submerged herself into the devotional practices. She sacrificed her life in a Vitthal temple, to save her sanctity being destroyed by the Badshah. She was the most magnificent example of the widespread of the Bhakti movement.

Conclusion:

Thus, the work of the Varkari Saints brought about a great awakening among the people. Religion once again became a thing to be respected and a spirit of self-reliance was born. People regained the lost confidence. This great awakening among the people brought about by the saints helped Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in his fight for Swaraj.


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