

Horizons of Folk Culture

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Horizons of Folk Culture

Ramachandra Chintaman Dhere

Translated by

Jayant Bhalchandra Bapat

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Horizons of Folk Culture

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Acknowledgements

Jayant Bhalchandra Bapat, the Translator

On the face of it, a translation looks a straightforward and simple affair. Let me assure you, it is far from it. Had it not been for the constant and unwavering help of many individuals, this book would not have seen the light of the day.

At the outset, I must thank Aruna Dhere and Varsha Gajendragadkar, the Dhere sisters who saw it fit to entrust me with this project. It has taken me over one year to complete this task. During this time, their help has been amazing and instantaneous.

Aruna and Varsha undertook this mammoth task of translating all of Anna's works from Marathi into English. They could do this only because of the keen interest shown by Manish Maheshwari both financially and as a philanthropist entrepreneur. How can anyone thank Manish enough? His contribution is invaluable. He has also been very quick to respond to my queries.

Since this book contains many Marathi and Sanskrit verses, I decided to use diacritics where necessary. While they are very useful for correctly pronouncing words, they are also tedious for the proof readers to check. I thank Dilip Bapat, Purushottam Kelkar, Manish Maheshwari and Janvi Ambawata for proof-reading the whole book. When I myself had queries regarding some diacritics, Anne Feldhaus and Greg Bailey gave me immediate help. I owe them a big debt. In spite of her incredibly busy schedule, Anne very kindly agreed to write a few lines about the book on the back cover. Many thanks to her.

My close friend, neighbour and a great artist, John Harris, has happily drawn many drawings for all of the books I have so far published. The cur-

rent book is no exception. I am indebted to him for his enthusiastic and timely help.

Several people at the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute Pune, were very helpful in providing me with high resolution images of Viśirā, Lambapayodharā, and the box into which these images were initially located: Professor Shahida Ansari and Professor Pandurang Sabale, both from the Department of Archaeology, Dr. Neelam Dhapare, curator of the Deccan College Museum and Dr. Gopal Joge. Gopal particularly has been a source of consistent and immediate help. I cannot thank all of them enough.

American Institute of Indian Studies very kindly allowed me to reproduce images of Maṇibhadra Yakṣa, Pūtanāvadha, and Śakunī (Ulukajataka). I particularly thank Vandana Sinha and Sushil Sharma for their help.

Credit for the photos of the Rajamaṭha goes to Miss Jaya Wahane, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai.

My good friend and colleague, Marika Vicziany, has always encouraged me to keep working in the lonesome task of writing books. This book is no exception.

Finally, my nephew Dr. Jeetendra Bapat has very ably handled my monetary and other transactions in India. He deserves special mention.

Jayant Bapat
Melbourne, Australia
November 2025

Image Credits

1. Mañibhadra Yakṣa – Mathura Museum, 1st and 2nd century BCE.
Photo Courtesy: American Institute of Indian Studies, Delhi.
2. Pūtanā's Demise – Harihar Mandir No. 1, Osia, Dist. Jodhpur, Rajasthan.
Photo Courtesy: American Institute of Indian Studies, Delhi.
3. Viśirā and the Bull – 1500 BCE.
Photo Courtesy: Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune.
4. Lambapayodharā and the Earthen Box – 1500 BCE.
Photo Courtesy: Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune.
5. Rājamaṭha (3 Photos) – 17th century CE..
Photo Courtesy: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai.

Note on Diacritics and italics

This volume contains a large number of Marathi, Sanskrit and Kannada words. It also has quotes from Marathi and Sanskrit poetry. In the opinion of the translator, the reader, especially the non-Indian one, needs to be able to pronounce words and phrases correctly in order to understand the intended meaning. This is especially true for poetry.

Mispronunciation can occasionally lead to an entirely different meaning of the word or the phrase.

It is with this thought in mind, that the translator has used the International Diacritic Convention throughout this book to write Marathi, Sanskrit, Kannada and Hindi words. The exception is that the current place names and proper names have been kept as they are.

We understand that the convention is to italicize non-English words and book titles, but in this book, we have chosen not to do so. Due to the high frequency of such terms, excessive italicization would have disrupted the flow and readability of the text.

Foreward

Jayant Bapat: Translator

tasmaiḥ śrī gurave namaḥ

It was around 1978 when I decided to plunge myself into research in sociology. Having spent my lifetime in Organic Chemistry in Australia, this was a challenging undertaking. I vaguely knew what I wanted to do; I had decided to investigate the ‘Śaiva-Gurav’ Temple Priests of Maharashtra for a doctorate degree. However, experience-wise, I had little knowledge of sociological sciences. With great enthusiasm and vigour, I landed in Mumbai and decided to collect material on the background of my research topic. I visited sociology departments in the universities and colleges all over Maharashtra and in India. I also visited hundreds of Śaivite temples and interviewed their pujāris and met pandits and scholars who were known for their academic work. Unfortunately, none of them were familiar with my topic and could not suggest as to how I should proceed. All of them were however in agreement on one thing: if there was someone who would know about my topic, it would be Śrī Aṇṇā Dhere (Ramchandra Chintaman Dhere). They all suggested that I approach him.

Because he was such a well-known researcher in folk-culture and religion, dozens of people wanted to see him every day. Because of this, his wife Indubala was very protective of him and I was told that I would have to play it carefully. It was my great luck and I probably made a good impression upon her that I was allowed to see Aṇṇā in December 1978 on my first visit to India for this undertaking.

Like every other meeting I had with him, this was a memorable meeting. He opened for me many doors in folk literature, culture and religion. At the speed of a bullet train, he would make suggestions as to what I needed to do.

It was often difficult to keep pace with his spoken word. I would fill pages and pages of my notebook with his suggestions. While I was in Pune, I visited him once a week and reported on my progress. With the background knowledge Aṇṇā gave me, I wrote my first journal paper on Gurav Temple priests and published it in a prestigious journal. Aṇṇā was more pleased than I was. He then suggested I examine Gurav Jātipurāṇas. Lady Luck was with me and I was able to get hold of several Gurav Jātipurāṇas and published two papers on them. Aṇṇā was so proud that he mentioned me in the conferences he attended.

For the next several years, it was my routine to visit India around December each year and go on my pilgrimage to the Dhere household. On each of these visits, Aṇṇā would present me with a signed copy of his latest book. Dozens of his autographed books are my proud possessions.

Professors Anne Feldhaus translated Aṇṇā's well-known book on Vitthal in 2011. His other equally important book, the Lajjagauri, was of great interest to scholars the world over and I asked his permission to translate it into English. He was most receptive to the idea and gave me his written permission. Unfortunately, I was unable to produce this translation while he was alive. When I eventually did, I sent it to Pune and asked Aruna to put it in front of his picture frame. I had fulfilled my promise to him, albeit after his demise.

It is with great delight that I have now translated another of Aṇṇā's beautiful books, 'Horizons of Folk Culture' (*Lokasaṃskṛtīcī Kṣitīje*) written in 1971. With the help of Manish Maheshwari, Aṇṇā's daughters Aruna and Varsha have undertaken the monumental task of translating all of Aṇṇā's books into English. I wish them every luck. Aṇṇā wrote over a hundred books on folk culture and religion.

Aṇṇā's greatest achievement was his deep understanding, analysis, and interpretation of Indian, and especially Marathi folk religion and culture. He felt dismayed and hurt as he saw the rapid decline and even disappearance of the folk religion that he knew from his childhood. He rightly believed that it was of paramount importance to study and record folk-songs, folk-tales, folk dances, folk religious observances, and folk beliefs in order to understand folk-culture and hence the history of Indian cultural thought. On this theme, he wrote several books.

Aṇṇā's work chronicles Marathi village life, its daily observances, the invisible socio-religious thread, however loose, that binds it together, and

the complex annual cycle of rituals that the folk observe. Indian village culture and religiosity depended on and still does, on shared values and effort. Nomadic Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī-the fortune-tellers advise the peasant about the best time to sow, Śāhirs visit regularly to entertain and inform people, and Vāsudev and Gondhaḷīs kept folk and Goddess religion alive. Aṇṇā has chronicled all of this in a very informative and lucid manner.

One of the main reasons that I chose this particular book for translation is an extensive introduction to it written by the late Arvind Manglurkar, an erudite scholar of his time. For this reason, I also do not feel the need to elaborate further on the theme of the book.

Aṇṇā's language was highly Sanskritised, scholarly, and very poetic. It often involved nuances which are at times very difficult to bring into another language. I have done my best to do so.

Having spent over nearly sixty years of my life outside India, I am far more familiar with the scholarship of overseas Indianists and Indologists. They have also been the main readers of my writing. Hence, in this translation, I have made extensive use of footnotes to make it easier for the non-Indian reader to understand the topic and the theme in question.

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The Horizons of Folk Culture have been lit up

Preface by Arvind Manglurkar¹

Ramchandra Chintaman Dhere is an exceptional researcher in Marathi literature. Based on his researches, he has, for many years, given the Marathi reader important inferences and conclusions about his work. More importantly, these inferences have been accepted by the majority of scholars in the field. Even those who do not agree entirely with Śrī² Dhere's conclusions, still have to think seriously about their own reservations. This is because Śrī Dhere's inferences are based on firm foundations. His logic is serious and thoughtful. There is no room in his arguments for one-upmanship, neither is there an urge to shut the other person up. Unlike some of the scholars I know, Śrī Dhere's writing never has the sarcastic edge. His arguments do not suffer from pre-conceived ideas either. Like some scholars, he does not therefore decide upon a particular conclusion at the very start and then go about finding support for these built-in ideas. The last thing he would contemplate doing is to present a series of questions like a lawyer to leave the audience spellbound!

1. Translator's Note: Professor Arvind Manglurkar (1909-1986) was born in Africa where his father ran a business. With the unexpected early demise of his parents, he came to Pune at the tender age of 10 where he was supported by his uncle. Arvind obtained Masters degrees both in Marathi and Sanskrit and taught at the S.P. College in Pune. His command over literature, music and the arts was exceptional; he was often called an 'Encyclopaedia' in these fields. He was also a great orator. For over ten years, he was the secretary of the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad (Maharashtra Literary Society). The work co-edited by him in 1958 on Marathi philology, is still used extensively by scholars. His annotated translation of Mammaṭa's '*Kāvyaprakāśa*' is a highly regarded work in poetics. His other works include annotated translations of Kalidasa's *Meghadūta*, Hāl Satavāhan's *Śephalikā*, Bhartṛhari's *Nitiśataka* and Jñāneśvara's *Pasāyadān*.

2. Śrī is an honorific title used in Marathi in referring to a male. The equivalent title for a female is Śrīmatī.

He does not bamboozle the reader with a highly ornate and synthetic writing style either. As a matter of fact, one knows that Śrī Dhere is highly skilled in Marathi and that the reader loves his style of writing. His book, *Amṛtakanyā*, and his introduction to the last chapter of the present book are testimony to this fact. Śrī Dhere is also a born poet. But when he writes about his researches, surprisingly, he is able to keep his poetic style well away with a healthy and untroubled distance. This brings to his writing a cool scholastic style and discipline which are devoid of literary embellishments. He then follows a straight logical style. When he selects a topic for his writing, he collects every available book and resource and then reads them all. After that, he examines all of the evidence available within this material and compares it with the evidence he has collected from other sources. He then weighs all of the evidence carefully, puts it in an order, analyses it and then puts it together. Finally, he will expound it and draw his conclusions. Like a skilled surgeon who does operation systematically and methodically, Śrī Dhere does his job and reaches a firm conclusion.

From the number of references he quotes, one can easily surmise how varied and abundant Śrī Dhere's reading is. His reading is also ardent and assiduous. His knowledge of Sanskrit is excellent. However, he also knows how important the knowledge of Prakṛt is. He knows Hindi very well and his English is equally good. With all this background, when he attempts to pursue the study of a particular topic, a certain speed automatically develops in his writing. Answers to difficult questions suddenly appear in his mind. New horizons appear beyond the ones which were not visible before. Suddenly, each and every thread of a complex puzzle unravels itself. Whatever is grey suddenly becomes clear. Whatever appeared distant, suddenly comes closer. Whatever appeared unimportant, suddenly shows its usefulness. Finally, whatever appeared illogical, suddenly becomes logical.

I must mention one more thing about Śrī Dhere, and that is his devout nature. He is intensely devoted to Indian Saint-Poets. He also worships the populace and folk culture. This however does not mean that his faith is blind. It does not matter what the topic is, he will study it in great detail, deeply and thoroughly. That is his devotion to that topic. It must be because of this devotion to what he studies, he has developed a very likable and constructive intellect. In Sanskrit literature, one often comes across the refutation of an opinion. This refutation however borders on the total destruction of the opposition. Śrī Dhere's refutation on the other hand is nothing more than

just removing a pawn on the chessboard. There is never an attempt to throw away the board itself. That is why his writing keeps the thread of his analysis and explanations intact. When one reads his writing, one never experiences anything without substance or gloom. On the other hand, the reader always has the happy feeling that he has entered a newly constructed and dainty home.

The Plan of the Book:

All the special attributes of Śrī Dhare I have mentioned above, can be seen in many of the books he has written. They are very much present in this book as well. As a matter of fact, all of the articles included in the present volume have been published separately in various magazines and this volume is just a collection of them all. However, in spite of this, there is a common thread running through them.

What is the cohesive thread running through the articles in this volume? I feel it is the Yakṣās and the upward mobility of gods and godlings in general. The Yakṣās have permeated every layer of folk culture within pan-India. Their presence can be felt ingrained within social organizations and into gods and godlings. Śrī Dhare never fails to mention the substantial debt we owe to the Saint-Poets of India for their input in raising community awareness of these issues. In this way, by interweaving the warp and weft threads of folk culture and the contribution of Saint-Poets towards it together, Śrī Dhare presents us with a beautifully woven garment.

Most of the articles in this book have been published before. There is however, some new material. The last article, 'Bālagrahancī Upāsanā' has been written specifically for this volume. One of the reasons for the publication of this volume at this particular time is the fact that this happens to be Viśvakarmā Mudraṇālaya's silver jubilee year. It is particularly pleasing to note that this silver jubilee is being celebrated by the display of the unity of all Indians through a literary volume. Viśvakarmā Mudraṇālaya deserves special appreciation and mention for this.

There are nine articles in this volume. Each one of these maintains its close relationship with the most fundamental layers of folk culture. To the common reader, these relationships are not easily discernible. However, when Śrī Dhare takes us towards the elucidation of folk culture with the material he has carefully collected, the detailed sociological study he has done,

the amazing insight he has developed, and the etymological knowledge he has, every fold of the complex pattern of the material slowly becomes visible to us. Our curiosity is somewhat placated but at the same time aroused. Our doubts are answered, but many new ones arise. If there were no doubts in the first place, new ones arise for the first time. We travel a long distance but we then start seeing the distant road ahead. We are not baffled but remain mesmerized. One feels that one has seen so much new material. However, one also feels that whatever remains to be seen is a lot more than what one has.

Chapter 1: Folk Aspects in the Biography of Śrīkṛṣṇa

This is the first chapter in this collection. In here, Śrī Dhare has rendered a poignant, penetrating and new meaning to three myths in the life of Śrīkṛṣṇa from the Śrīmadbhāgavatam: Pūtanāvadha, Arjunavṛkṣotpāṭaṇa and Kālī-yāmardana. Śrī Dhare's says that according to the belief of the populace, Pūtanā, who fed Śrīkṛṣṇa with the poisoned milk from her breasts, was a representative of the evil spirits which possess children. He has also listed the adjectives which portray this. Such evil beings (Bālagrahas) are servants of Skanda, the son of Śiva. A commentator of the Mahābhārata has said that the region of Mathurā is termed 'Pautana'. Śrī Dhare comments that although the composers of the Śrīmadbhāgavatam have given the story of Pūtanā a pleasing slant, Pūtanā's real character cannot be hidden. Śrī Dhare has discussed this real character of Pūtanā in the last chapter of this book.

The two Arjuna trees which Kṛṣṇa uprooted were in fact two Yakṣas called Nalakūbara and Maṇigrīva. In this story, one can see the remnants of Yakṣa worship which was prevalent from the time of the Buddha. Yakṣas normally reside in trees and such trees are called, 'Caityavṛkṣa'. Ancient literature is full of the adorative mentions of Caityavṛkṣas. The fact that two Yakṣas in the form of trees in Nanda's backyard eventually became disciples of Kṛṣṇa is nothing but the Sanskritization and upward mobility of these two minor godlings. This important and significant myth is worthy of attention and gives credit to the composers of the Bhāgavatam. Yakṣas have also been mentioned in Sanskrit scriptures. For instance, in the discussion about 'Aitihiyapramāṇa', an example that is commonly found is,

'asmin vaṭe yakṣaḥ tiṣṭhati'

(Lit: in this tree, a Yakṣa lives).

This reference would be very appropriate for Śrī Dhere's argument about Yakṣas. There is a Nyāya³ called, 'vaṭe yakṣanyāya' about Yakṣas in Sanskrit philosophy as well. The Kenopaniṣad talks about the relationship of Yakṣas with vegetation. It is possible that Kālidāsa, knowing the close connection between Yakṣas and clouds, may have used that relationship in his epic poem 'Meghadūta.'

It is clear that the myth of Kāliyāmardana is about a serpent king whose job it is to protect waters. In Indian tradition, waters were protected by serpents and Yakṣas. Here, one may remember the Mahabharata story about a Yakṣa who sought answers to his questions before allowing anyone to drink the waters he protected. Even to this date, many lakes in Kashmir are protected by serpents. Viz. Śeṣanāga. The myth about Kṛṣṇa defeating the serpent Kāliyā and bringing the dead cowherds back to life with his divine eyesight is testimony not only to the constructive intellect of the composers of the Mahabharata but also a tale of the upward mobility of minor gods. One can see that from the sea of purāṇic tales generally considered to be gossip or idle talk, precious pearls such as the present article by Śrī Dhere can also be produced.

Chapter 2: Gondhaḷa:

The second article in this volume, *Bhūtamātecā Mahotsava*, deals with the celebration of the 'Mother' of ghosts and goblins, Bhūtamāta. Śrī Dhere opines that the current popular folk performance staged all over Maharashtra called 'Gondhaḷa,' owes its lineage to this ancient celebration. The Cālukya dynasty king of Kalyāṇī, Someśvara the third, had ordered the performance of a dance called 'Citragoṇḍalī' in celebration of the Bhūtamāta. Śrī Dhere believes that Citragoṇḍalī, which dates back to the twelfth century and before, was the ancient form of the modern day Gondhaḷa. Quoting many experts, the composer of the 'Saṅgītaratnākara', Śārṅgdeva, says that the Gondaḷinṛtya came out of Karnataka. In view of the fact that Someśvara's city of Kalyāṇī was in Karnataka, one can easily see why the experts mentioned by Śārṅgdeva said that Citragoṇḍalī came from that state. However, one wonders who this Bhūtamāta is!

3. Translator's Note: Nyāya is one of the six systems (*darśanas*) of Indian philosophy. It is central to the analysis of logic and epistemology.

The Prabhasakhaṇḍa of the Skandapurāṇa quotes a discussion between Śiva and Pārvatī. According to it, the Bhūtamāta has been engulfed by dead bodies and ghosts. There are also nine crore Gaṇas⁴ surrounding her. In the second half of the month of Vaiśākha, Bhūtamāta is celebrated by people. They smear their bodies with mud and dance as if intoxicated. Bhūtamāta is fierce and dreadful. It is said that during her celebration, 'Preraṇī' and 'Prekṣaṇī' dances should be performed. This celebration of Bhūtamāta has many similarities with the annual celebration of 'Śimgā'. There is a shrine to Bhūtamāta in the Prabhāsakṣetra of Saurāṣṭra as well. Although he gives no proof for it, Śrī Dhare thinks that this shrine must have gone to Saurāṣṭra from the Karnataka-Maharashtra region. One needs to find out more details about that shrine. At least in Maharashtra, Bhūtamāta is not worshipped anymore. However, some Jain families worship her as their clan deity (Kuladevī). Śrī Dhare's attempts to connect Goṇḍalīnṛtya, the folk dances Pre-
raṇī and Prekṣaṇī, and the mention of Gondhaḷa and Gondhaḷī in ancient Marathi literature are highly noteworthy. The Jñānadevī (13.1004) gives the meaning of Gondal as 'a ghost'. In the later Mahānubhāva literature, words such as 'Yoginīcakra' and 'Śaktīcakrameḷa' are used in this connection. In recent literature, Bhūtanṛtya has been called 'Gondaḷa'. There exist many such examples. This goes to show that Gondhaḷa is a dance which is a part of worship. This is the background Śrī Dhare has given to explain the performance of the Gondhaḷa during the worship of the goddess.

I feel like including some of my own remarks over here. 1) It would have been better if Śrī Dhare had told us exactly where in Karnataka the Cālukya's city of Kalyāṇī was. 2) The meaning suggested by Śrī Dhare to Jñānadevī Ovī (13.1004) is generally correct but is not precise. In that Ovī, the word used by Śrī Dhare, 'Gondalī, is to me incorrect. I believe the word needs to be 'Gondal'. If that is taken as correct, then 'Gondalīm' would be its grammatical form as locative single. It would then mean, 'why should a sage not be taken in place of a ghost?' 3) In case of Jñānadevī, why not take the old established Rajwade interpretation? 4) In the Ovī of Dasopanta (1.2391) the word 'Gondaḷa' has its meaning totally changed. In that case why does Śrī Dhare say that the meaning intended in the Ovī, resonates well with the actual meaning? I think it is wrong.

In spite of these minor criticisms of mine, I believe that Śrī Dhare's article does not lose its prime importance by any means. As a matter of fact, this

4. Translator's Note: The Gaṇas belong to the ghost and goblin class and are servants especially of Skanda, Śiva's son.

is the first time that a lot of highly valuable information about the worship of the goddess, in the form of 'Gondhaḷa', is coming out. Not only that, this information is historically well-researched, well-referenced and quite comprehensive, and comes to limelight for the first time.

Chapter 3: *Yakṣa Saṁskṛtī*:

From the third article, 'Maṇibhadra Yakṣa,' Śrī Dhere starts elaborating the place of Yakṣas in Indian folk culture. The king of Yakṣas, Yakṣarāja Kuber, is still mentioned at the end of our daily worship regimen of *mantrapuṣpāñjalī*. On the thirteenth day of 'Dhanada-Trayodaśī' during the festival of Divalī, he is still worshipped to this day. His deputy, Maṇibhadra Yakṣa, was highly popular within some layers of our society. In the Sabhāparva of the Mahābhārata, sage Nārada has described Maṇibhadra as the next in importance to Kuber and has used the adjective, 'Dhanada'⁵ to him. It would thus appear that the tradition of 'Dhanada-Trayodaśī' is even older than the Mahābhārata. After this, Maṇibhadra has been mentioned in the 'Nalopākhyāna'. There he is described as 'Mahāyaśa Yakṣarāja'. If one does not worship him, all kinds of calamities fall upon the worshipper. Maṇibhadra is the deity of business people. That is why he is very important on Dhana-Trayodaśī. His wealth-giving (Dhanad) description has also been included in the 'Kuṇḍadharopākhyana of the Śāntiparva of the Mahābhārata. In the 'Āśvamedhika Parva, there is a mention of Yudhiṣṭhira obtaining a buried treasure by the grace of Kuber. The Rāmāyaṇa states that in the war against Rāvaṇa, Yakṣa Maṇibhadra was the commander-in-chief of Kubera's army. The Vāyupurāṇa mentions that Yakṣa Maṇibhadra has his residence near lake Achhoda. This statement will no doubt remind people of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's 'Kādambarī'. Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal believes the mountain peak called 'Māñā' near Badrināth is where Maṇibhadra resides. Maṇibhadra has also been mentioned in many other Hindu works and Buddhist literature as well.

The group of businessmen whom Damayantī saw in the forest, were worshippers of Maṇibhadra. They had crossed the river Vetravatī (presently called Beṭavā) near the town of Vidiśā. There are still Yakṣa icons around this place and also places of Yakṣa worship. A huge image a well-known Yakṣa found in the Vetravatī river is in the museum at Vidiśā and I have personal-

5. Translator's Note: Dhanada means the giver of wealth.

ly seen it. This is a definite proof for Śrī Dhere's conjectures. The nomadic Vanjārīs in this area bury their treasures in these areas where they stay overnight. For the purpose of relocation, they build a raised quadrangular seat so as to identify them later. In order to protect them from others, they smear Sindura on this seat so as to give the seat a godly status. According to Śrī Dhere, this custom of the Vanjārīs is related to the resting place of the Yakṣas and the worship of Maṇibhadra. This is because the function of the Yakṣas is to protect (buried) wealth. Such places are usually situated in forests close to a lake or river where one can stay overnight. It is particularly important to know that the place where a group of Maṇibhadra worshippers met Damayanti should be full of such quadrangular seats and also a huge image of a Yakṣa.

Chapter 4: Narasiṃha Yakṣa:

Śrī Dhere's article, 'The Mystery of the Rājamaṭha' is strongly supported by references from Mahānubhāva literature. The abode of Govindaprabhū in Ṛddhipūra is known famously as 'Rājamaṭha'. However, what does the term Rājamaṭha mean? The answer is that the temples of Nṛsiṃha are called Rājamaṭhas. This statement has several proofs in ancient literature. The abode where Nṛsiṃha discarded his ferocious form and assumed a calm and placid form is called 'Rājamaṭha'. There are many such Nṛsiṃha temples in Marāṭhawāḍā to this date. Some of their names are Sām (= Sām̐ba) and Rāj (= Nṛsiṃha), which are self-explanatory. It is also worth remembering that two towns in Marāṭhawāḍā, 'Sāmbakheḍe' and 'Rājasadan' are both connected with Nṛsiṃha. The segment 'Rāj' in the word Rājasadan naturally refers to Nṛsiṃha. Another name for Nṛsiṃha is Sām̐rāj, which obviously refers to Nṛsiṃha's placid form. But why is Nṛsiṃha called 'Rāj'? To explain this, Śrī Dhere has mentioned and unravelled a very complex sociological process. It is difficult to elaborate it completely in these introductory pages. However, it tells us that Nṛsiṃha is one of Vīrs out of the fifty-two known Vīrs such as the Vetāla. He is also ferocious and the controller of the blood-thirsty mothers (Mātṛkās) who were invoked by Śiva at the time of the destruction of Andhakāsura. These fifty-two Vīrs belong to the category of Yakṣas and Nṛsiṃha is a lion-headed Yakṣa. This is the same Nṛsiṃha who was taken out of the Yakṣa category and elevated to an incarnation of Viṣṇu by our ancient religious preceptors.

Śrī Dhere has also explained why Nṛsiṃha appeared out of a wooden pillar. Just as Yakṣas were thought of residing in trees, their images were also made out of wood. One of the Jain Āgamas has said in one place, 'if this wooden image of Mudgarapānī⁶ were alive, he would not have put me in this formidable calamity'. All of this thus means that the wooden image of Yakṣa-Nṛsiṃha must have become the wooden post in the myth of the *avatāra* of Nṛsiṃha. The term Vīr is synonymous with the term, 'Rājā', both mean a Yakṣa. Kuber is a 'Rājārāja' (Meghadūta, parva 3). Also, the Mantrapuṣpāñjalī⁷ addresses him as 'Mahārāja'.

Nāg-Narsobā is another such curious term. These days, we worship the cobra during the month of Śrāvaṇa. We have however forgotten to worship Narsobā during this month. Nāg-Nṛsiṃha-Yakṣa is a chain. Otherwise, why would Nṛsiṃha appear along with Nāg?

Śrī Dhere's conclusion here is, the term 'Rājamaṭh' exemplifies another instance where the tendency of Indian culture to embody the harmonious coherence of myths is yet again demonstrated.

Chapter 5: Tarrāh-Kaḷage:

In the fifth article with the title, 'The background to Śahirī', Śrī Dhere has demonstrated the antiquity Śahirī performances. In his work 'Dāsboḍh', Samartha Rāmdās has divided poets into three classes: Dhīṭa, Pāṭh and Prāsādik. Among them, Dhīṭa have mentioned the Śāhirs. Śāhir is a term that came to prominence during Islamic rule in India. When one looks for its equivalent term in local languages, one finds that they were called, 'Gāṇa' (masculine, meaning a male singer) and Gāṇī (feminine, a woman singer). A similar word is 'Nācaṇ' (One who dances). In Gomantaka, the men who accompany singing and dancing women (Kalāvantiṇs) are called, 'Gāṇa' to this date. Gāṇas were also among the people who accompanied Bimbadev Yādav to Konkaṇa. These people sang accompanied by a Duff and were called, 'Daḡgāṇa'. Two alternative forms of the word Gāṇa are, Gāvana and Gāvaṇa. These names were in vogue from the time of the Yādavas until recently. Although Daff songs

6. Translator's Note: Mudgarapānī (Holder of the Mudgar, a wooden club) was a Yakṣa around 100 BCE.

7. Translator's Note: The Mantrapuṣpāñjalī (Lit: Mantras in the form of a bouquet of flowers) is chanted at the end of all pujas. It has specific mentions of Kuber, as the king of Yakṣas and a great king (Mahārāja). (Skt. कुबेराय वैश्रवणाय महाराजाय नमः)

often consisted of spiritual puzzles, Marathi saint-poets did not at all respect them. They were totally against such barren play of words purporting to be embedded into spirituality.

These Śāhirs belong to two different groups, Śiva and Śaktī. The Śiva group is called 'Turā' and the Śaktī group is called, 'Kalagī'. According to etymologists both Kalgī and Turā mean the same thing and that is, a head gear. Śrī Dhere however does not agree with this interpretation. His main question is how these two came to represent Śiva and Śaktī. According to him, 'Tarrāh' (meaning a memorial stone or a raised quadrangular seat) is a Malayalam word and in Kerala, it means a memorial for a warrior. In the Kannaḍa language, the word used for a memorial stone is 'kaḷ'. Both in Karnataka and Maharashtra, one finds memorial stones spread all over the place. Many of these are also become places of worship by the villagers. In Marathi one calls them, 'Vīragaḷ' whereas in Karnataka they are called, 'Vīrakaḷ'. Similar to words such as Kāgadapatra, Arjavinantī and Bājarahāt, which consists of two parts meaning the same thing, the Malayalam (Keraliya) word 'Tarrāh' entered Karnataka. With the process of close connection during the process of translation, the Kannaḍa word with the same meaning, 'kaḷ' was attached to it. To the translation compound, 'Tarrākaḷ', the suffix 'ge' was attached to make the word, 'Tarrākaḷage'.

After this elaboration, Śrī Dhere has turned his attention to the antiquity of 'Gaṇagaḷana'. It is but expected that a folk-poet will pay homage to 'Gaṇa'.⁸ However, how does the 'Gaḷaṇa'⁹ enter this picture? Historically, it seems that a male 'Naṭyā' who has been described by Śekh Mahammad, used to act as 'Rādhā'¹⁰ and hence a Gaḷaṇa in the performances of folk theatre called 'Kṛṣṇalīlā'.¹¹ Śrī Dhere says that Kṛṣṇalīlā is as old as the time of the Yādavas. He has not given any explanation for this assertion and I feel that a more detailed account would have been beneficial here. It would have teased out more information about Kṛṣṇalīlā.

In this respect, one should note that performances of 'Kaḷage-Turā' used to take place all over Maharashtra during the annual celebration of Vīr Me-

8. Translator's Note: The word 'Gaṇa' can mean one of two things in this context. It could mean the god, 'Gaṇeśa' who is paid homage before one starts anything in Hindu thought. Alternatively, it could also mean a 'group'. This would mean the performer acknowledging his troupe.

9. Translator's Note: A *Gauḷaṇ* is a milk-maid.

10. Translator's Note: Rādhā is Kṛṣṇa's consort.

11. Translator's Note: Lit: Escapades of Kṛṣṇa.

morial. These fifty-two Vīrs and the sixty-four Yoginis are minor godlings. In the opinion of Dr. Aggrawal, the term 'Vīr denotes a Yakṣa. However, Hanuman the monkey-god has also been included in this list. During this annual celebration, the Kalgī and Turrā used to compete against each other for the coveted trophies. They would present complex and difficult mythological and spiritual puzzles to the opposition in a sing-song fashion. The opposition would then have to answer it in a sing-song way as well. This way they would out-do each other. One is well- aware of the stories of Yakṣas seeking answers to difficult questions from those who were seeking their approval for some purpose. This is evident from the 'Yakṣapraśnas' in the Mahābhārata. Not only that, but the lineage of Yakṣas can be traced to 'Brahmodyas'¹² of the Yajurveda. This tradition has also found its way into Buddhist literature.

In this connection, one also comes across 'Caityapūjā'. Etymologically, the word Caitya comes from the word, 'Citā'. There is a custom of planting a tree at the place where a person has died, as a memorial to that person. Such trees were considered sacred. Although Śrī Dhere has not mentioned this, one is reminded of the sacred 'Ājāna' tree planted on the memorial to Jñānadev. The same goes for a 'Tulsi-Vṛndāvana'¹³ built in memorial of a 'Sati'. The two trees, Pipal and Vaḍ¹⁴ are also connected with last rites. Both of these trees were thought of as Yakṣas and were worshipped. Hopkins has said that, 'those who have valorously died with a sword in hand, belong to the class of Guhyakas'¹⁵. The Vīrs become Yakṣas after their death. The worship of Yakṣas eventually became part of the worship of gods in higher Hinduism. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that according to the purāṇās, Kubera, the king of Yakṣas, worships Śiva as a respected friend. Śrī Dhere has managed to unravel the intricate relationship between the worship of Vīrs, Yakṣas, and Śiva and Śaktī. In this manner, Śrī Dhere has effectively shown the inclusiveness of Indian culture.

12. Translator's Note: Brahmodyas were riddling contests between various priests in Vedic time.

13. Translator's Note: A Vṛndāvana is a square structure constructed of bricks with a hole in the middle where holy basil is planted. This used to be a feature of every backyard in a household in the past.

14. Botanically, *Ficus religiosa*: Pipal, and *Ficus bengalensis*: Vaḍ).

15. Translator's Note: Guhyakas (literally "hidden ones") is a class of supernatural beings in Hindu mythology similar to Yakṣas. They are attendants of Kubera, the keeper of wealth, and protect hidden treasures. They live in mountain caves.

Chapter 6: Lokagāyak:

The sixth article, 'Kalyāṇ and Pahāṭagāṇ' is about common folk singers on the village scene. We have already come across many mentions of the Gāṇs. These singers had several sub-groups such as Ṭhakur, Kalyāṇ, Ṭīpgāṇ, Bhāṭ, Daurī and Pahāṭgāṇ. Many of such groups do not exist anymore. However, every now and then, one finds their mentions in the ancient literature of the Mahānubhāv and Saint-poets. There is mention of a Bhāṭ by the name of Kalyāṇakīrti in the work, 'Rukmiṇīsvayaṃvar' by Narendra. One finds it mentioned later in various places as well and this has led Śrī Dhare to suggest that this name may have been derived from a professional Bhāṭ by the name of Kalyāṇ who used to sing laudatory songs for rich patrons.

Deducing from a mention by Janī Janardan, it appears that there was a class of folk singers called Pahāṭagāṇ. Like the Paṅgul, they would have sung at dawn. The ever so vigilant researcher that he is, until he finds more evidence, Śrī Dhare has not elaborated further on this topic. Instead, he has posed some questions for the reader. At the end of the chapter, he has provided us with two rare texts of Pahāṭagāṇ, one by Samartha Rāmadās and the other by Narahari Mālo. The latter is a part of Śrī Dhare's own collection. In the first Pahāṭagāṇ, in verses 19 and 20, I can clearly see echoes of the well-known Vedic mantra, 'dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā'.

Chapter 7: Lokarānjaka:

'Bhāṇḍance Bhaṇḍapurāṇa' is, in a way, a funny topic. In the days gone by, Bhāṇḍas was a class of people who entertained the populace by deliberately resorting to obscene talk. Because of this, poet-saints such as Ekanath and Tukobā have severely criticized them. The word Bhāṇḍa has come into Marathi from the Sanskrit verb, 'Bhaṇḍa', which means to make fun, to frolic and to resort to merriment. Bhāṇḍaṇa (quarrel), Bhaṇḍāvaṇe (to harass) are words in the same class. This is because in a quarrel, there is often verbal abuse and use of swearwords and obscene words. The same thing can happen in harassment as well. We come across the Bhaṇḍa in the southern Indian 'Yakṣagāṇ'. In the state of Andhra, one sees him in the form of 'Vikaṭakavi'. In Rajasthan, there is actually a caste called Bhāṇḍas. These Bhāṇḍas are spread in the north up to Kashmir, and to the north-east up to Bengal. Because of the deliberate and clever use of obscenity in their speech, the common folk

liked them. It is interesting to know that because of their popularity, even the saint-poets have composed some poetry in the language style of the Bhaṇḍas. Although the poetic construction is superficially in the style of the Bhaṇḍas, the main theme with the poetry of the saint-poets is of course spirituality. In a folk theatre called, 'Bhāṇa', one can see both words, Bhāṇḍa and Bhaṇa. The genre of Bhāṇa, uses wild and untamed language similar to what the Bhāṇḍas do. It is possible that both roots, bhaṇḍa and bhaṇa have come into Sanskrit from Prakṛt.

Chapter 8: Folk Astrologers (Lokajyotiṣī):

The eighth article, Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī, is long and full of new information. The subject of the article is 'folk-astrology'. Called, the 'Jyotiṣa', there were many kinds of such folk astrologers generally called the 'Joṣis'. Among these, the 'Sahadev Joṣis' call themselves the descendants of Sahadev. The format of the astrological predictions here consists of a discussion between Sahadev and a woman called, 'Bhāḍaḷī'. The conjectures which develop out of these conversations is the subject of this fortune-telling. The topics which are usually covered in these discussions are, predictions about agriculture, possibility of rains, and auspicious and inauspicious times to undertake tasks. Out of these, several aphorisms about the possibility of rains are used by most people even to this date. For example, 'if it rains during the constellation of Swatī, there would be abundant crop.'¹⁶ Other than this, proverbs such as 'the noise made by the house-lizard, to sneeze, the call of the bird Pinglā etc. are also included in such predictions. In connection with Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī, Śrī Dhere has informed us about several weird and wonderful stories about such astrologers and their predictions in various parts of India. In this connection, it is interesting to note that in almost all of the States of India, these folk astrologers seem to be born out of the intermingling of castes. I fail to see why this is so. The period of Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī aphorisms seems to be around 1200 BCE. Another interesting fact about these aphorisms is that the Marathi ones in Maharashtra are often quite similar to the ones which exist in the State of Haryana. Only their language is the local Punjabi-Rajasthani mix. Śrī Dhere has quoted many examples of these. There are several aphorisms in

16. Translator's Note: In Marathi: पडतील स्वाती तर पिकतील माणिक-मोती. (Lit. If it rains in the constellation of Swatī, one will grow precious stones).

the Rajasthani language as well. Among their collections, Bhaḍḍali-Purāṇ, Sahadev-Puraṇ and Meghamālā are the important ones.

In connection with the Bhāruḍ literature in Marathi, one must mention a class of people known as 'Ḍākulatā'. It is difficult to find a satisfactory etymology of the word, Ḍākulatā. In particular, why should there be a 'l' in there? It has also been recorded alternatively as Ḍākutā, Ḍākotā and Ḍācocā. The Ḍākot Brāhmins in Rajasthan belong to the class of Pañcagaud Brāhmins and are worshippers of Saturn. Śrī Dhere has recorded many of their extraordinary customs and tales about their origin. In Rajasthan they are known as Ḍaṅk-Bhaḍḍali whereas in Bengal they are called Ḍāk and Bhaḍḍali. The astrologers known in Maharashtra as 'Sarode' are in fact Ḍākots from Rajasthan. One finds the surname Sarode in Khandesh as well.

In conclusion, Sarodā, Sarode, Ḍākulatā and Ḍākot are all the same. The aphorisms in Gujarat are termed 'Bhaḍaḷivākye' without the mention of Sahadev. They are no earlier than 1500 CE. The collection of the aphorisms of 'Ḍākvacanāvalī' is found in Bhojapurī and Maithilī tongues as well. In the Hindi speaking areas of India, one finds the mention of a couple, Ghāg-Bhaḍḍarī.

There is no doubt in my mind that these manifestations of folk fortune-telling in the various States of India invite further research and tell us about the unity of pan-Indian thought.

In here, I feel like mentioning in particular that the Crow, Tittar and Papihā,¹⁷ are birds whose call is thought to be important in telling fortune. These birds have often been used for this purpose,¹⁸ This aspect of their use has even entered North Indian classical music. Those familiar with it will know the composition 'kagavā bole morī aṭariā' in the Rāga Multānī. In the well-known Marathi composition by Jñāneśvara, 'paila to ge kākū kākātāhe', the meaning of the crow's call is evident.

Chapter 9: The Beautiful Poetry in Ancient Archaeology:

The subject of the last essay, 'Worship of the Bālagrahas', is the discovery of earthen-ware images of two goddess and an ox in the excavations at Ināmgāv

17. Translator's Note: The Tittar is called a partridge in English whereas the Papihā is the common Cuckoo.

18. Translator's Note: The frequency, time and timbre of the call of these birds are used to decide auspicious or inauspicious times for the humans in the vicinity.

in 1970-71. Both of these goddess images display elongated breasts and one of them is without a head. Śrī Dhere is asking himself what the purpose and meaning of these images is. He feels that the inferences drawn by archaeologists are often very general and gross. That is why Śrī Dhere has made the images talk. This essay by Śrī Dhere has the ability of making the dead talk. He has thrown an entirely new light on the topic. For the rather dry archaeologists, Śrī Dhere's essay would be like a piece of beautiful poetry.

We make and worship earthenware images of the Nagobā (the cobra), Gaṇeśa, Gokūḷa, the Ox at the time of Poḷā, Baḷīraṇā and Śiva, for their worship in connection with their festivals. We are amazed to find that this tradition has existed in India for over 3000 years. It is also celebrated overseas as well. The worship of Mātṛkās and Mātṛdevatās in ancient. The ancients saw them in their forms as Sarjak (creatrixes), Rakṣak (protectors), and Bhakṣak (devourers). The Mātṛkā by the name of Maheśvarī rides an Ox because of her association with Śiva. The Śalya Parva of the Mahābhārata gives a very long list of the Mātṛkās. It is highly interesting to know that this list contains 'Lambapayodharā' and 'Viśirā' (One without a head), both of the earthenware images found in the excavations at Ināmḡāv. In the Skandopākhyana of the Vanaparva of the Mahābhārata, there is mention of the goddesses dangerous for little children. Because they are responsible for the untimely death of children, their worship is enjoined. The worship of Ṣaṣṭhī (= Saṭvāi in Marathi) upon the birth of a child, and Jivatī in the month of Śṛāvaṇa both are in the same category. The long-breasted Pūtanā who had come to kill little Kṛṣṇa on the orders of Kaṇsa, was also long-breasted. She wanted to kill little Kṛṣṇa by feeding him poisonous milk from her breasts. Among the list of the Bālagrahas, Pūtanā was quite prominent. She has also been described as a female bird with wings. Her long breasts are indicative of her distinction. The suitability of a wet nurse depends entirely on her healthy breasts. Therefore, the long-breasted female image found at Ināmḡāv must have belonged to this category of females. The other child-killing goddess is someone who bends and twists the child's neck (Sanskrit: grīvām nāmayatī). That is why she is without a head. It is but natural for this faceless female to be without a neck and head. In relation to the Bālagrahas, several images of goddesses have been found from the period of Śuṅga to Kuṣāṇa dynasties. The literature also mentions such goddesses with wings. In this respect, the description of Pūtanā in the Harivaṃśa is especially telling and apt. With a large number of references and supporting evidence, Śrī Dhere has brought

this particular topic in front of the reader in a highly professional manner. Śrī Dhere's writing to me is like a word picture. It is like when someone notices an ancient broken image which has remained unidentified and then someone carefully repairs it and makes it talk. Over here, because of it, one gets a feeling of contentedness and satisfaction.

The All-Encompassing Experience of Oneness:

This then is the nature of Śrī Dhere's book, replete with references and an index. Śrī Dhere himself knows that this research in folk-culture is by no means the last word in such work. He is very well aware of this. However, there is little doubt that his researches have made a substantial input into bringing into light many aspects of folk-culture. I have a friendly suggestion to him that he should undertake further investigations into the culture and history of the Yakṣas in the Indian sub-continent. Using literature such as the Purāṇas, he should dig deep into this fascinating topic.

Basically, Śrī Dhere is a firm believer in God. However, his is not a blind faith; his curiosity is very much alive. In order to satisfy this curiosity, the amazing efforts he has consistently made and his innate virtue of being a probing examiner are virtues to be emulated by anyone working in this field. Although this book, 'Horizons of Folk Culture' is written in Marathi, its importance is pan-Indian. It is highly important that such works should be translated into all Indian languages. By doing so, the oneness among the various layers of Indian culture would be experienced by one and all. Reading this book brings to one an experience of oneness within Indian culture that will not be experienced by listening to a hundred speeches.

Arvind Mangrulkar

1 August 1971

With Gratitude

by

Dr. R.C.Dhere

I am particularly happy to present to the Marathi reader this small third book of mine on folk culture. The other two books, " Khaṇḍobā and 'Marāṭhī Lokasaṃskṛtīce Upāsaka', were wholeheartedly welcomed by the discerning Marathi reader. I am confident that they will do the same with this book.

I can say that my love and curiosity of folk culture comes naturally to me. 'Khaṇḍobā', published in 1961, was the first example of that love and curiosity. However, from 1962 onwards, I came across the exhaustive study of folk culture published by none other than the esteemed and highly knowledgeable Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal. His amazing work opened my inner eyes. It also opened the broader horizons of folk culture for me. My academic curiosity knew no bounds. I strongly felt that in order to keep the memory of such a champion of folk culture alive, I needed to study folk culture for the rest of my life. Had he been alive today, I have a feeling that he would have blessed my efforts to pursue folk culture. The only thing I can now do after his demise is to keep his eternal contribution to knowledge in front of me and pursue my own efforts like Ekalavya.

Out of the nine articles in this book, eight have appeared previously in the monthly Marathi magazines, Saṃhyādrī, Mahārāṣṭra Sāhityā Patrikā, Marāṭhī Saṃśodhana-Patrikā and Mīnāñjalī. Out of these, I must specifically mention the Kesari Marāṭhā Trust with whom I have a special relationship, and who have always encouraged me. One is painfully aware that Marathi literature somehow does not give enough encouragement for research type articles. Given this fact, I must acknowledge the debt of those magazines who have published my articles with enthusiasm.

In the article, 'Kalyāṇa and Pahāṭagāṇa', the part dealing with Pahāṭagāṇa and the last article, 'Worship of the Bālagrahas', are being published for the first time. I have also made some important corrections and additions to most of the pre-published articles.

Esteemed scholars such as Pandit Mahadevashashtri Joshi and Professor Narahar Kurundkar have always given me plenty of encouragement from time to time. It is because of that that I could continue pursuing my rather unusual hobby. Arvind Manglurkar, a very senior pandit and a connoisseur of literature has also given me a lot of encouragement. That has made me more confident about my ability. It was the encouragement by close friends such as V.S. Walimbe, Prabhakar Kulkarni and Professor Ashok Kamat that made the task of producing this book facile. I am thankful to them.

I have no words to express my special gratitude to book-sellers, librarians and many close friends.

Ramchandra Chintaman Dhere

'Lokakalyan'

77 Shanivar Peth, Pune 30.

The Quest to Unravel the Distant Horizons

Prologue by Dr. R. C. Dhere

The horizons of folk-culture have spread beyond time and history. They have neither a beginning, nor an end. The more a person runs in search of them, the more distant they appear. However, while doing so, they unfold for the researcher many mysteries hidden away deep inside them.

I have been playing this seemingly crazy game of trying to unfold such horizons ever since my childhood, and I have still not given up doing so. This quest is not yet finished, nor will it ever finish in the future. There is no question of winning or losing in this game. The only thing one gets out of this endeavour is a healthy and boundless joy.

My childhood was spent in a small village in Māvaḷ.¹⁹ It was nestled amongst steep hills in a dense forest. Although it was not too far from Pune, it had been untouched by city life and culture. Poverty was rampant, but at the same time, there was an everlasting wealth of human values, preserved traditions and religious culture. The annual cycle of seasons and each one of the minutest parts of that cycle spelt an untold liveliness, an everlasting beauty. When the season of Vasanta²⁰ arrived, the trees and vines displayed new growth of leaves and a variety of flowers. This is when the festival of Gudhī Pāḍvā was celebrated by every household by erecting a welcoming

19. Translator's Note: Māvaḷ is a *Taluka* (group of villages) in the Pune district of Maharashtra. It comprises about 180 villages. Nigde was the name of the village where Śrī Dhere was born and brought up.

20. Translator's Note: India has four distinct seasons. The season of Vasant (Vasant Rtu) occurs during Mid-March to Mid-May. This is when trees and vines display new leaves and produce an abundance of flowers.

Gudhī on a pole on top of the roof of the house.²¹ For an entire month after this festival, women used to beautify the front of their home by coating it with cow-dung and making auspicious colourful patterns and designs with Raṅgoḷī.²² In that decorated and auspicious front-yard, young ladies would stage a welcome dance for the Vasantgaaurī.²³ This was followed by the worship of the Karhā (a potful of water) on the day of Akṣayaṭṭīyā.²⁴ The full-moon day of the next month, Jyeṣṭha, was a great occasion for all married women. They observed the ritual of Vaṭasāvitṛī and performed the worship of the Vaṭ tree²⁵ so as to remain happily married forever. When Varṣā, the rainy season danced and announced its arrival with torrential rains in the month of Āṣādhā, the village folk, in spite of the leaking roofs of their small cottages, welcomed it with open arms. The distant bluish peaks of the surrounding hills welcomed the rains as well.

Then it was the beginning of Cāturmāsa,²⁶ the time for women to observe various 'Vratas' at home. At night, the public reading of the religious works of Śrīdhara and Mahipatī was staged. The descriptions of the victo-

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21. Translator's Note: Gudhī Pāḍvā is a Hindu festival that marks the beginning of the new year in Western India. It occurs in spring. Mythologically, it is linked to the day on which the Hindu god Brahma created time and the universe. To some, it commemorates the coronation of Rama in Ayodhya after his victory over Rāvaṇa, and also the start of the Śalivāhaṇa calendar. On this day, people erect a Gudhī, a wooden post on top of which a piece of cloth covered by an inverted pot is tied.
 22. Translator's Note: Raṅgoḷī is an art that originated in the Indian subcontinent, in which patterns are created on the floor in front of the house using materials such as powdered lime stone, red ochre, dry rice flour, flower petals, etc. It represents happiness, positivity and liveliness of a household, and used to be drawn everyday early in the morning by the housewife. On special days to celebrate Hindu festivals such as Diwali, Raṅgoḷīs can be very elaborate and complex.
 23. Translator's Note: Vasantagaaurī is a festival staged in the month of Caitra (first month in the Hindu calendar) to welcome mother-goddess Gaurl.
 24. Translator's Note: Akṣayaṭṭīyā is the third day in the bright half of the month of Vaiśākha (Second month in the Hindu calendar). On this day, Hindus worship Lord Viṣṇu and his consort Lakṣmī. They also worship *Karhā* a round pot full of water, which represents the universe. *Akṣaya* means 'forever, permanent' and Hindus believe that anything new started on this day will always go to completion.
 25. Translator's Note: *Ficus Benghalensis*.
 26. Translator's Note: Cāturmāsa is a holy period of four months, beginning on June-July and ending on October-November, for the Hindus. This period coincides with the monsoon season in India. This period is reserved for austerities, fasting, bathing in holy rivers and religious observances for all. Devotees resolve to observe some form of vow, be it of silence or abstaining from a favourite food item, or having only a single meal a day.

ry of the devotees and Saints over evil were as important as were the well-known works, 'Rāmavijaya and Harivijaya'. When the audience heard of the collapsing on the earth of Rāvaṇa by an arrow from Rāma, and Rāvaṇ's subsequent demise, they became ecstatic with great joy. A coconut was broken at that very moment to celebrate the news, as if Rāvaṇa had just been killed in front of their eyes. That innocent joy and celebration knew no bounds. Rice crop was also sown in the month of Āṣādhā. Before this was done, the ritual of 'Sāti' was performed. This involved sprinkling of freshly killed goat blood and rice all over the village. This ritual signifying the 'binding' of the village together against evil, was practised with the same devotion as that required for listening to the stories of Gods and devotees at the temples. Farmers would stand in mud up to their knees when the sowing of rice went on. The torrential rain pelted their Irlees²⁷ but, in spite of it, the sowing went on throughout the month of Āṣādhā. The end of Āṣādhā brought the 'Avas of the lamps',²⁸ the no-moon night before the start of the waxing moon. Brass and silver lamps would be freshly washed and polished. Lamps were also made out of wheat and pearl millet and they were worshipped with amaranth and conch-grass. The very next day came the month of 'Śrāvaṇa'.

'The month of Śrāvaṇa, a favourite of the mother, has arrived smiling', so says the verse describing this auspicious month. The newly-wed young girls who had freshly arrived in the village would make swings by tying ropes around the big branches of the trees. Just like the swings, their hearts would swing with the expectation of a messenger from their parents. Mehendī (Hennā) would beautify their hands. Some would visit their paternal home. Their favourite songs would be sung again. All of the girlfriends would gather together and perform the worship of the cobra on the day of the Pañcamī; they would tie the Rākhi²⁹ around their brothers' wrists on the full-moon

27. Translator's Note: An *Irle* is a protective umbrella made out of leaves and used mainly by farmers as a protection against the elements.

28. Translator's Note: Diveavas or Divyaci Avas is the name given to the no moon night in the month of Āṣādh. This is the day on which brass and silver lamps are cleaned, polished and worshipped by married women.

29. Translator's Note: The tying of the Rākhi (Lit. a piece of thread) for the brother takes place on the day of the full-moon day of the month of Śrāvaṇa. On this day in the evening, the sister ties a thread around her brother's wrist and feeds him sweets and dinner. In return, the brother promises to protect her and her family throughout the year.

evening, worship the Jivtī on the Friday,³⁰ light up lamps made out of flour in the temple of Hanumān, the Monkey-God on Saturday, and worship Āditya-Rāṇubāī³¹ on the Sunday. On the eighth day of the second half of the month, the Vrata of Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī³² was begun. Women often read religious scriptures including the Purāṇas during this month. The entire month of Śrāvaṇa was thus a big religious celebration. Śrāvaṇa would end, followed by the month of Bhādrapada. Young ladies will sing:

saralā śrāvaṇa ga, navā nighālā bhadavā masū ||
ga, navā nighālā bhadavā masū ||

(Lit: Friends, the month of Śrāvaṇa has ended, now is the start of the month of Bhādrapada)

In the very beginning of Bhādrapada, the 'Gaṇagaurīs' were welcomed. Then the two very strict Vratas for women followed: Hartālikā³³ and Ṛṣipaṇcamī. Hartālikā is the worship of Śiva in the presence of his consort Pārvatī so as to emulate an ideal husband like Śiva. The worship was done with a variety of flowers and sacred leaves. It was mandatory for the women to fast and not to touch even a drop of water during the entire day. The women used to be in a sort of a trance; they would dance and sing the whole night, forgetting their hardships and their empty stomachs during the day.

On the day of the Ṛṣipaṇcamī, it was forbidden to eat or drink anything that was produced as a result of the hard work of the bullocks. What had this to do with the Ṛṣis, one does not know. However, it made all of us curious. We now know that our gratefulness to the Vṛṣa (Lit: Ox) was at some stage translated into our reverence for the Ṛṣis. Even then, the Ox has maintained his place in the Vratas that women perform. Once the Gaurīs had been fed and

30. Translator's Note: Married women in the state of Maharashtra worship Goddess Jivtī on any one of the Fridays in the month of Śrāvaṇa. Jivtī is thought to be an incarnation of the mother-goddess Pārvatī who protects children.

31. Translator's Note: 'Āditya-Rāṇubāī' is a Vrata performed by married women in Maharashtra. It involves the worship of the Sun on the first Sunday of the month of Śrāvaṇa. The observance is supposed to bring wealth to the family.

32. Translator's Note: Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī is a Vrata which lasts a whole month. It is the worship of the god Śiva and his consort Pārvatī.

33. Translator's Note: Hartālikā is a Vrata observed by married women who seek their husband's well-being and longevity. They worship Śiva and Pārvatī, the ideal couple in Hinduism.

Gaṇeśa has been farewelled for another year, the fortnight of the memory of our ancestors who have passed away (*pitṛpakṣa*) started. One fed the Gaṇas (Brāhmins) in memory of them. On the no-moon night of the 'Sarvapitrī Amāvasyā,' all others who have passed away were remembered as well. It was also a special day for the cattle. The oxen were meticulously bathed and painted with beautiful designs. In the evening there was a special procession for them. The right of passing through the decorated door with a wreath of flowers hung above, belonged to the Ox devoted to the temple. The other oxen would then follow. The Gurav temple priest had the right to walk first in the procession with the earthen oxen he had made. Others with their oxen would follow. In the households, earthen-wear oxen were placed on special timber seats and worshipped.

The next day was reserved for the installation of the copper or brass pot full of water (Ghaṭasthāpanā) in the household. It was the beginning of the nine days celebration of goddess Durgā (Durgā-Navarātra). Nine floral garlands were made for the nine special days of the Goddess. The Bharāḍis would stage their performances in the temple on all the nine days. A Homa-Havan ceremony was performed on the ninth day and a goat was sacrificed. On the next day, the day of Vijayādaśamī,³⁴ the crossing of the border of the village (Simollanaghana) was celebrated among the loud sounds of the 'tāśa-vājantrī' ensemble. After a further five days, on the auspicious day of the Aśvinī Pūrṇimā (full-moon day of the month of Aśvin), it was the time for the blessing of the eldest child.

'Reach old age like spun cotton and be tenacious and forever living like Couch Grass'

This was the blessing given to the eldest child by the elders in the home everywhere. The blessing was full of parental tender love and caring.

Following this, all the five days of the festival of Diwali brought in bright light with beautifully lit lamps. People's enthusiasm knew no bounds. The Weskar³⁵ would drop cut wood, the barber would visit and massage everyone

34. Translator's Note: Vijayādaśamī is one of the three and half auspicious times during the year for Hindus. This is the tenth day of the month of Aśvin according to Hindu calendar. Children pray Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge on this day. This is also the day on which the demon Maḥiṣāsura who terrorised the earth, was killed by goddess Durgā. People worship the instruments of their daily living such as books, musical instruments, weapons and implements used for daily living.

35. Translator's Note: A Weskar was a person appointed by the village to perform menial tasks for the village community.

with oil, the washerman would deliver freshly washed clothes and the potter would bring freshly made oil lamps. The cowherd would arrive in the evening with a frame of wood decorated with marigold flowers and containing a lamp made out of an old piece of material. He would come in the cattle-pen and sing:

*din din divālī || gāyā mhaśī ovālī ||
gāyā mhaśī kuṇācyā || lakṣmaṇācyā ||*

(Lit: It is the time of Diwalī. Go and wave the lamp for the cattle. Who does the cattle belong to? They belong to Lakṣmaṇa).

I have also heard the song about the cow Bahuḷā from the cowherd during Divalī time.

Fifteen days after Divalī comes the day of Dev-Divalī³⁶ on the full-moon day of the month of Kārtik. This is followed by Sankrānt³⁷ and finally, the festival of Hoḷī.³⁸ The arrival of Hoḷī is heralded earlier around the time of the full-moon night of the month of Māgha. On this night, a smaller Hoḷī was lit. It signalled the time to start stealing wood for the big Hoḷī. The crops had just been collected, and the cowherds had been given a holiday for the preparation for Śimgā.³⁹ All five days of this festival were marked by loud rowdy songs about the 'God of Love', Kāmadeva. The special sweet of Puraṇapoḷī for the day of Hoḷī, the Rāḍ⁴⁰ at Dhuḷwaḍa and the colours at the festival of Raṅgapancamī were all the occasions for joyous interactions. Both

36. Translator's Note: The festival of Deva-Divalī celebrates the destruction of the demon Tripurāsūr by Śiva. It is also the birth anniversary of Śiva's son, Kartikeya.

37. Translator's Note: The fourteenth day of the month of January is celebrated by Hindus as Sankrant, the travel of the Sun from the zodiac of Sagittarius to Capricorn. Prayers are offered to Sun and freshly harvested grain is consumed. Sweets made out of sesame seed are distributed amongst friends. This is also a day for kite-flying competitions. Hindu mythology tells us that on this day, a demon called Sankarāsūr was killed by Goddess Sankrāntī.

38. Translator's Note: The festival of Hoḷī is a men's festival and is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Fālgun. There are several Purāṇic stories about this day. One of them is that on this day, the baby Kṛṣṇa killed the demoness Pūtānā and she was burned into fire by his colleagues. It is customary to light up a big fire in the village square. Men dance around this fire and utter obscenities.

39. Translator's Note: The festival of Śimgā is typically from Maharashtra and is celebrated for five days. The day of Hoḷī is part of that festival.

40. Translator's Note: The second day of the five-day Hoḷī festival is called Dhuḷwaḍ. On this day, people literally throw mud on one another. The mud is called Rāḍ.

the Rāḍ (Lit. mud) and Raṅga (Colour) are thrown on one another; Rāḍa at Dhulwāḍa and Raṅga on the day of Raṅgapancamī. On all five days, during day time young men in various garbs and guises would go to each household and collect 'Śerṇī'.⁴¹ At night, they would imitate various known members of the village community and walk the street in a dignified manner in a procession. The village priest or another person with the gift of the gab used to review and comment upon these imitations every now and then. On the day of the Raṅgapancamī, late afternoon after lunch, all of the men in the village would sit on the mound constructed around the Pipal tree. One person would the sprinkle colour on all of them. Finally, they all shared the Śerṇī collected over the five days.

The annual celebration for the village goddess (Grāmadevatā) used to happen during the time of Sugī.⁴² From early morning, shops selling sweat-meats, toys and imitation jewellery were set up near the Pipal mound. Swings would start moving. Young men from our village and from surrounds would roam around the village with their colourful turbans with long loose ends floating on their backs. Sweats were made at every household. Images of the gods in all temples were adorned with new clothes. In the evening, people who had taken particular vows and observances would arrive at the temple among the loud noises of a band. They would then fulfil their vows in front of the God. At night, there would be a procession of the Goddess image in a palanquin with a guard of honour called 'Chabinā'. After this procession was over, in the later part of the night, there would be the eagerly awaited performance of the 'Tamāśā'⁴³ in the village playground. Amazingly, the very next day was the wrestling competitions. The procession of the Goddess and the Tamāśā were both equally important parts of the celebration. In the worship of the village deity, there was no discord between the two. Tamāśā did not interfere with Bhaktī, devotion to the goddess.

I have remembered this cycle of seasons, which ran parallel to the cycle of life, with great curiosity and zeal. I have stored it with utmost sincerity in

41. Translator's Note: Śerṇī means a mixture of jaggery and dried coconut. It is commonly used at religious gatherings.

42. Translator's Note: Sugī is the beginning of the cooler season in India, around October to November. Farmers have collected the crops and looking forward to a quieter period. The weather is getting cooler and it is time for various festivities.

43. Translator's Note: Tamāśā is a traditional form of Marathi folk theatre, which is widely performed by local and travelling theatre groups within Maharashtra. It includes erotic songs known as *Lāvāṇīs*.

the inner depths of my mind. Thankfully, even when I came to the city, my curiosity did not leave me. It kept looking for the secrets of the folk-culture hidden deep within my mind. That curiosity also made me undertake further studies in this area, further enriching my knowledge. I fell in love with the study of folk culture. This led to several things within my memory seeking explanations and justifications. The godling Ceḍobā, who was very willing to destroy the opponents of his devotees in lieu of the offering of a chicken, the Bhikrojibuvā, who was prepared to hide the shepherd's cattle for the reward of a coconut, the Mariāi, who expressed her anger by spreading disease and the Bhairobā who freed his devotee of poison; all of these Godlings (Grāmādevatā) started telling me their ancient lineage. I realised that the sacred Ganges of folk-theatre had its origin in the Himālayas of ancient religion. That clarified for me the background of things such as the donning of disguises in Śimgā, the Tamāśā staged during Urus,⁴⁴ the performance of Bharāḍ during Navarātrī, the Gondhaḷ performance during the worship of the goddess and the overnight performances of Vāghyā-Murḷi for the god Khaṇḍobā. I was amazed to discover that the Rāṇūbāi invoked during the Vrata 'Āditya- Rāṇūbāi' came from Iran. I found out that the child-protector goddess Jivtī who is worshipped on Fridays during the month of Śrāvaṇa originally belonged to the class of godlings who devoured little children. That explained to me the process of the upward mobility of gods in the minds of their devotees. I also found out that the worship of Nāg-Narsobā encompassed ancient streams of the worship of Cobra (Nāg) and Yakṣas. When these secrets were unravelled, all of them opened for me many new pages in the cultural history of the Indian nation.

Even in our present-day city life, the lowest strata of the society are still influenced by their erstwhile folk culture. Also, the seeds of folk culture still linger among the higher echelons of our society in the form of many religious observances. The erotic farce of Lokanāṭya (Tamāśā), the former domain of villagers, is taking on new forms and entertaining all levels of the society. The former Bahurūpī⁴⁵ who entertained villagers by miming various characters, is now entertaining educated city-dwellers by 'one-act' plays such as those staged by P.L. Deshpande.

44. Translator's Note: *Urus* is a Muslim religious festival which honours its saints.

45. Translator's Note: Lit: One who has many different forms.

When one realises this amazing and extraordinary influence of folk culture on human endeavour, one is even more tempted to fathom her far reaches. This intense desire leads one to discover newer and newer ways of approaching her secrets. On each of these paths, one discovers beautiful and uncharted horizons.

It is true that folk-literature and folk customs are two of the major and primary means for the study of folk culture. However, it is also possible to glean about the mighty flow of folk culture from other resources. It is true that the current folk literature and customs have a long tradition behind them. However, with the passage of time, a lot of folk literature disappears and many folk customs are no longer followed. Often, many customs change.

In order to explain my argument in detail, let me take an example of folk-literature as a means of studying folk culture. The available history of Marathi folk literature does not go beyond the thirteenth century BCE. Also, even the history of Marathi language as such does not go beyond 1500 BCE. However, one cannot deny that Marathi community as such did definitely exist before the beginning of Marathi language and Marathi literature. Their culture expressed itself through a language that preceded the Marathi language as we know it today. This means that the folk culture of Marathi speaking people cannot simply be studied by studying the folk literature of the present day. The roots of this culture go very deep into the distant past and in order to understand their spread, one needs to study pre-Marathi literature of Maharashtra.

There is yet another matter one needs to consider. That is, Marathi folk-culture is nothing more than the Stately Version of the pan-Indian folk culture. That pan-Indian culture is replete both with the cultures of the individual States in addition to the synthesized culture of her own. That is why the traditions of the folk culture as they appear in the folk literature need to be studied through the literature of ancient Sanskrit and Prakṛt as well and that too through the not too frequent mentions pertaining to folk literature in these cultures. The idiom of expression in any language is tightly woven with every aspect of the lives of the populace. Because of this, in the literature of any language, one is able to see a reflection, however small, of the folk culture pertaining to that language. With this background, it would be hardly surprising if the literature that was specifically produced with the populace in mind so as to entertain them, and which took notice of the spec-

ificities of folk culture, would have the predominance of folk culture as a theme. That is why the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, Buddhist Jātakakathās and Jain Āgamas are especially important. Other works which are related to Bṛhatkathā and similar are nothing but written versions of the spoken genre of folk literature.

Once one takes a dip into the vast ocean of Pre-Marathi literature, one discovers many pearls, each signifying an aspect of folk culture. And when one finds the loose thread which connects them, one is rewarded with a beautiful pearl necklace.

Folk Culture is forever victorious. She is bedecked with a myriad of forms and colours. The so-called high culture of humans derives from the life-blood of folk culture. The picturesque and beautifully carved temples of the high culture have been constructed from the myriad of the un-sculpted stones of folk culture. Even then, the undiminished mountains representing folk culture will stand forever to give further support and majestic background to the sculpted high culture. She will stand this way forever.

It is indeed rare to find a researcher who is possessed with the desire to study folk culture. This is because the chances of success are rare. However, failure in this pursuit is just as beautiful and challenging. One must however have plenty of patience.

In this work, the reader will find some of my steps in this direction. Whatever I was able to find in relation to the mobility of folk deities and the often-tortuous path of folk beliefs is what one will notice on this journey. The reader will also meet many known and unknown folk singers. It would also be possible to see some of the missing pieces in the history of institutions, gods, and goddesses and their iconic representations. Even a cursory examination of the pages of this book will be sufficient for the reader to appreciate the incessant struggle of the folk-mind for recognition, expansion, and upward mobility.

Among the nine articles in this book, the first four and the ninth deal with very complex and involved stories of folk-deities. The reader will be able to appreciate the reasoning behind the worship of the class of deities belonging to groups such as the Yakṣas, Nāgas, trees, Bālagrahas, and Matr̥kas. Out of the four remaining articles, 'The Background of the Śāhirs' and 'Kalyāṇ and Pahāṭagān' are those that investigate the background of the folk-singers. The article, 'Bhāṇḍānce Bhaṇḍapurāṇa' introduces to the read-

er to a class of folk-performers who entertain people. On the other hand, the article, 'Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī' the universality of nomadic fortune-tellers in India. I am convinced that in the near future, due to the combined efforts of readers of thinking similar to me, would be able to throw more light on this subject. I for one, am very eager for this to happen.



Kālyāṇa's Subjugation

Chapter 1

Folk Aspects in the Biography of Śrīkṛṣṇa

Marathi Saint-Poets saw Lord Viṭṭhal in the form of Bāḷa-Kṛṣṇa, the Child-God, thereby pouring their devotion into the play (Lilās) of this miracle-child. Over the centuries, through the constant devotional chanting and listening to the myths and stories through the medium of the Bhagavatgītā and the Bhāgavata,⁴⁶ the Lilās of Kṛṣṇa have been kept alive and have been enriched. The Bhagvatgītā can rightly be called a treasure of Kṛṣṇa's philosophy. The Bhāgavata on the other hand is a treasure of Kṛṣṇa's Lilās. As a matter of fact, one can say that if one follows the thinking behind the devotion of the saint-poets, the philosophy of Lord Kṛṣṇa has actually shaped the format of the Lilās of Kṛṣṇa described in the Bhāgavatam.

The Saint-Poets and the Discretionary Devotion in the Bhagavatgītā:

The Gītā put Bhakti-the devotional worship, on a noble, lofty and eminent platform. Vaiṣṇava Saint-Poets used this as a means of supplementing the Gītā's ideals and thus suppressing alternative thoughts in people's minds. The Saint-Poets En-masse transformed and purified the devotional regime of the common man. The background to this was of course the Bhakti philosophy of the Gītā. Thus, in elaborating the disparity between various deities, the Gītā says:

46. Translator's Note: The Bhāgavata or Bhāgavatapurāṇa (Sanskrit: Śrīmad Bhāgavatam) is one of the eighteen Major Purāṇas (Mahapurāṇas) in Hinduism. Ascribed to the sage Vyāsa, it is one of the major texts of the Vaiṣṇava sect and promotes devotion (bhakti) towards Kṛṣṇa. It has been dated somewhere between the 8th to the 10th century CE.

yajante sātṭvikān devān yakṣarakṣānsi rājasāḥ ||
pretān bhūtagaṇāścānye yajante tāmāsā janāḥ ||| (Gītā:17.4)

(Lit: The gentle people (Satvagūṇī) worship Gods. Those with Rajoguṇa worship Yakṣas and Rākṣasas. Those with Tamoguṇa worship ghosts and the dead.

Marathi saints followed this dictum wholeheartedly. They also spread its message widely for the spiritual enlightenment of the common man. In speaking against the worship of minor godlings such as Jākhāi and Jokhāi, their expression developed a particularly sharp edge. The following verse by Sant Tukārām can be considered a representative of the thinking of these Saint-Poets:

sendarī hendarī daivate || koṇa tī pūjī bhutekhetē ||
āpalyā poṭī jī raḍate || māgaṭim śitem avadān || ||

(Lit: Who worships those ghosts, goblins, and godlings smeared with Sendur? They cry when they are hungry and ask for the offerings of food).

In this context, it is worth noting that Samartha Rāmdās fearlessly and resolutely threw away the Sendur-smeared stones in the cremation ground at Cāphaḷ, and installed an image of Lord Rāma in their place.

The above-mentioned prohibition practiced by the Marathi Saint-Poets is in accordance with the teachings of the Gītā. I have mentioned before that the teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa as illustrated by the Gītā form the basis of the biography of Kṛṣṇa developed by the composers of the Bhāgavata. With this background in their minds, Marathi Saint-Poets have added some new Līlās to the already existing repertoire. A detailed and thorough look at these new Līlās is, to me, going to be highly beneficial.

New Līlās constructed by the Saint-Poets:

In one of the Abhaṅgas⁴⁷ (No.1689) describing the play of Kṛṣṇa as a child, Saint Nāmdev, in his Nāmdev-Gāthā,⁴⁸ has described a new Līlā. In this Abhaṅga, Nāmdev has imagined that the clan deity (Kuladaivat) of the Nan-

47. Translator's Note: *Abhaṅga* is a type of metre used extensively by the Marathi Saint-Poets.

48. Translator's Note: *Gāthā* is a collection of Abhaṅgas.

das⁴⁹ was the folk-God Khaṇḍobā. The day of Campāśaṣṭhī⁵⁰ is especially important for this God. On this day, the family traditionally cooked special foods for Khaṇḍobā, their favourite god. Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa's mother, had made several sweets and *bharīta-roḍge*,⁵¹ his favourite food, for him. Vāghyās and Muraḷis⁵² were invited to perform during the whole night after the meal. Suddenly, Kṛṣṇa, who was very tired after playing with his mates, came inside the kitchen and told his mother, 'I am very hungry. Please give me the food right now. Yaśodā realised that her little son was very hungry. She prepared a plate with all of the food offerings to be offered to Khaṇḍobā first before anyone partook of them. She went in a hurry to invite all the guests for the worship of God and then partaking of the ritual food. In the meantime, Kṛṣṇa started eating the food that was to be offered first to Khaṇḍobā. When Yaśodā returned, she saw what Kṛṣṇa was doing and was petrified. She was certain that the fierce God would now punish Kṛṣṇa and said:

This God (Khaṇḍobā) is fierce. What would happen now?
My Son, He will punish you by making you insane.

Kṛṣṇa deliberately twisted his mouth but continued eating. Seeing his crooked face, Yaśodā was horrified. She was convinced that Kṛṣṇa had become insane due to the wrath of Khaṇḍobā. She was also convinced that Kṛṣṇa's actions were due to his insanity and called various Śāmans to ward off the evil. The Śāmans sprinkled sanctified water on the child and subjected him to holy smoke as well. None of these helped, and Kṛṣṇa continued acting like an insane child. Yaśodā was sure that the gods in Gokūḷa were powerless in front of Khaṇḍobā and as a result, became almost unconscious due to her grief.

49. Translator's Note: Nanda and his wife Yaśodā were the foster-parents of Kṛṣṇa.

50. Translator's Note: The sixth day of the Hindu month of Mārgaśīrṣa is called Campāśaṣṭhī. The particular god who rules over this day is Khaṇḍobā, also known as Mallāri. It is said that the demons Maṇi and Malla were defeated by Khaṇḍobā on this day, thereby freeing people from their tyrannical rule. The festival of Campāśaṣṭhī starts from the first day of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa and is also called Khaṇḍobā's Navarātra. The festival is particularly important to those families who have Khaṇḍobā as their Clan-God (Kuladaivat).

51. Translator's Note: The favourite food of Khaṇḍobā is a yoghurt and onion-based curry of egg-plant called Bharita, to be eaten with a thick round bread called Roḍgā.

52. Translator's Note: Vāghyās and Muraḷis are male and female servants offered to the god Khaṇḍobā for their lifetime. To fulfil their vows, many families offered their first child to the god. One of the major duties these servants performed was to dance in front of Khaṇḍobā.

However, finally, when she realised that everything was in the hands of her son, Lord Kṛṣṇa, the calamity passed away. The abhaṅga says:

jaṇonī antara mhaṇe kṛṣṇhārpaṇa ||
tevhām ālem viḡhna dūra hoyā ||
nāmā mhaṇe dev pāhe kṛpādṛṣṭī ||
jāṇavale poṭī hāci deva ||||

(Lit.: When she realised the difference, she said that everything was now offered to Kṛṣṇa, and was his hands. Nāmdev the poet says, ‘God in the form of Kṛṣṇa looked at her with benevolence’ and she realised that Kṛṣṇa was the only true God.)

The Interdiction of Rājasic and Tāmasic Devotional Regimes.⁵³

There is now no particular need to mention that the Lilā described above is in consonance with the philosophy of the Gītā. This Lilā is a strong statement against the highly prevalent worship of Khaṇḍobā all over Maharashtra. It is but natural that the worship of the god who steals the daughters of his devotees and accepts inhuman worship forms such as the Gaḷa and Bagāḍ,⁵⁴ is an anathema to the Saint-Poets who wholeheartedly followed the teachings of the Gītā. They insist that the worship of gods such as the Khaṇḍobā needs to be discarded in favour of the universal god who is present in every atom of the universe. It is noteworthy that although Khaṇḍobā has not at all been mentioned in the Bhāgavata, Nāmdev and other saint-poets of the time have included this Lilā in describing the Lilās of Kṛṣṇa as a child. One can see that

53. Translator's Note: In Hindu thought, a person is made of three characteristics called Guṇas in various proportions, Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Satva stands for goodness, contentment and Joy. It is devoid of malice, wrath and fear. Rajas is passion, energy and desire. Tamas, the last one, is darkness, anger and ignorance. The Guṇas decide how a person sees the world and vice versa.

54. Translator's Note: Bagāḍa and Gaḷa are two of the extreme forms of vows in the form of physical punishment undertaken by the devotees of the God Khaṇḍobā in order to fulfil a promise they gave the God for obtaining their wish. If that wish was fulfilled, the devotee would then lie upside down, his neck or lower back would be then be pierced with a sharp hook and the hook, attached to a rope (Gaḷa) was then pulled up so that the devotee was suspended in that state until he circumambulated the temple. Bhaṇḍārā (turmeric) was thrown liberally at the suspended devotee. The practice is now banned.

this was a simple method of tearing away the worshippers of Khaṇḍobā and similar folk deities to a more noble and eminent form of worship of the ultimate principle.

The story of Mahābalaḥṭa's ignominy which the Marathi Saint-Poets have described in great detail, falls into the same class of tales. In this story, Marathi Saint-Poets have ridiculed the excessive and blind belief that people have in astrology. The Saint-Poets knew that because of this irrational belief, in order to placate the wrath of inauspicious combinations of the planets (aśubha grahayoga), people used to leave the children born during such planetary combinations on their own in the forest. They would soon become the food for wild animals.

The Saint-Poets have adopted the method of criticizing and speaking against Rājasic and Tāmasic worships through the medium of Kṛṣṇalīlās, similar to what the composers of the Bhāgavata have done. With this insight, when one starts examining the Līlās of Kṛṣṇa through the lens of the Bhāgavata, one notices how the teachings of the Gītā have permeated into the latter. With this background, we are now going to analyse the inner meaning of three of the Līlās described in the Bhāgavata: Pūtanāśoṣaṇa (Bh. 10.6), Yamalārjunotpāṭana (Bh. 10.9.10) and Kāliyāmardana (10. 15-17). All of these three are very well-known. However, it is important to analyse the nuances within each, particularly in view of what we have been discussing so far.

The Myth about Pūtanāśoṣaṇa (sucking Pūtanā dry):

As it once happened, a terrible demoness by the name of Pūtanā started roaming around the cities and villages, including the cowherd enclaves, and killing young children. On her journey, she arrived at Nanda's home. With her demonic powers, she turned herself into a most beautiful woman and thus conquered the minds of all of the residents of Gokūḷa. She appeared almost as beautiful as Lakṣmī who had come to see her beloved god, Viṣṇu. In actual fact, she was a demoness looking for young children whom she could devour. In Gokūḷa, she saw the baby Kṛṣṇa who was lying in his cot and playing. He had deliberately hidden his godly glow and thus appeared like a fire hidden amongst ashes. Kṛṣṇa realised that Pūtanā was a child-killing Dākinī. However, he quietly stayed in his cot appearing oblivious to her real form. Pūtanā picked him up and took him in her lap. Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa's mother and her friend Rohiṇī were mesmerised by Pūtanā's beauty and simply kept looking at her in

awe. The evil Pūtanā then introduced her poisonous breast in Kṛṣṇa's mouth. Because of this, Kṛṣṇa became very angry. He held the breast in both of his hands and squeezed it so hard that he not only sucked her dry but killed her as well. As she was dying, she screamed, shouted, and created a big racket. Finally, she came back to her original demonic form and passed away.

Pūtanā: A Bālagraha:

The above is the sum total of the myth of Pūtanāśoṣaṇa. The composers of the Bhāgavata have called Pūtanā by various adjectives such as Bālaghatinī, Khecarī, Bālamārikā and so on. Also, when she was lying dead in her demonic form, the Gopīs, worried about Kṛṣṇa's well-being, uttered a protective mantra. This mantra tells us Pūtanā's real character.

*dākinyo yātudhanyaśca kuṣmāṇḍā yerbhakagrahāḥ ||
bhūtapretapiśācāścha yakṣarakṣovīṇāyakāḥ ||
koṭarā, revatī jyeṣṭhā pūtanāmāṭṛkādayaḥ ||
unmādā ye hyapasmārā dehaprāṇendriyadruḥ ||
swapnadṛṣṭā mahotpātā vṛddhabālagrahaśca ye ||
sarve nashyantu te viṣṇornāmagrahaṇabhīravaḥ || ||*

(Bhāgavata. 10.6. 27-29)

(Lit. The following are fearful even of the very name of Lord Viṣṇu. Let all of them be destroyed: Ḍākinīs, Rakṣasīs, Rakṣasas and Kūshmaṇḍas who harass young children. Similarly, Ghosts, Corpses, Piśācas, Yakṣas and Vināyakas, the Māṭṛkās such as Revatī, Jyeṣṭhā and Pūtanā, and those Grahas who produce epilepsy, horrible dreams and calamities and possess children).

This protective mantra seeks the destruction of ghosts, corpses, Yakṣas, Rakṣas and Bālagrahas, and somewhat surprisingly, includes three Māṭṛkās: Pūtanā, Revatī and Jyeṣṭhā. The mantra also classifies these Māṭṛkās as Bālagrahas. It is important to know that the Gopīs were oblivious of the fact that the woman killed by Kṛṣṇa was Pūtanā. However, the protective mantra the Gopīs chanted in order to ward off evil for Kṛṣṇa did include Pūtanā. This inclusion informs us that Pūtanā was known to people as a terrible Bālagraha who harassed young children.

The Nature of the Perception about Bālagrahas:

In Indian medicine, discussion about the Bālagrahas was often included in the (discussion about the diseases of children) Kaumārabhṛtyatantra. Whenever medical experts were unable to diagnose ailments suffered by children, as a last resort, they bowed to people's religious beliefs and suggested ways by which spirits which possessed young children could be appeased. Thus, the limitation of medicine had led to the belief in the appeasement of malevolent supernatural spirits.

Ancient literature contains many myths about the birth of the Bālagrahas. These can be summarised as follows:

Lord Śiva had employed many male and female servants to protect his baby-son Skanda. After Skanda grew and became a young man, these servants asked Śiva as to what they should do from then on. Śiva told them to go down to earth and look for those people who were non-religious, polluted and unclean. The servants should then harass these children until they were appeased by their parents.

The above myth tells us that the Bālagrahas are servants of Skanda. It is well-known that Skanda himself has been called the most important Bālagraha. It is therefore appropriate that the other Bālagrahas are called his servants. Vāgbhaṭa has given a list of twelve Bālagrahas as follows: Skanda, Viśākha, Meśāsya, Śvagraha, Piṭṛagraha, Śakunī, Pūtanā, Śītapūtanā, Andhapūtanā, Mukhamaṇḍitikā, Revatī and Śuṣkarevatī. The Kaurmārabhṛtyatantra also lists in detail the symptoms exhibited by those who are affected by them. It lists the symptoms for those who are affected by Pūtanā as bodily pain, cold, tremors, spasms, swelling, curling of the body hair, inability to sleep, thirst, inability to urinate, irritability, putrid odour like that of a crow, etc.

Teaching Through Entertainment:

From the above discussion, the reader will easily realise that in the past, the idea of inauspicious deities afflicting young children with incurable maladies which could not be diagnosed, was well established in people's minds. To some extent, the idea still exists in some members of the populace. These inauspicious deities were called 'Bālagrahas' and Pūtanā was one of the terrible Bālagrahas among them. In the Skandaparva of the Mahābhārata, Pūtanā

has been included as a deity who harasses children (also Vanaparva: 230.27, Śalyaparva: 46.16). In this context, one of the critics of the Mahābhārata has mentioned that the land around Mathura is called, 'Poutana'. It thus appears that Pūtānā was an important local deity around the region of Mathura. In commenting on the myth of Pūtanaśoṣaṇa, the composers of the Bhāgavata have belittled the myth about the Bālagrahas and have told the Vaiṣṇavas in no uncertain terms that:

*na yatra śravanādīni rakṣoghnāni svakarmasu ||
kurvanti sātvatā bharturyārtudhānyaśca tatra hi ||*

(Lit: Listening to and thinking of the great deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa leads to the destruction of the evil inflicted by demons and others. Those who do not do so while observing their daily chores, are affected by these evil spirits).

The description of Pūtānā as an enchanting female, her feeding poison to Kṛṣṇa through her breast milk and Kṛṣṇa killing her by sucking her dry, are all episodes which are meant to entertain the populace while at the same time teaching them the greatness of the universal God. The composers of the Bhāgavata merely wish to show that once one accepts the all-encompassing nature of Bhakti for the Almighty, beliefs into minor deities such as the Bālagrahas are automatically destroyed. By creating the myth about the destruction of Pūtānā, these composers managed to add valour to child Kṛṣṇa's biography, and at same time stressing the importance of Bhakti-the devotion to the supreme. Such multi-faceted outcome is quite often the speciality of purāṇic myths.

The Myth about the ousting of twin trees:

The second myth, named Yamalārjunotpātana, is concerned with the uprooting of two large Arjuna trees⁵⁵ in Kṛṣṇa's backyard. Because he was naughty, Yaśodā tied Kṛṣṇa to an Ukhaḷī (a large stone mortar in the shape of an hour-glass) as a punishment. After that, Yaśodā got busy with her household chores. The Gopīs went about their business. At this time, the child Kṛṣṇa happened to look at the two giant twin Arjuna trees. Still tied to the stone

55. Translator's Note: Arjuna is a tree of the Genus Terminalia of the plant family Combretaceae. It is used traditionally as a medicinal plant.

mortar, he tried to go through the gap between the twin trees. However, the stone mortar fell on its side and was stuck in the space between the twin trees. Kṛṣṇa tried to go through the gap by pulling the rope with force. After he pulled hard, the two giants fell down, roots and all. The composers of the Bhāgavata have said that these two trees were two Yakṣas in their previous birth. They have explained further as to why they became trees.

Yakṣas in the form of trees:

The two trees which were in the backyard of Nanda's house were, in their previous life, two Yakṣa brothers called Nalakūbara and Maṇigrīva. As we know, Kuber is a close friend of Rudra. That is probably why Kuber would have sent these two brothers to serve Rudra. Because they were associated with Rudra, they had become prodigal. One day, they were enjoying themselves on the banks of the celestial Mandākinī River in an orchard in the Kailāśa Mountain. They were intoxicated and were sporting with their women who were also drinking and singing. As it happened, the sage Nārada was passing by and stopped there. Seeing him, the naked women were abashed and put on their clothes in a hurry. However, because they were drunk and also proud of their wealth and riches, the two sons of Kuber totally ignored Nārada. In order to bring them back to their senses, Nārada cursed them and said that they will summarily become trees. However, they will remember their guilt, and after one hundred God-Years⁵⁶ they will be blessed by an encounter with Kṛṣṇa, who will release them from this spell and they will then go to heaven.

Thus, these trees were two Yakṣas who had become transformed into trees due to Nārada's curse. Once Kṛṣṇa ousted them from the ground, they came out in human form and worshipped Kṛṣṇa with great fervour. On their way back to heaven, Kṛṣṇa told them that when they reach their abode, they should always worship him wholeheartedly. He said that they had achieved what they had wished for, which was their unflinching devotion to him.

The Victory of Bhāgawata-dharma over Yakṣa Worship:

This tale in the Bhāgavata is the story of the victory of the Bhāgavata religion over the worship of the Yakṣas. Even before the time of the Buddha, the wor-

56. Translator's Note: Divine years are 360 times human years.

ship of Yakṣas was highly prevalent in India. People were extremely scared of the Yakṣas and used to offer sacrifices to appease them. Any difficulty they experienced and any calamity that came their way was attributed to the wrath of the Yakṣas. To this date, Indian religions continue to exhibit signs of the universal influence of Yakṣas and related deities. Until recently, the Saint-Poets had to confront the worship of the Jākhāis and Jokhāis. One of the peculiarities of Yakṣa worship was the belief that Yakṣas inhabited certain trees. People used to worship such trees in the belief that they were actually Yakṣas. In ancient literature, such trees were called Caitya-Vṛkṣas. There is no doubt that the twin Arjuna trees in Nanda's backyard were, in fact, Yakṣa-Caityas. The composers of the Bhāgavata must have constructed the myth about the curse of Nārada in order to explain the importance of the worship of the Yakṣas, Nalakūbara and Maṇigrīva in the form of twin Arjuna trees. It is quite possible that there are similar stories about Yakṣas in the form of Caitya trees elsewhere in the realm of Indian folklore. The Yakṣa Nalakūbara is mentioned in the Mahābhārata (Vanaparva 274.16 and 291.33), the Bṛhatkathāmanjirī (p. 264), and in many Purāṇas dealing with the exploits of Kṛṣṇa.

It is significant that although Kṛṣṇa uprooted the twin Arjuna trees, the two Yakṣas residing in these trees thought of themselves blessed as a result, and became his disciples. The myth clearly shows the attempt by the composers of the Bhāgavata to uplift the Yakṣas and absorb them into the Bhāgavata religion. In addition, the myth also informs us of the dangers of acquiring too much of wealth which could lead to moral degeneration.

The Story of Kāliyāmaradana:

The third tale in this group of myths is that of the defeat of the serpent Kāliyā. Once, Kṛṣṇa and his friends had gone to the banks of the Yamuna River. It was summer and because they were in the sun for a long time, the cows and cowherds were very thirsty. They therefore went to the riverbank and drank the water from the river. Unbeknownst to them, the river water was polluted by the deadly poison of the serpent Kāliyā. Because of this, as soon as they drank the water, all of the cows and cowherds died instantly. When he saw this, Kṛṣṇa, with his eyes full of ambrosia, brought all of them to life again. The cowherds did not quite know what had transpired. Eventually, they did realize that they had succumbed to death because of the poison, but it was their

devotion to Kṛṣṇa that had saved them and brought them back to life. After this event, Kṛṣṇa resolved that for the benefit of all, the waters of Yamuna River must always remain pure. He therefore fought with Kālīyā and defeated him. Kālīyā became a devotee of Kṛṣṇa and left Yamuna on Kṛṣṇa's orders.

Kālīyā: A Protector-God of Waters in the Form of a Snake:

The composers of the Bhāgavata have deliberately painted Kālīyā as a highly poisonous snake. Their twofold purpose in doing so was firstly, to bring an element of surrealism to the myth and secondly to highlight young Kṛṣṇa's valour. In actual fact, Kālīyā was a fierce Snake God who protected waters. It is generally believed in Indian folklore that Yakṣas and Nāgas (Snakes) are protectors of ponds and rivers and if the water in such places is used by humans without their permission, they either possess such people or even kill them. In the Vanaparva of the Mahābhārata, there is a well-known story of all of the Pāṇḍavas except Yudhiṣṭhira dying as a result of drinking the water from a pond which was protected by a Yakṣa. Many of the ponds and tanks in Kashmir are named after a Snake God. Because of the inherent fear of Yakṣas who protected waters, many people did not drink water from places which were known to be inhabited by them. Therefore, the purpose of the myth of the defeat of Kālīyā by Kṛṣṇa is to free people from the fear of Nāgadevas. The Padmapurāṇa (5.42.148) and Vāyupurāṇa (3.69.72) both contain names of Snake-Gods. Both of them mention Kālīya.

*śīlīmukho dadhimukhaḥ kālīyaḥ śālīpiṇḍakaḥ ||
bindupādaḥ puṇḍarīko nāgascāpūraṇastathā ||*⁵⁷

As we have seen, the Gopas (Cowherds) came back to life in spite of drinking the poison released in the water by Kālīyā. This was solely due to the ambrosia-like sight of Kṛṣṇa who showered them with his love. Needless to say, this ambrosia-like vision of Kṛṣṇa is nothing but the rational insight into life as expounded by the Gītā. When one acquires such a sight in life, all of the poisons and difficulties in one's life are removed and one is able to enjoy life fully. The Saint-Poets did acquire such a sight.

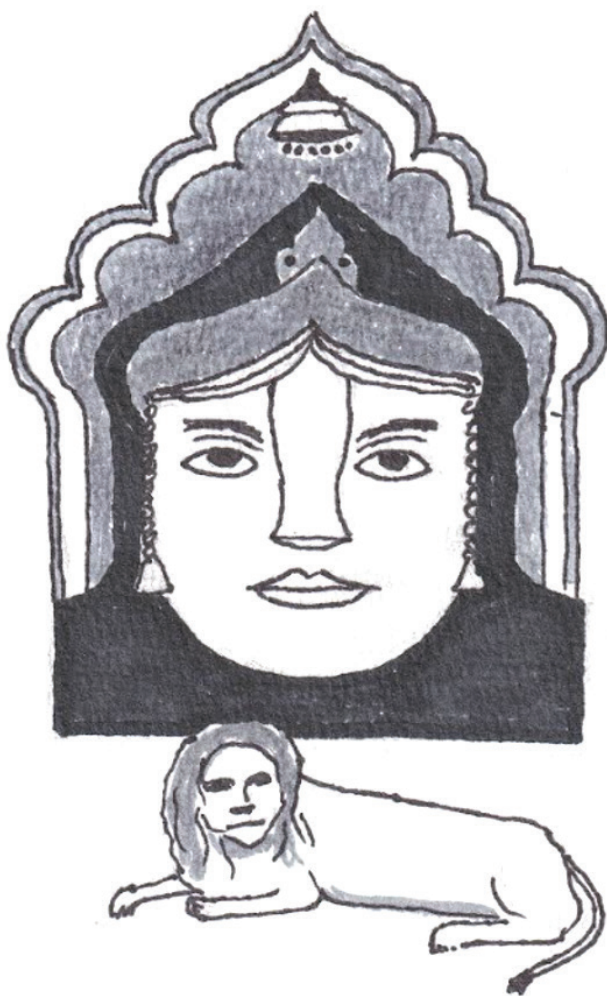
57. Translator's Note: Lit: Śīlīmukh, Dadhimukh, Kālīya, Śālīpiṇḍaka, Bindupāda and Puṇḍarīka are the Snake-Gods.

The Constructive Vision of the Purāṇa Composers:

We have just examined three tales which describe miracles performed by the child Kṛṣṇa. Created by the composers of the Bhāgavata, all three have been aimed at criticizing the worship of demigods, namely Bālagraha, Yakṣa and Nāga. In doing so, the sole purpose of the composers was to dissuade people from worshipping godlings and to instil into them the devotion to the ultimate being, which occupies the entire universe. All three of these tales are quite transparent. Although the miracles described border on exaggeration, one cannot fail to notice an ardent wish to uplift the minds of the common people. This method adopted by the Purāṇa composers to teach important lessons via the medium of entertainment proved highly effective. One often ridicules Paurāṇic stories as unimportant idle gossip. However, if we study them seriously, we find that their popularity is based not only on the improbable and miraculous but also on the deliberate but indirect attempt they make to instil sound moral values in the minds of the populace. Also, the many facets of life they portray are highly important as tools in the study of the cultural history of mankind. If we concentrate on the three myths we studied in this article, we see the strong belief of the common man in the demi-gods Bālagraha, Yakṣa and Nāga. One cannot deny the importance of these beliefs in the study of the cultural history of India.

References:

1. *Suśrutasaṃhitā, Uttaratāntra*, Adhyāyas 27-37; Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛudaya, Utrasthāna, Adhyāya. 3; Kāṣyapasaṃhitā, Revatīkalpa; etc.
2. *Myth and Reality*: D. D. Kosambi, Bombay, 1962. pp. 85, 109 Footnote.
3. *Prācīn Bhāratīya Lokadharma*: Dr. Vasudevsharan Aggrawal. Ahmedabad, 1964, pp. 77, 91.
4. *Ibid.* p. 74.



Depiction of Goddess Bhūtamātā

Chapter 2

The Grand Celebration of the Bhūtamātā (Ghost Mother)

Similar to the mind of an individual, a community's mind is often strange and temperamental. Many a times, it is difficult to fathom the exact nature of the collective likes and dislikes of people. A person or an idea may become so popular within the society that it is elevated almost to a platform of sacredness and the divine. The entire populace then seeks to stake their claim to the ownership of that person or idea. This does not however mean that this popularity, bordering on devotion, is present forever. The populace may suddenly develop a dislike for that object. Some objects may altogether vanish in the distant past due to the neglect or disregard they experience. If one is able to locate such objects and make them talk, one would be able to shed important light on the mindset of people historically. However, it is not often possible. It is indeed rare for a researcher to strike gold in such an endeavour. On the rare occasion one does so, one feels exceedingly happy and enjoys a level of joy as wonderful as begetting a son.⁵⁸

The Bhūtamātṛmahotsava in the city of Kalyāṇī:

While I was on the lookout for the roots of the Gondhaḷa, a performance aimed at the worship of the Goddess, I suddenly came across one such centre of devotion. This was an insight into a strange and unusual facet of the mind of the populace. There is an ancient work on dance called 'Nṛtyaratnāvalī.

58. Translator's Note: Dr. Dhare rightly says that this extreme happiness is equivalent to a family begetting a son. In Hindu thought, a son is the one who continues the family lineage and is required to perform the last rites for the parents, thereby ensuring that they go to the heavens. Hence his importance.

The work was written in 1240 CE by the head of the elephant squadron of the King of Wāraṅgaḷa, Gaṇapati Kākatiya. The writer's name was either Jāyaṇa or Jay Senāpatī. In this work, the author states that

The King, Someśvara the 3rd, in his capital called Kalyāṇī, had staged a performance of the Goṇḍali dance in honour of the Bhūtamātā. The king made some changes to the dance known in Maharashtra as the Goṇḍali dance and called it 'Citragoṇḍali'.⁵⁹

Thus, the dance by the name of Goṇḍalinṛtya is obviously the original form of the Gondhāḷa which is staged in Western India to this day. There are some scholars who doubt this statement of mine. However, I have been able to collect ample evidence that supports my view. I have in my possession a manuscript (pothī) in Sanskrit called 'Āmalikāgrāmamāhātmya'. Āmalikāgrāma is the present-day town of Māhur. Because this place has an important sacred tree called Kṛṣṇa Āvalī, it was given the name Āmalikāgrāma. The manuscript, through the medium of several short stories (Kathās), explains the importance of Māhur where the main shrine of Goddess Reṇukā is. While illustrating the importance of Māhur and the resident Goddess, the composer has elaborated on the importance of the performance of Gondhāḷa in the worship of Reṇukā. He has done so in three chapters (Adhyāyas). These three chapters have the collective name of Goṇḍalinṛtya. It is strange that some of the stanzas in this work are also found in the Gaṇḍalividhī (Lit. the method of performing the Goṇḍala) section of Śārṅgadeva's Sangītaratnākara.⁶⁰

Śārṅgadeva was a well-known musicologist during the reign of the Yādavas. In his work Sangītaratnākara, he has discussed many Indian folk dances and has included Gaṇḍali dance as one of them. In quoting the experts in the field, Śārṅgadeva says that

gauṇḍyā maṇḍalaṃ proktaṃ tajiṇaihi karṇātadeśajam ||⁶¹

59. The Quarterly Journal of the *Bhārat Itihas Samshodhan Mandal*, Year 20, Issue No. 2. Aświn Śaka 1861, p. 81. (CE 1929).

60. Translator's Note: The Sangītaratnākaraḥ is one of the most important and definitive Indian texts on music and dance. It was composed in the thirteenth century by Śārṅgadeva and deals with both Carnatic and North Indian musical traditions.

61. Sangītaratnākaraḥ, Nartanādhyaya, Ślokaś 1284-1312.

It is worth remembering that Śārṅgadeva quotes experts in musicology when he opines that Gauṇḍlīṇṛtya originated in Karnataka. The Yādavas ruled over both Maharashtra and Karnataka and Śārṅgadeva held an esteemed position in the courts of the Yādava kings of Karnataka. Therefore, his opinion about the birth of Gauṇḍlīṇṛtya must carry some weight. The City of Kalyāṇī where King Someśvara Cālukya commissioned Gauṇḍlīṇṛtya in honour of the Bhūtamātā is in Karnataka. Also, in the work composed by king Someśvara himself, namely, Mānasollāsa or Abhilāṣitārthacintāmaṇī,⁶² there are mentions of the Bhūtamātā's celebration.

The Seat of the Bhūtamātā in Saurashtra:

What was the nature of the celebration for the Bhūtamātā mentioned by Someśvara? What did this celebration involve? Who exactly was this goddess in whose honour this celebration was done? Many questions such as these may be asked. While I was on the lookout for the answers to such questions, I accidentally stumbled upon some highly important information in the Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa of the Skandapurāṇa.⁶³ An entire chapter of the Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa of the Skandapurāṇa is devoted to the Bhūtamātā. One may wonder as to the relationship between Prabhāsakṣetra and Bhūtamātā. However, I think the reason is simple. Because Prabhāsakṣetra is one of the seats of the Bhūtamātā, the composer of the Purāṇa must have felt compelled to include the importance of the Kṣetra and details of the worship of the Bhūtamātā. The description by the composer takes the form of a discussion between Śiva and Pārvatī. Śiva says to her:

*tato gacchen mahādevi tatrasthām bhūtamatyākām ||
sāvitryā vāruṇe bhāge śatadhanvantare sthitām || 1 ||*

Thus, Śiva is telling Pārvatī that the religious tourist (yātrika), while he is visiting various sacred shrines (in Prabhāsakṣetra), should also visit the Bhūtamātā shrine. The next śloka describes the Bhūtamātā as one with nine crore attendants (*navakoṭigaṇairiyuktā*) and belonging to the same class as corpses and ghosts. Śiva further says that during the celebration in honour

62. Mānasollāsa: Ed. G.K. Shrigondekar. Baroda, 1971. Part III, p.119.

63. The Prabhāsakhaṇḍa of the Skandapurāṇa. Prabhāsakṣetramāhātmya, Adhyāyas 167-170.

of the Bhūtamātā, village and town folk dance, laugh loudly, and run around with great joy. Their behaviour during this time is comparable to drunks and they act like having tremors. They smear their body with dirt and mud just as the ghosts and goblins do. Having heard this, Pārvatī asks again;

kimeṣa śāstranirdiṣṭo mārگاḥ kimuta laukikaḥ || 6 ||

(Lit: Is this a way of celebration according to the tenets of the scriptures or is it just a folk festival?). She further asks: How should the people in Prabhāsakṣetra worship this goddess? When and how did this Goddess come here? On what particular day should her festival be celebrated?)

The information gained as a result of Śiva's reply to Pārvatī's queries seems nothing short of miraculous. Śiva says: My Beloved! After we got married, I made love to you for a thousand years on Brahma's time scale. Because you were so very tired after the physical love, you went away from me. However, from your menstrual fluids, a horrible woman came into being. She had the looks described below:

kṛṣṇā karālavadanā piṅgākṣhī muktamūrdhajā ||
kapālamālā bharaṇā baddhamuṇḍārdhapiṇḍakā || 14 ||
khaṭvāṅgakaṇkālādharā ruṇḍamuṇḍakarā śivā || 15 ||
dvīpicarmāmbadharā raṇatkinkiṇimekhalā ||
ḍamaḍaḍamarukārā ca phetkārāpūritāmbarā || 16 ||

(Lit: She was black in colour with a dreadful and fierce looking mouth. She had tawny eyes, loose hair and wore a garland of human skulls. In her hands, she held dreadful weapons such as the Khaṭvāṅga and Kankāla. She wore tiger skin. The Kinkiṇi and Mekhalā she wore made a loud noise. She was also playing the Ḍamarū drum and filling the void of the skies with her dreadful screams).

After this dreadful Bhūtamātā was born, a male was also born out of Śiva's semen. He looked equally dreadful and his attendants were ghosts and goblins. Śiva gave both the Bhūtamātā and this dreadful man a boon that the mere touch of their hands would turn the day into night. Their influence would last only during the night, during the day they would be powerless. Immediately after Śiva pronounced this boon, Bhūtamātā and the man coalesced into one.

Bhūtamātā and her associates are to be found wherever there is darkness and licentiousness. They are unable to do any harm wherever there is light associated with righteousness. Bhūtamātā is also known as Bhrātṛbhāṇḍā and Udasevikā. Special celebrations for the Bhūtamātā should be done from the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Vaiśākha to the new moon day (amāvasyā).

*pratīpatprabhṛti vaiśāke yāvaccaturdaśītithiḥ ||
tāvatpūjā prakartavyā preraṇīprekṣaṇīyakaiḥ || 72 ||
atha devi pravakṣyāmi pratīpatprabhṛti kramāt ||
yathotsavo naraiḥ kāryaḥ preraṇīprekṣaṇīyakaiḥ || 78 ||
vikarmaphalanirdeśaiḥ pākhaṇḍānām viṭambanaiḥ ||
pradarśyate hāsyaparairnarairadbhutaceṣṭitaiḥ || 79 ||*

How should this celebration be performed? Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa recommends that plays showing the result of bad deeds should be staged during this celebration. Such plays should also include comic scenes making fun of heretical behaviour. Preraṇī and Prekṣaṇī dances should also be performed. On the ninth and eleventh day, lamps should be lit at night. People should dance wearing face masks portraying demons and ghosts.

*mukhabimbāni tatraiva lepadārukṛtāni vai || 97 ||
vicitrāṇi mahārḥāṇi raudraśāntāni kārayet ||
mātrṇām caṇḍikādīnām rākṣasānām tathaiva ca || 98 ||
bhūtapreta piśāccānām śākinīnām tathaiva ca ||
mukhāni kārayet tatra hāvabhāvākṛtāni ca || 99 ||*

The Purāṇa further declares that celebrating this goddess this way makes sure that no one suffers from the evil eye of the ghosts and goblins. Also, children stay healthy.

The Bhaviṣyapurāṇa has quoted the same śloka described above. However, it has given a different set of dates for this celebration. It says that this celebration should happen from the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Jyeṣṭha to the new moon day. Bhūtamātā celebration has been mentioned in a number of places in Sanskrit literature and in religious books. In his work called, 'Kṛtyakalpataru,' Lakṣmīdharabhaṭṭa has said that during this celebration, the young and the old behave as if they are drunk.

They smear themselves with ash, mud, urine and faeces. They ride on donkeys and utter all kinds of obscenities.

Even a cursory look at Bhūtamātā, her retinue and the mode of her celebration informs us that this goddess is strictly a folk-goddess. It is also clear that the tales described in the Skandapurāṇa about her celebration are deliberately concocted simply to justify the rather unusual and strange happenings that are a part of her celebration. It appears that the dreadful, obscene and loathsome were hallmarks of this celebration and they were also taken to an extreme. One notes that this celebration has a lot in common with the present-day Śimgā festival.⁶⁴

I have a feeling that the worship of the Bhūtamātā in Prabhāsakṣetra may have gone there from Maharashtra and Karnataka. It would be worth investigating whether the worship of this goddess is still practiced in Prabhāsakṣetra. To my knowledge, she is no longer worshipped in Maharashtra. Interestingly, it seems that due to their close association with Hindus, many Jain families have accepted some Hindu deities as their own clan-deities (Kuladevatā). There is evidence to suggest that some Jain families have accepted Bhūtamātā as their clan-deity.⁶⁵ On another note, the powerful Bālagraha 'Revatī', known for the dangerous affliction she causes in young children, has Bhūtamātā as an alternative name.⁶⁶

I now wish to concentrate on the Bhūtanṛtya, the dance which is performed during this celebration. There is no doubt in my mind that this dance is a folk-dance. The main reason for this is that the two folk dance types, Preraṇī and Prekṣaṇī are closely associated with this dance. One wonders whether this Bhūtanṛtya is the same as the Gauṇḍalīnṛtya that was staged in the city of Kalyāṇī during Bhūtamātrmahotsava. The folk dances, Preraṇī and Prekṣaṇī have been mentioned in the middle-ages in works dealing with music and dance. There they have been called Peraṇī and Pekkhaṇī. In one of the verses of Saint Nivṛttināth quoted below, the word used by him, Pekhaṇa is obviously concerned with dance.

64. Translator's Note: Śimgā, also known as Hoḷī Pūrṇimā, is a popular festival in most parts of India that celebrates the elimination of evil and the coming of spring. It is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Phālguna, which usually falls in March. The festival includes dancing, throwing coloured water on one another and performing folk music. An image of the demoness Hoḷī is burnt on a wooden pyre in public as well. Obscene songs and dances and licentious behaviour are often hallmarks of this festival.

65. Jain Community, Vilas A. Sangave, Bombay.

66. *Kāśyapasaṃhitā*. Ed. Hemraj and Satyapal, Varanasi, 1953. P. 99.

viṣṇusahita Śiva āṇilā paṇḍharī ||
kele bhūmātīrī pekhaṇa jeṇem ||

(Lit. Accompanied by Viṣṇu, Śiva was brought to Paṇḍharapūr. He (Śiva) danced the Pekhaṇa dance on the banks of the Bhīmā river.

In other works associated with dance, such as *saṅgītaratnākara* and *saṅgītasamayāsāra*, the three dances, namely, Peraṇī, Pekkhaṇī and Gauṇḍalī have been mentioned together in the discussion on folk dances. This leads me to believe that the Bhūtanṛtya mentioned in the Skandapurāṇa is closely associated with the folk dances Peraṇī and Pekkhaṇī. There are many references in Marathi literature dealing with Goṇḍalinṛtya which support my conclusion.

Gondhaḷī means Ghosts and Goblins:

Let me summarise what we have learned up till now. As we have already noted, Jāyaṇā's Nṛtyaratnāvalī puts together Bhūtamātṛmahotsava and Gondhaḷa-Gauṇḍalinṛtya in one class. We have already examined Bhūtamātṛmahotsava in some detail. As a part of that celebration, we saw that folk dances such as Peraṇī and Prekṣhaṇī were performed. While they danced, the dancers wore masks representing demons and ghosts. It seems very fair that during the celebration for Bhūtamātā, the mistress and patron goddess of the ghosts, and whose attendants were ghosts and the like, the dancers should use masks representing demons and ghosts. This dance would obviously have been a folk dance. Finally, we have seen that the Gauṇḍalī dance has been included in the class of other folk dances such as Peraṇī and Prekṣhaṇī. I therefore have no hesitation in surmising that the dance Someśvara instituted as part of the celebration, the Gauṇḍalinṛtya, must have been the Bhūtanṛtya mentioned in the Skandapurāṇa. When one sees mentions of Gondhaḷa and Gondhaḷī in ancient literature, the above supposition of mine gains further strength. One then experiences a great joy in discovering a truth long lost in the darkness of ignorance.

In an early well-known and seminal Marathi work, the Jñāneśvarī, the word Gondhaḷī has been used to mean a ghost (Piśāca). In elaborating on the inter-dependent relationship of Puruṣa and Prakṛti, Jñāneśvara says:

kām sādhubuteṃ gondaḷī || sancarouni, suye meḷim ||
nā nā sudinañcā ābhāḷim || durddinnu kīje || ⁶⁷

67. Marathi: कां साधुनें गोंदळी ॥ संचरौनि सुये मेळी ॥ ना ना सुदिनांचा आभाळी ॥ दुर्दीन्नु कीजे ॥ १३.१००४

(Lit: Once a Gondhaḷī befriends a good person and pulls him into his own camp, the good person loses all his goodness and starts behaving like a member of the Gondhaḷī's camp. Same happens to a Puruṣa, if he becomes too dependent on Prakṛtī).

Obviously, the meaning of the word Gondhaḷī in this context is a ghost or goblin. In order to assure ourselves that this is the exact meaning Jñāneśvara wanted to convey, let me quote the 10th chapter (Adhyāya) of the Jñāneśvarī. In explaining the term 'rāmaḥ śastrabhṛtāmaham', Jñāneśvara has written:

*prṣṭhiṃ ubheṃ ṭhakauni suvelīṃ || pratāpeṃ lañkeśvarācāṃ sisālīṃ ||
gaganīṃ udo mhānatayāṃ bali || dīdhaḷī bhūtāṃ || || (10.233)*

(Lit: After this, the Rāmacandra who stood on the top of the Suvela mountain and with his great valour, sacrificed the heads of Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā to the ghosts who were shouting 'udo, udo' from the heavens, is me, the same Rāmacandra who holds the weapons).

Dr. Dhare comments: Obviously, Rāma gave the heads of Rāvaṇa to the ghosts who were also known as Gondhaḷīs. This can be seen from the screams of 'udo, udo'⁶⁸ that they were uttering.

In more recent times, especially in the Mahānubhāva literature, the mention of Gondhaḷa has appeared in the form of similes and metaphors. For instance, works such as Śiśupālavadha (Ovi⁶⁹ 447), Rukmiṇīsvayamvara (Ovis 735, 810), Sahyādrivarṇana (Ovi 24), Mūrtiprakāśa (Ovi 2414), have all mentioned the Gondhaḷa. Two of these are especially worth mentioning here:

*maḍaurāncāṃ baṃbaḷī || yoginīcakrācāṃ gondaḷīṃ ||
kāḷarātrī udo mhaṇavilī || raṇāmāji || ||*
(Śiśupālavadha, 447)

*kī sarvaśaktīncāṃ meḷīṃ || parajñānacakragondaḷīṃ ||
ānanda prakāṭalā bhūtaḷīṃ || jīvā udo karītu || ||*

68. Translator's Note: 'udo udo' is a typical chant meaning 'praise be to the Goddess, Hail the goddess' and so on. In seeking alms in the name of the goddess, devotees often carry Her image in a basket, go to each household and seek alms. In her temples, one constantly hears this chant.

69. Translator's Note: Ovi is a metre used extensively in Marathi religious poetry.

(Sahyādrivarnana, 24)⁷⁰

Both of these verses mention 'udo'. Also, words and phrases such as, 'yoginīcakrācā gondaḷa', 'sarva śaktīncā meḷā' and cakragondaḷa are all used in relation to Gondhaḷa. The very first line tell us that Yoginīcakrameḷa and Śaktīcakrameḷa both mean a group of ghosts. It is worth noting that in the worship of the sixty-four Yoginīs, the concept of the circle of Yoginīs (yoginī-maṇḍala) is most important. Their temples are also circular.

The first *ovi* describes the scene on a battleground. Having defeated and decimated the enemy on the battleground, the night of death and destruction (kāḷarātrī) was celebrated by the circle of yoginīs among the terrible sounds of the various cremation-ground musical instruments (*maḍaurāncā bambāḷī*) and chanting 'udo udo' for the Kāḷarātrī.

Similarly, the following verse in Dāsopant's *Gītārṇava* mentions the two words, bhūtāncā, and gondaḷa together.

*bhūtāncām gondaḷīm paḍileṃ || tem māṇusa navhe āpuleṃ ||
taiseṃ pāpā adhīna jāleṃ || jīṇeṃ hoī ||*

It is important to note that the meaning of this *ovi* is in consonance with the *ovi* in the Jñāneśvarī (13.1004) that I have mentioned before. In the worship of the Goddess, the Bhutye are as important as are the Gondhaḷīs. In fact, both of these words probably carry the same meaning. Just as the human representative of the dog in the worship of Khaṇḍobā is the Vāghyā (< vaggeya: dog), the human representatives of the ghosts and goblins in the worship of the Bhūtamātā are the Gondhaḷī and Bhutye.

Gondhaḷa ghālītī Bhūtagaṇa:

We have come across the words Yoginīcakra and Śaktīcakrameḷa in relation to Gondhaḷa and we know that they signify an assemblage of ghosts and goblins. There is a lot of evidence in later literature to support this conjecture. For example, in the work by the name of Ātmatīrthaprakāśa written by the seventeenth century Mahānubhāva poet Kṛṣṇamunī Virāṭadeśe, there are several examples which support my statement. This work of Kṛṣṇamunī describes the greatness of Pāncāleśvara. A goddess by the name of Satyādevī

70. Marathi: मडौरांचा बंबाळी || योगिनीचक्रांचा गोंदळी || काळरात्री उदो म्हणविली || रणामाजी ||

came to the aid of king Pāncāḷa, who wanted to destroy the demons Kumbha and Nikumbha. With Satyādevī was a group of ghosts who have been called Yoginīcakra by Kṛṣṇamunī.

yayānaṇtare pravartailī niśī || tava rokaḍā aṇi kaḍā bhūtāṇniśīṇ ||
satyādevī yoginīcakraśīṇ || ālī rāyājavalī || 457 ||

Because of a boon given to Kumbha and Nikumbha by Śiva, as soon as a drop of their blood fell on the earth, new demons were born out of it. Therefore, the ghosts were ever ready to drink every drop before it fell on the earth. The work of the ghosts started as soon as the battle began.

kinkāḷiyā nādeṇ garjatī || karīṇ rudhirāpātreṇ zelitīṇ ||
harṣe gondaḷīṇ nācatī || satyādevīpudhāṇ || 406 ||

As one can see, Kṛṣṇamunī has used the term ‘Gondaḷa’ for the dance of the ghosts. Another Mahānubhāva poet of the same period, Lakṣadhīra, in his work called Rukmiṇīsvayamvara, makes a similar mention when he is describing the scene of a battle.

raṇī utaralī bhūteṇ || mhaṇatīṇ upavāse bahuteṇ ||
ajīṇ pāraṇeṇ jālem āmuteṇ || ichhā āpuliye ||
yeke mānseṇ toḍitī taṭataṭāṇ || goḷe gīlītī gaṭagaṭāṇ ||
ghāṭī baisoni ghaṭaghaṭā || ghoṭitīṇ asudheṇ ||
hiṇḍatī causaṭī yoginī || kapāḷakharpareṇ asatīṇ pāṇūṇ ||
rudhireṇ bharuni ghetī dhaṇī || detātī dhekara ||
magā mhaṇatīṇ udo udo || aiseṇ juga sadā nāndo ||
kāryā āmuce siddha || śrījagannāthā ||
navakoḍī kātyāyanī dekhā || chapanakoḍī cāmuṇḍāncā lekha ||
nagna dhānvatī āikā || vetāḷa raṇūṇ ||

(Rukmiṇīsvayamvara, 16.14-15, 22-24)

In this description by the poet Lakṣadhīra, the ghosts including the sixty-four Yoginīs, nine crore Kātyāyanīs, fifty-six crore Cāmuṇḍās and the naked Vetāḷa, are ecstatic, having consumed the meat and drunk the blood. They are dancing the tune ‘udo, udo’.

A fifteenth century Jain Marathi writer by the name of Sūrijan wrote a book called Paramahansakathā.⁷¹ In this work, he has ridiculed

71. *Paramahansakathā*. Ed. Dr. Subhashachandra Akkoḷe. Solapur, 1960. P. 46.

Cārvākas by the use of a metaphor for Gondhaḷa saying, ‘cārvāka bhūta nācatī || kaliyougīm udo mhaṇatī’ (Lit’ ghostly beings such as Cārvāka dance in the Kaliyuga. They chant ‘udo udo’ while doing so. Once again, there should be no doubt that this ghostly dance with the chants of ‘udo udo’ is nothing but Gondhaḷa.

The writer of the *Aśvamedha*, Vipra Nārāyaṇa, has specifically mentioned Gondhaḷa when he described the play of the ghosts during a battle. He says:

nagna dhāvati lāvā || ālā vetāḷāncā thavā ||
bhūtāvaḷi mhaṇatī devā || aiseṃca ho pratidinīm ||
ālī auṭakoṭī bhūtāvaḷi || medamānsa khātām sarva dhālī ||
mhaṇatī dhanya dhanya vanamālī || ājīm bahutām divasām bhojana ||
sairāvairām dhāvati yakṣiṇī || sagaḷa bhakṣitī dānkiṇī ||
vidārītī piśācavāṇī || mahāvīrantem ||
aisī nānā parī bhūtem amita || parisoni pāvalīm tvarita ||
medamaunsa āṇi śoṇitem || sakaḷa tṛpta jālīm ||
*maga tṛpta jāliyāvarī || **gondhaḷa kheḷatīm** avadhārīm ||*
divaṭiyā ghevoni karī || ekeka ambarīm usaḷatīm ||
***udo udo karitīm bhūtem**⁷² ||*
mhaṇatī bhojana didhalem jagannāthem ||
ājīm jo na ye yethem || to mukalā bhojanā ||

Lit: They all ran naked. The group of Vetāḷs came as well. All of them said to God, ‘May it be like this every day! Millions of ghosts and goblins arrived. They all consumed the meat and fat. They all thanked Lord Kṛṣṇa for the wonderful meal they enjoyed after a long time. The Yakṣiṇīs ran around. The Dākiṇīs devoured everything in sight.

If there is still any doubt in the mind of the reader that Gondhaḷa is the same as the dance of the ghosts and goblins, it is worth looking at Śrīdharasvāmī Nāzarekar’s book, *Ambikā-udaya*.⁷³ In describing the entourage of the Goddess who is on the way to destroy the demons Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, Śrīdharasvāmī says:

aṣṭabhujā ādibhavānī || nighe mṛgendrāvarī baisonī ||
savem causaṣṭī koṭī yogini || icchāmātreṃ pragaṭalyā ||

72. Translator’s Note: Text highlighted by Dr. Dhere.

73. Translator’s Note: *Ambikā-udaya*, Ed. Nārāyaṇaśāstri Nāzarekar, Pandharpur, 1965.

ananta śaktīncī swāminī || asaṅkhyā devī miḷālyā te kṣaṇī ||
navakoṭī kātyāyanī || causaṣṭī koṭī cāmuṇḍā ||
auṭakoṭī bhūtāvaḷī || gheuni cālālī bhadrakālī ||
jvālāvetāḷa mahāṅkāḷī || asaṅkhyāta prakaṭale || 3.33-35 ||

Śrīdharaswāmī then elaborates further how the Gondhaḷa dance of this crowd of ghosts starts once the battle begins. He adds:

ikaḍe ambecyā daḷiṃ || auṭakoṭī bhūtāvaḷī ||
navakoṭī cāmuṇḍā sakaḷī || causaṣṭī koṭī yoginī ||
vetāḷ bhairava apāra || tehatīsa koṭī devabhāra ||
divāṭyā gheuni samagra || gondhaḷa ghālītī ambepudhe ||
daityānce kādhūni kothaḷa || techa chaṇḍakem karuni viśāḷa ||
rangīm nācatī vetāḷa || divāṭyā karīm zaḷakatī ||
tanta-vitanta-ghana-suṣira || caturvidha vādyānce gajara ||
duṇḍubhī vājavī purandara ||
nadem dharādhara tharakatase || 4.47-50 ||

In continuation of this description, in verse 4.70, Śrīdharaswāmī clearly says:

udo udo mhaṇona || gondhaḷa ghālītī bhūtagaṇa ||

Also, once again in the fifth chapter (adhyāya), he says:

toṃ dhāvilyā bhūtāvaḷī || sakaḷa raṇa bhakṣileṃ te veḷī ||
trupta houni gondhaḷī || nācatī tevhām ambepudhem || 5.84 ||

It is in this explicit way that Śrīdharaswāmī has described the Gondhaḷa dance of the ghosts. Through his work ‘Ambikā-udaya’, the exact nature of Gondhaḷa becomes very apparent to us. The participants in this ghostly dance are: Yoginīs, Śaktīs, Kātyāyanīs, Cāmuṇḍā, Yakṣiṇīs, Vetāḷa and Bhairava. Also present are the typical accompanying musical instruments and other sounds associated with the Gondhaḷa dance: divṭyā, caṇḍke, tuṭtuṇe, and the udokāra.

A contemporary of Sant Eknātha, the muslim Marathi Saint-Poet Shekh Mahammad Śrīgondekar wrote a work called Yogasaṅgrāma. In it, he has said the same thing about Gondhaḷa. He says:⁷⁴

ātā aikā gondhaḷāce vyavadhāna ||
hāṃkārī samasta bhūtāṃlāgūna ||

74. *Yogasaṅgrāma*. Ed. B.C. Bendre, Mumbai, 1959. P. 150.

aneka aneka karūni baraḷaṇa || rangaṇī avatarata ase || 13.24 || ||
*ghaḍika hajivanta hota malikāce || ghaḍika **gondhaḷe** hoūnanāce ||*
*tethem **uccāra karī aneka bhūtānce** || hātī tāṭa gheūniyā || 12.97 ||*

Finally, in his work called ‘Svanubhavadinakara’, the disciple of Samartha Rāmdās, Dinakaraswāmī Tisgāvakar, declares that Śakticakrameḷa is nothing but a collection of ghosts.⁷⁵

hotoṃ paḍiloṃ Śakticakrameḷiṃ ||
*maja yekāsi **pañcabhūtabādheci ākaḷi** ||*
*sadguru tūm **pañcākṣari**⁷⁶ aturbaḷi || yekeñci akṣarem upacāriḷeṃ ||*
yeḷākṣarāci karūni kaḍasaṇi || niḥśeṣa keli bhūtazāḍaṇi ||
maja mī cukaloṃ hotoṃ nirvāṇiṃ || tyā bheṭavileṃ maja māteṃ || ||

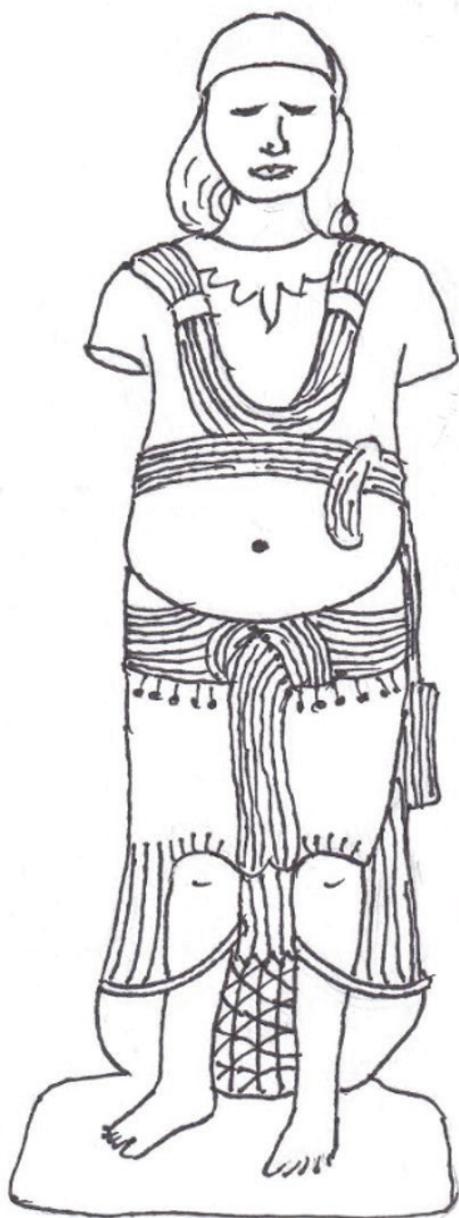
With the definitive evidence I have provided so far, the reader will no doubt come to realise that, the words Śakticakrameḷa and Yoginīcakrameḷa, used in the early period of Mahānubhāva literature, were indicative of a collection of ghosts. Also, Gondhaḷa is a dance that imitates the dance of ghosts and goblins and is used as a part of the worship regimen for the Goddess.

The description of the Bhūta-nṛtya in the Skandapurāṇa, the mention by Jāyana of the celebration of Bhūtamātā, which included the Goṇḍalī-nṛtya, and several mentions of the Bhūta-nṛtya in Marathi literature, all go to show that Gondhaḷa is a ghost-dance used in the worship of the Bhūtamātā.

Gondhaḷa today is a folk-dance used strictly in the worship of the goddesses Reṇūkā and Tuḷajābhavānī. Bhūtamātā seems to have disappeared altogether in the dark unknown past. The Gondhaḷe and Bhutye do not even know her anymore. We were however able to delve into the unknown past and investigate her, due mainly to the etymology of the names Bhutye and Gondhaḷi. We were able to look at a lot of evidence that came from ancient Marathi literature. This allowed us to visit closely the terrible dance, the Bhūtanṛtya, used in her worship. It is likely that probably over six to seven hundred years ago, Bhūtamātā became less significant in comparison to the popularity of Reṇūkā and Tuḷajābhavānī. Her worshippers became more engrossed with the milder celebratory chants (udokāra) for these two goddesses. Although we are not able to investigate this change *in toto*, material available to us has given us at least an inkling of the past.

75. *Svanubhavadinakara*. Ed. Shankar Shrikrishna Dev. Dhule, Śaka 1833.

76. Translator's Note: Text highlighted by Dr. Dhere.



Line Drawing Depiction of Mañibhadra Yakṣa

Chapter 3

Maṇibhadra Yakṣa

Within the large group of Indian deities, the Yakṣas and Yakṣiṇīs have made their distinct mark. Since ancient times, the general Indian populace seems to have been deeply involved in the worship of the Yakṣas. Even to this date, vestiges of Yakṣa worship can be seen dispersed all over the villages in India. In the realm of Indian iconography, many different kinds of Yakṣa statues attract our attention. Stories and myths about Yakṣas are abundant in Indian literature. The ideas behind many of the religious rituals we practice to this day have their bearing on our erstwhile Yakṣa worship. I am convinced that if we meticulously investigate the effect of Yakṣa worship on the Indian mind, we are very likely to unravel a myriad of mysteries in the cultural history of India.

Among the deities classified as Yakṣas, the leader of the Yakṣas (Yakṣarāja), Kubera, is still invoked in the daily worship practice of Hindus in the form of ‘a mantric bouquet of flowers’ (*mantrapuśpāñjalī*). He is also worshipped every year during the Dīpāvalī festival on the day of the *dhana-trayodaśī*. Not long ago, the worship of Maṇibhadra Yakṣa was also highly popular in some prominent segments of Indian society.

The Importance of Maṇibhadra:

Maṇibhadra is one of the most important deities in the Yakṣa pantheon. Next to Kubera, he is considered to be the most influential Yakṣa. Although he is not mentioned all that often in the Mahābhārata, even the few mentions we see suggest to us that he was very important at the time. For example, in the Sabhāparva (10.15), the sage Nārada describes the court of Kubera. In describing the court attendees, Nārada puts the name of Maṇibhadra the very first in the list. It is also important to know that in this list, Maṇibhadra has been described with the suggestive adjective, *ghanada*, meaning ‘the giver of wealth’.

After this mention, one comes across Maṇibhadra in the Nalopākhyāna of the Vanaparva of the Mahābhārata. In the deep jungle, having burnt the hunter by her curse, Damayantī, suffering intensely from the loss of Nala and searching for him singlehandedly, notices a caravan of businessmen crossing the river. Damayantī, somewhat confident about seeing a group of people in the otherwise lonely forest, approaches them and asks if they know the whereabouts of Nala. S'ucī, the head of the group of businessmen says to Damayantī:

*Kuñjaradvīpimaḥiṣaśārdūlarkṣarmṛgānapi ||
paśyāmyasminvane kṛtsne hyamanuṣyaṇiṣevite ||
ṛte tvāṃ mānuṣīm martyaṃ na paśyāmi mahāvane ||
tathā no yakṣarāḍjṇa maṇibhadraḥ prasīdatu || ||*

(Vanaparva, 64.129-30)

(Lit: Oh Kalyāṇī! In this forest where humans do not venture, I only saw elephants, tigers, wild-buffaloes, Cheetahs, and deer. I have not seen a single human being apart from you in this great forest. However, Oh Kalyāṇī! Let our King of Yakṣas, Maṇibhadra, make it so happen).

These businessmen were on the way to Cedi country and Damayantī joined them as well. On their way at night, they all stopped on the bank of a lake. While they were asleep, a herd of wild elephants attacked the elephants belonging to the businessmen and almost killed all of them. Those businessmen who survived this calamity got together and started lamenting their fate. They said, 'What bad deed did we do to deserve this calamity?'

*nūnaṃ na pūjitoḥ asmābhiḥ maṇibhadro mahāyaśaḥ ||
tathā yakṣādhipaḥ śrīmān na vai vaiśravaṇaḥ prabhuḥ ||
na pūjā vighnakartṛṇāmavāḥ prathamam kṛtā || ||*

(Vanaparva, 65.22-23)

(Lit. We did not worship the ever-successful Maṇibhadra and also the leader of the Yakṣas, Śrīmān Vaiśravaṇa. It is also certain that we did not worship other deities who create calamities as well).

The Adored God of Sārtha:

When one examines the above passage, it becomes clear to us that Mañibhadra was the favourite God of business people who travelled in their caravans. Due to the nature of their business, they constantly moved from place to place. Therefore, it was but natural that they would entrust their God Mañibhadra with their fate. The good and bad in their life were attributed to either a boon or a curse from Mañibhadra. It is worth noting that they remembered Mañibhadra first, even before Kubera, the Lord of Yakṣas. It is also important to remember that the sage Nārada addressed Mañibhadra as *dhanada*, the giver of wealth. It is but natural that businessmen who roamed constantly to acquire wealth would worship Mañibhadra, the giver of wealth, with great devotion. It is for this reason that they have called him 'Yakṣarāṭa' (king of Yakṣas) and 'Mahāyaśa' (giver of great success).

In the same Vanaparva, in describing the religious travels of Yudhiṣṭhira and others to sacred places (tīrthayātrā), there is a mention of the seer Lomāśa telling Yudhiṣṭhira that in the vicinity of the mountain Mandara-girī, many Yakṣas, Gandharvas and Kinnaras worship Mañibhadra, the Indra among Yakṣas. It is stated that Lomeśa narrated this information to Yudhiṣṭhira (Vanaparva, 141.7).

Mañibhadra's special attribute of being the 'giver of wealth' (*dhanada*) has been further elaborated in the Śāntiparva under the name of 'Kuṇḍadharopākhyāna' (Śāntiparva, 271). This tale has been told to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma. It extolls the importance of observing one's dharma:

The God who Bestows Wealth:

In order to ward off poverty, a poor Brāhmin decided to undertake various religious observances and started the worship of many deities. However, he did not receive the fruit of his efforts. While he was in search for new deities who could give him rewards for his observances, he came across a cloud by the name of Kuṇḍadhāra. This cloud happened to be an attendant to many gods and would always be found around them. The poor Brāhmin propitiated this cloud and as a result, was able to acquire his favours. With Kuṇḍadhārā's blessing, he obtained divine vision. Thus, once, while he was lying down on a bed of sacred grass (*darbha*), he was able to see the radiant god Mañibhadra sitting in the middle of a circle of Yakṣas. He also noticed that

on Maṇibhadra's orders, the Yakṣas were distributing wealth and property to those people who had acquired merit through their actions, and at the same time, taking away the possessions of those who had committed sins. At that moment, while the Yakṣas were watching, Kuṇḍadhārā prostrated in front of Maṇibhadra and sought a boon to obtain better living conditions for the poor Brāhmin. Maṇibhadra agreed to give a lot of wealth to the Brāhmin. However, on deeper thought, Kuṇḍadhārā felt that wealth was of no value whatsoever. He said to Maṇibhadra, 'Sir, the giver of wealth! I do not want to beg for riches on behalf of my devotee, the Brāhmin. In place of it, I would like him to be someone who believes in and observes Dharma. Upon this, Maṇibhadra said, 'Isn't the fruit of believing in and observing Dharma, obtaining property and everlasting happiness?' So why subject oneself to tapas, involving physical hardships, rather than obtain the fruit of the same without going through physical hardships?

Kuṇḍadhārā did not however agree with Maṇibhadra's argument. He insisted that the devotee must observe dhārmic practices and obtain a boon by doing so. Finally, pleased with Kuṇḍadhārā's devotion and also with his arguments, Maṇibhadra gave the Brāhmin the boon that he would live by his religiously pure self.

It is clear from the above story that according to popular perception, Maṇibhadra is a god who is known to give wealth to his devotees and he is surrounded by several Yakṣas and is their chief.

Maṇibhadra's last mention in the Mahābhārata is in the *Āśvamedhika Parva* (65.6). Following Vyāsa's advice, Yudhiṣṭhira decided to perform an Āśvamedha sacrifice. For this purpose, he wanted to recover the treasure that had been previously buried by the King Marutta. This is where the mention of Maṇibhadra comes in. In order to recover the secret treasure, Yudhiṣṭhira departed to the place with his family and army. When he reached the implied place, he erected a large tent on a levelled ground. Ṛṣis, including Dhoumya gave him the auspicious time to start the digging. Overnight he fasted and listened to the chants of the accompanying Brāhmins. Next morning, he organized a *prasāda* cooked especially for the God Śiva. He then made offerings of ghee in the specially prepared fire and worshipped Agni, the god of fire. By chanting the appropriate mantras, the Brāhmins offered cooked rice (*caru*) to the fire. Flowers which were sanctified by mantras were offered with the *caru* as *balī*⁷⁷ to lord Śiva. The Kinnaras were propi-

77. Translator's Note: A *baḷi* is a sacrificial offering.

tiated by sanctified offerings of a variety of flowers and puffed grains. This was followed by *baḷis* to Kuber, the king of Yakṣas and Maṇibhadra, his chief-tain. Other Yakṣas and Bhūtapatī, were offered Citrānna,⁷⁸ meat and water containing Til (Seasome). The priest made offerings to each one of these godlings in separate earthen pots. Yudhiṣṭhira made offerings of cows to the Brāhmins and *baḷis* to supernatural beings.

This way, having thus performed the puja of Rudra and associated Gaṇas, Yudhiṣṭhira, accompanied by Vyāsa, went to the exact place where the treasure was buried. Here, he first worshipped the Lord of Wealth, Kubera. The conch shell and gods who look after buried wealth were then propitiated by offerings of flowers, Citrānna and Apūpa.⁷⁹ The Brāhmins then chanted Svas-tivācana. It was during this sacred atmosphere that the digging for wealth was done. Having found thousands of containers containing the treasure, Yudhiṣṭhira once again offered prayers to Śiva and then left for Hastināpura, his capital.

It is important to examine this story about the transport of a treasure in order to appreciate not only Maṇibhadra's role, but also to understand the nature of the worship of the Yakṣas by the populace. From this tale, one can easily follow that hidden treasures are protected by Yakṣas and Kinnaras, who themselves pay obeisance to Śiva. Unless they are satiated by one offering them a detailed worship involving rituals, one is unable to get access to hidden treasures.

These mentions of Maṇibhadra in the Mahābhārata inform us of his notable importance at the time. The composers of the Mahābhārata have lauded him by adjectives such as Yakṣarāja (king of Yakṣas), Dhanada (giver of wealth), Mahāyaśa (highly victorious) and Mahādyutimāna (one with great lustre). The giver of wealth and kingdom to his devotees, guardian of hidden wealth, giver of business prosperity to business people, and at the same time bringing calamities for those who do not propitiate him, is how Yakṣadeva Maṇibhadra has been described during the time of the Mahābhārata.

78. Translator's Note: Citrānna or lemon rice is a South Indian dish made especially on puja days.

79. Translator's Note: Apūpa is a type of cake made out of flour.

Elaboration of the Iconography of Maṇibhadra:

The picture of Maṇibhadra that is painted in the Mahābhārata can be further clarified by looking at other sources. In the 15th Adhyāya of the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Vālmikī-Rāmāyaṇa, there is a description of Maṇibhadra having acted as the leader of Kubera's army (Senāpatī) during the war between Rāvaṇa and Kubera. Maṇibhadra is described here by the honourific adjectives, Mahāyakṣa (the great Yakṣa) and Yakṣendra (the Indra among the Yakṣas). During the battle with Rāvaṇa, Maṇibhadra killed many of the great warriors of Rāvaṇa. Unfortunately, in the end, Rāvaṇa defeated Maṇibhadra. In this final battle with Rāvaṇa, there is an important reference to Maṇibhadra's iconography. It says:

*tāḍito māṇibhadrasya mukuṭe prāharadraṇe ||
tasya tena prahāreṇa mukuṭaṃ pāśvamaḡataṃ ||
tataḥ prabhṛti yakṣa asou pāśvamouirabhūtkila || ||*

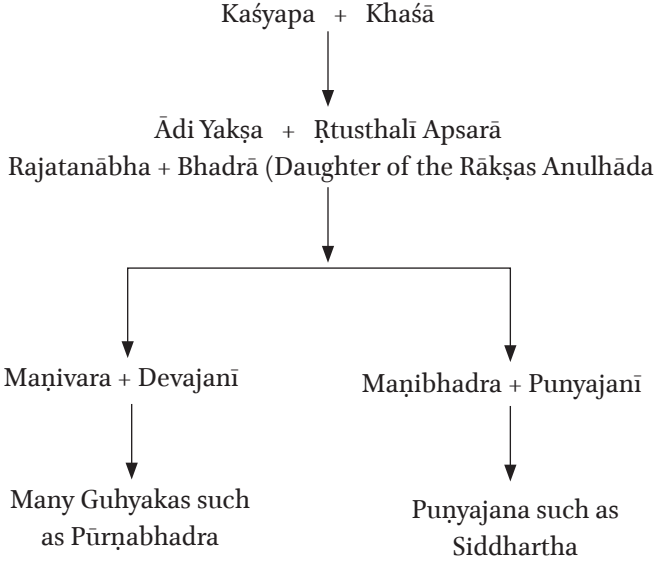
(Uttarakāṇḍa, 15.15)

(Lit: Although he was hit several times with Maṇibhadra's weapons, Rāvaṇa strongly hit on Maṇibhadra's crown. Because of the force of the impact, Maṇibhadra's crown tilted backwards. From then on, Maṇibhadra started wearing his crown with a backward tilt).

In his iconography, Maṇibhadra is always shown with his crown tilting backwards. It must be that the iconographers took heed of the above story in constructing Maṇibhadra's image.

Maṇibhadra's Family History:

The Vāyupurāṇa (Adhyāya 69) contains important details about Maṇibhadra's place of residence and his family. Using this information, one is able to prepare a table of Maṇibhadra's lineage as follows.



Puṇyajana, Devajana and Guhyak are alternative names for Yakṣa clans. They may well be among the various classes of the Yakṣas. From the above family tree, one thing would be clear that the Puṇyajana were a part of the clan of Maṇibhadra.

Maṇibhadra's Abode:

The Vāyupurāṇa (Adhyāya 47) has provided definitive information about the abode of Maṇibhadra. It says that on the north-east of Kailāśa, there is a mountain called Candraprabhā. This jewel of a mountain is adorned with heavenly medicinal plants and chemical elements and is situated next to a golden mountain. At the base of Candraprabhā is a lake by the name of Achhodā. This lake is the source of a river called Acchodā. On the banks of this river is a heavenly forest called Caitrarath. Accompanied by other Yakṣas, Maṇibhadra, the leader of the Yakṣas, lives on this mountain Candraprabhā. A number of his subjects live with him. Among them, many are cruel by nature.

The Matsyapurāṇa (121.5.9) provides identical information about Maṇibhadra's abode. We have already seen that according to the Mahābhārata, Maṇibhadra's abode is a mountain called Mandaragiri. In the opinion of Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal, the mountain peak known at present as

‘Māṇā’ must be the abode of Maṇibhadra. This peak is close to Badrināth.⁸⁰ In his work, ‘Kādambari’, Bāṇabhaṭṭa has described lake Acchoda as a very beautiful place. He has further described a place called Candraprabhā at the base of the Kailāśa mountain. According to him, Candraprabhā has a beautiful Śiva temple which has a four faced Śivaliṅga. He describes a scene where someone has just completed the puja at this temple. It is also this temple where Mahāśvetā sat in deep meditation. This description by Bāṇabhaṭṭa resonates well with our knowledge that Kuber, the king of the Yakṣas, is a close friend of Śiva and all of the Yakṣas are devotees of Śiva.

The Vāmanapurāṇa mentions that there is intimate relationship between the Vaṭa tree (*Ficus benghalensis* – banyan tree) and Maṇibhadra:

*yakṣāṇām adhipasyāpi maṇibhadrasya nāradaḥ ||
vaṭavṛkṣaḥ samabhavat tasminstasya ratih sadā || 18.3 ||*

(Lit: Pulastya Ṛṣi tells Nārada: Oh Nārada, The Vaṭa tree was born out of the king of the Yakṣas Maṇibhadra. Because of this, this tree is very dear to Maṇibhadra.)

The relationship of Yakṣas with the Vaṭa tree is age old. There have been many mentions of the Yakṣas residing in the Vaṭa tree. The well-known Vaṭayakṣiṇī who is known for her worship by those who are practitioners of the secret meditation which yields practical benefits (Sakāma Gūḍhasādhana) always resides in a Vaṭa tree.

Popular Folk God:

The Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Vāyupurāṇa and Matsyapurāṇa have all described Maṇibhadra as the leader of the Yakṣas. The Devībhāgavata also does so. The Padmapurāṇa says that in the battle between Śiva and the demon Jalandara, Maṇibhadra fought side by side with Śiva (Padmapurāṇa, Uttarakhaṇḍa, 13.55, 14.7, 18.21, 23, 26). In Kṣemendrapā’s Bṛhatkathāmaṇjirī, he has been described as the brother of Kubera and his wife is called Madanamāṇjirī.⁸¹ The Āṭānātiyasūtra of the Buddhist work Dīghanikāya lists the names of Yakṣas.

80. *Bhāratasāvitṛi*, Prathamakhaṇḍa: Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal. New Delhi, 1957. P.253.

81. *Bṛhatkathāmaṇjirī* (Kāvyaṃālā: No. 69), Mumbai, 1931. pp. 214,222.

Mañibhadra has been named in this list as a prominent Yakṣa.⁸² The Viṣṇu-harmottarapurāṇa includes Mañibhadra in its index of folk deities.⁸³

One can easily see how important this Yakṣa was to the folk mind. When the worship of Yakṣas was in vogue, Mañibhadra's worship was right next to Kubera in importance. Because of his pervading appeal to the common folk, many shrines around India were developed for his worship. According to Jain Āgamas, his Caityas and Āyatanas existed in the cities of Mithilā and Vardhamānpura.⁸⁴ The Kathāsaritsāgara (2.5.165-166) mentions Mañibhadra shrines. People used to offer *navas*⁸⁵ at these shrines for tangible awards. It appears that Mathurā and Padmāvati (currently Pavāyā in Gwalior District) were important active shrines for the worship of Mañibhadra. The sculpted image of Mañibhadra found at Padmāvati is currently in the museum at Gwalior. Another image, found in the village of Parkham near Mathurā is in the museum at Mathurā. Both images are enormous in size. Experts in iconography believe that these images of Mañibhadra were the precursors of the images of Viṣṇu and Bodhisatva which were sculpted later. There is some evidence to support a conjecture that the image discovered at Padmāvati would have been the subject of worship by the business people described in the Nalopākhyāna. This description seems to indicate that the caravan (Sārtha) Damayantī met on the way to the Chedi country (Sagar-Jabalpur area in Madhya Pradesh), started from Padmāvati and crossed the Vetravati (currently Betavā) river on their way. The Buddhist work 'Mahāniddeśa' has said that the devotees of Mañibhadra were called Mañibhadravratika⁸⁶ (Lit. those who had taken the oath of the worship of Mañibhadra).

The worship of Mañibhadra which was very popular in the distant past does still exist to some extent at present. The worship of 'Bāvana Vīr' (Lit. Fifty-two Heroes) which is very prevalent to this date in Indian villages includes Mañibhadra.⁸⁷ In Bengal, he is referred to as 'Māṇik Vīr'.

82. *Dīghanikāya*: Translated by Bhikṣu Rahul Sāmskrītyāyana. Bhikṣu Jagadīśa Kaśyap. Varanasi, 1936, pp. 277-278.

83. *Pracheen Bharatiya Lokadharma*: Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal. Ahmedabad, 1964. P. 12.

84. *Vivagsuyam*: Ed. Dr. P.L. Vaidya. Pune, 1935. P. 72. Para 188.

85. Translator's Note: *Navas*: *Navas* is a vow taken by the devotee for a tangible reward. If the devotee obtains his wishes, he/she does what was promised to the God.

86. *Hindī Sanskritī āṇi Ahimsā*, Dharmananda Kosambi, Mumbai, 1935, p. 143 (In Marathi).

87. Translator's Note: In his book, *Mahāraṣṭrācā Devhārā*, Dr. Dhare has discussed in some detail, the worship of the Vīrs. pp. 76-78.

The Guardian of Hidden Treasures:

Maṇibhadra is the god of business people. He makes sure that they acquire wealth and then he also protects their wealth. In this regard, it is important to know the significance of the relics found in the state of Madhya Pradesh by Muni Kantisagar.⁸⁸ Following is the information on these distinct remains, provided by him:

In the town of Mahākosala or the deep forest close by, one often finds some square mounds. These are different to Suttee stones in that they are not erected in the memory of a particular person. What then is the significance of these stone mounds? While it is a hard question, it cannot be ignored. These square mounds are constructed out of ordinary un-sculpted stones. One of these stones is adorned with Śendur, the orange-yellow pigment. It was learned from an old teacher at Hirapur, Mr. Nanhelalji Chowdhari that there is most probably a connection between these square mounds and one of the most ancient nomadic tribes of ancient Indian tribes, the Banjāris. In the olden days, when transport was far from easy, trade between the states was done mainly through the Banjāris. These Banjāris carried the goods on the backs of their bullocks. It was only during the rainy season that the Banjāris stayed put in one place. For the rest of the year, they would roam around the country for their business. They would stay only at places where water and fodder for their bullocks were available, even if such a place was situated in a dense forest. While they stayed in such a place, they would store their hard-earned cash inside freshly erected stone mounds. They would then render the mound with mud and finally imprint a symbol of their deity on the top. Because of the fact that the folk mind in India is very devout, no one would touch the mound, and that way the wealth of the Banjāris remained safe. When the Banjāris moved on to the next place, they would take out the cash if they needed it. Otherwise, remembering its location, they would leave it in there.

There is proof in the assertion that the Banjāris did actually hide their wealth this way, it is not only a myth. This is clearly seen from

88. Translator's Note: Muni Kantisagar (1011-1980) was a scholar of Jainism,

the following story that Mr. Nanhelalji Chowdhari, 'Cakṣurvaī Sa-tyam' (Lit. eye witnessed) told by himself.

In the jungle on the western side of the town of Hirapur in Sagar district, there was a square shaped stone mound. People of the town thought of it as a shrine for some deity. Once a group of Banjāris came and stayed there overnight. When the town's people visited it after the Banjāris had left the next day, they were most surprised. The mound had been broken and was in pieces. The town's people then realised what the mound had meant for the Banjāris.⁸⁹

I strongly believe that such square mounds have a lot to do with the worship of Mañibhadra and in fact more generally with the worship of the Yakṣas. Being the protectors of hidden wealth, Yakṣas were the deities of the tradespeople in India. The locations of their shrines were not only in the villages but also in forest next to rivers and lakes. With this background of Yakṣa worship, when we think of the square mounds built by the Banjāris, we can unequivocally say that these mounds are nothing but shrines for the Yakṣas. The Śendur-covered stone on top of these mounds can then be called a Yakṣa, the protector of hidden wealth. Because of the fear of the Yakṣa in people's mind, no one dared to touch such mounds.

It is then not at all surprising that in the middle of India (Madhya Pradesh) at Padmāvati where the huge image of Mañibhadra was found and where Damayanti met his devotees, the traders (Vanikjana), a very large number of such mounds were discovered. One must always remember that such mounds are very closely connected with the worship of the Yakṣas.

89. *Khaṇḍaharonkā Vaibhava*: Muni Kantisagar, Varanasi, 1953. pp. 358-359.



Nṛsiṃha killing Hiraṇyakaśipu

Chapter 4:

The Mystery of the Rājamaṭha

For those who study the literature of the Mahānubhāva Sect, the term Rājamaṭha is well known. Thus, in Ṛddhipura, the abode of Govindaprabhū is known as Rājamaṭha. Originally this was a shrine for the god Nṛsiṃha. Govindaprabhu alias Guṇḍum Rauḷa used to frequent this shrine. He used to personally check and taste the suitability of the seven food offerings made for Nṛsiṃha before they were offered to the deity. Guṇḍam Rauḷa was also known to play games with the image of Nṛsiṃha.⁹⁰ Now and then he would go out of town. However, on such occasions, the devotees would often say that, ‘without Rauḷa being here in person, we experience many calamities.’ They also wondered that whereas there were many temples in the town with attached residences for the religious preceptors, how come there was no such place for Rauḷa? They therefore decided that there needed to be a temple and also an attached residence for Rauḷa. The devotees made this decision out of their devotion. However, the close disciples of Rauḷa wanted to buy a maṭha, a maṭha of their own. Finally, Mhaimbhaṭṭa gave the townsfolk ‘sāṭi āsu cautharīyā’ and bought the Rājamaṭha for Rauḷa.⁹¹ Mhaimbhaṭṭa made a copperplate to this effect as well.⁹² After this, the Rājamaṭha became the permanent residence of Guṇḍam Rauḷa. Because of the memories of many Liḷās he performed there, it became a highly sacred place for members of the Mahānubhāva sect.

90. *Śṛīgovindaprabhucaritra*, Ed. V.B. Kolate. Malkapur, 1960. P.38, Liḷā No. 111-112.

91. Translator’s Note: The translator is grateful to Aruna Dhere and Dr. Avinash Avalgaonkar for their help with the explanation and Translation given here: Finally, Mhaimbhat, who was a very rich goldsmith, paid two hundred and forty Āsu and bought the Rājamaṭha for Guṇḍum Rauḷa.

Note: Āsu was a gold coin of that time.

92. *Ibid.* pp.38-39. P. 158-159. (In Marāṭhi)

In his Bijapur campaign, Aurangzeb, as his fanatical religious duty, converted Rājamaṭha into a mosque. However, in people's memory, it still remained Rājamaṭha. Even to this date, it is still called 'Rājamaṭha Mosque'.⁹³ As a place where Guṇḍam Raula performed many of his Līlas, the Mahānubhāvas have a deep-seated respect for this place.

Rājamaṭha: A shrine for Nṛsiṃha⁹⁴ (Nṛsiṃhamandira):

We have already seen that the shrine for the god Nṛsiṃha was the place where Guṇḍam Raula stayed at Ṛddhipura. It was also known as Rājamaṭha. However, the term Rājamaṭha is not confined only to the Nṛsiṃhamandira at Ṛddhipura. In Mahānubhāva literature, any Nṛsiṃhamandir is termed a Rājamaṭha. Dr. Y. K. Deshpande opines that a Narasiṃhamāṭha has customarily been called Rājamaṭha (in Mahānubhāva literature).⁹⁵ Dr. Kolate further explains that in the Mahānubhāva sect, wherever their *avatāras*, especially Śricakradharasvāmī and Śrīgovindaprabhū stayed, the Nṛsiṃhamandiras have all been known as Rājamaṭhas.⁹⁶ The Līlācaritra has mentioned many Nṛsiṃha shrines and Rājamaṭhas which have a connection with Cakradharasvāmī.⁹⁷ In the Sthānapothī of Līlācaritra, such places have been described in great detail.⁹⁸

Cakradharasvāmī travelled extensively in Vidarbha and on both banks of the Godāvarī river in Marāṭhavāḍā. There are several Nṛsiṃhamandirs in this region. With the supportive evidence from the Gautamīmāhātmya of the Brahmapurāṇa, the creator of 'Godāmāhātmya,' Sant Dāsagaṇū has said:

*gaṅgādvārāpāsūna | tom sāgarāparyanta jāṇa |
kelem naraharīṇeṃ śodhana | Pavitra godātīrāce |
prahlādace samāna | godā naraharīteṃ priya jāṇa |
godātaṭākīṃ asaṃkhyā sṭhanēṃ | āheta Śrīnaraharichīm ||*

93. *Mahānubhāva Samśodhana*: No.1, Dr. V.B. Kolate. Malkapoor, 1962. pp. 158-159. (In Marathi)

94. Translator's Note: Dr Dhere has used the alternative words Nṛsiṃha and Narasiṃha to describe this deity.

95. *Śrīṛddhipuravarṇana*: Ed. Dr. Y. K. Deshpande. Yavatamal, 1929, Introduction, p. 19.

96. *Mahānubhāva Samśodhana*: No.1, p.157.

97. *Līlācaritra*: Ed. Dr. S.G. Tulpule. Pune, 1964-1967. Part 1 (Pūrvārḍha) -2 pp. 24-25. Part 2-1 (Uttarārḍha). pp. 62-65, etc.

98. A Mahānubhāva writer, Muni Vyas, compiled an encyclopaedic work called *Sthānapothī*. It describes all of the places Cakradharasvāmī visited.

(Lit: From the source of the Ganges to the sea, Naraharī examined the sacred Godā river. Just as Prahlāda did, Naraharī was very fond of that river. There are thus innumerable shrines of Naraharī on the banks of the Godā.)

It looks as though that Cakradharasvamī had had some connection with all of these Nṛsiṃha shrines. The Mahānubhāva poet, Kṛṣṇamunī Ḍimbha, has said in his work *Ṛddhipuramahātmya*,⁹⁹ that after he killed Hiranyakaśipu, Nṛsiṃha became ritually unclean. In order to exonerate his sin, as advised by Brahmā, he bathed in several sacred tīrthas. At each of those places, Viśvakarmā erected shrines and installed images of Nṛsiṃha. In spite of bathing in these sacred tīrthas, Nṛsiṃha was not able to totally wash away his sin. The Tretā and Dvāpara Yugas passed and Kaliyuga began. It was only then after he came in contact with the *avatāras* whom the almighty had sent to earth (i.e. Guṇḍam Rāuḷa and Cakradharasvāmī), that Nṛsiṃha absolved his sin and obtained his erstwhile glory. This is what the Mahānubhāvas strongly believe. To them, this explains why Guṇḍam Rāuḷa and Cakradharasvamī always stayed in the Nṛsiṃha shrines. Kṛṣṇamunī Ḍimbha has also explained why Nṛsiṃha shrines are called by the alternative name Rājamaṭha.

*nṛsiṃhem jethem kelī vastī | tethem nṛsiṃhamaṭha kelā nigutī |
tayāsi rājamaṭha mhaṇatī | kaḷayugīm munijana ||*

(R Mā. 4.37)

(Lit: Wherever Nṛsiṃha stayed, Nṛsiṃhamaṭhas were constructed at appropriate times. In the Kaliyuga, the sages called these places Rājamaṭhas).

The thinking that the Rājamaṭha is the same as Nṛsiṃhamaṭha or Nṛsiṃhamandir, is most evident in the above lines. In the same context, Kṛṣṇamunī has provided some more detail. He says:

*jethem bhayenkara roop tejileṃ ||
tethem viśvakarmeni nṛsiṃhāḷaya kelem ||
tayāsi munijanī nāva thevileṃ || rājamaṭha aiseṃ ||*

(ṛs. mā. 4.14)

This means that the fierce form Nṛsiṃha adopted in order to kill Hiranyakaśipu was discarded afterwards. He then adopted a milder benevolent form.

99. *Śrīṛddhipuramahātmya*: Ed. Dr. U. M. Pathan. Aurangabad. 1967. Episode 4.

The place where he stayed in this latter form became known as Rājamaṭha. The above information provided by Kṛṣṇamunī is going to be crucial for us in solving the puzzle of Rājamaṭha. This will be very clear in the discussion that follows. Kṛṣṇamunī in his work has mentioned various Nṛsiṃha places, such as Chinnapāpa (Dombegṛāma), Khadkuḷi-Sāvkhed, Nānded, Deuḷwādā, Ṛddhipūra, etc.

Attempts to fathom the meaning of Rājamaṭha:

Scholars who have delved into Mahānubhāva literature seem not to have looked at the meaning of Rājamaṭha. Apart from noting that for the Mahānubhāvas, Rājamaṭh means Nṛsiṃhamandir, they have not examined this term in any detail. Dr. Tulpule has expressed a view that Rājamaṭha means the main temple in the town.¹⁰⁰

It is easy to see that Dr. Tulpule's interpretation cannot be endorsed.

In the word Rājamaṭha, the latter part of the word, *maṭha*, is a synonym for the term, *Mandir*. Our problem is the use of the first part of the word, 'Rāja'. In the normal sense of the word, one could easily interpret it as meaning, 'the head' or 'the chief.' Viz. Rājayoga means the main Yoga. However, this would be incorrect in our present situation. For example, if, in a town, the main shrine is that of Śiva, would one call this shrine the Rājamaṭha? Obviously not. Shrines for gods other than Nṛsiṃha have never been called Rājamaṭha. Therefore, how can a Rājamaṭha be the main shrine?

Rājā is Nṛsiṃha's alternative name:

If Rājamaṭha means Nṛsiṃhamandir, then the word *maṭha* obviously stands for a shrine (Mandir). In which case, the first part of the word, Rāja would have to mean Nṛsiṃha. We know that Sāmarāja is one of Nṛsiṃha's names. It has been used this way many times in Marāṭhī Bhakti literature in the poetry addressed to Nṛsiṃha. For example, Samartha Rāmdāsa has lauded Nṛsiṃha's caring for his devotees in the following manner:

jaya jaya sāmarājā sāmarājā ||
*ākāntīm pāvasi devā bhaktakājā ||*¹⁰¹

100. *Līlācaritra*: First part-1. P.151; Second Part-2. p. 200. *Śrīṛddhipura Varṇana*. p.114. (Pune, 1967).

101. *Śrī Samarthāncā Gāthā*: Ed. Anantadāsa Rāmadāsī, Wai. Śaka 1850. P. 345. (In Marathi).

(Lit. Hail Sāmarājā, hail Sāmarājā. When a devotee is in dire need, you are always there to help).

Another great poet, Madvamuniśvara,¹⁰² has lauded his servitude to Nṛsiṃha when he says:

Śrī sāmārājā, tū svami māzā ||

(Lit. Oh Sāmarājā, you are my master!)

The well-known Pandit and Saint-Poet, Sāmarāja, had Nṛsiṃha as his family god. That is why he was named Sāmarāja by his parents. Sāmarāja is also the name given to the milder aspect of Nṛsiṃha. His devotees have often said:

*sāumya zālā narahari svamī dāsācā ||*¹⁰³

(Lit. The master of his servants, Narahari has taken on the milder form (for his favourite devotees). Such is the devotee's experience.

nṛsiṃhane bhayaṅkara rūpa tejile

(Lit. Nṛsiṃha took on a fierce form, and, this is where Rājamaṭhas were erected).

This information provided by Kṛṣṇamunī is in consonance with Nṛsiṃha's name, Sāmarāja. On this background, the term Rājamaṭha seems to be a shortened form of the term, Sāmarājamaṭha. Sāmarāja means a milder form of Nṛsiṃha and of course Rājā means Nṛsiṃha. There is a place called *Nṛsiṃha kṣetra* in Maharashtra at present. This name is in consonance with the name Sāmarāja.

Sāuvkheḍa and Rājasadana:

In Aurangabad district, the place where the rivers Godāvarī and Śivaṇā meet, there is a small island called *Maṇiparvata* in the middle. This island has a

102. Madvamuniśvara (17-18 Century CE) was a well-known Marathi saint poet who wrote over 700 devotional poems. See Madvamuniśvarāncī Kavitā: Ed. P. V. Gubbī. Pune 1933. P. 88. (In Marathi).

103. *Marāṭhī Ārtī*: Dr. M. V. Gokhale. Pune 1967. P. 445.

shrine of Nṛsiṃha which is known as Sāuvkheḍa. Close by is a place called Śendūrawāḍe, which is also known as Rājasadana.¹⁰⁴ Both of the places, Sāuvkheḍa and Rājasadana, are connected to Nṛsiṃha. Sāuva means Sāmba. Pandit Nārāyaṇa Vyāsa Bahāḷiye, in his book by the name of Ṛddhipūravarnana (Lit. description of Ṛddhipūra), has addressed the Rājamaṭha at Ṛddhipūra as 'Rājabhuvana' several times; this should be considered in reference to the place, 'Rājasadana'. Madvamuniśvara has also written many devotional poems in praise of God Nṛsiṃha at Sāuvkheda and the nearby holy place, Rājasadana.¹⁰⁵ In the Līlās which took place while Cakradharasvamī was staying at Khaḍakuḷī, one often finds a mention of Sāuvkheḍa, which is very close to Khaḍakuḷī.¹⁰⁶ Kṛṣṇamunī Ḍimbha has also stressed the importance¹⁰⁷ of this Nṛsiṃhakṣetra.¹⁰⁸

From the above discussion, we have now arrived at the conclusion that the word 'Rājā' in this context, means God Nṛsiṃha. The main question still remains. Why should Nṛsiṃha be called 'Rājā'? In the normal usage of the word, 'Rājā' certainly does not connote Nṛsiṃha. To answer this question, we will have to focus deeply on a difficult and complex cultural process. To do this, we will have to unravel the real Nṛsiṃha. That may well give us the clues into his form as a king. With this in mind, let us first of all look for the mentions of Nṛsiṃha in ancient Marathi literature. Then only we may be able to see whether these mentions in ancient literature support his projection as a king, the 'Rājā'.

Śakunī's Nṛsiṃhasāadhanā:

In the work by the name of *Śalyaparva* he composed, the Mahānubhāva poet Navarasanārāyaṇa has described an episode detailing the horrific method of worshipping Nṛsiṃha.¹⁰⁹ The episode details Śakunī going into a cemetery to perform a tantrik worship Nṛsiṃha (Nṛsiṃhasāadhanā) as a means of destroying the Pāṇḍavas. The cemetery contains a number of memorials to the dead.

104. *Ṛddhipura Varṇana*. Ovi 389, etc. (In Marathi).

105. *Madvamuniśvarānci Kavita*, No.s 307, 653 etc. (In Marathi)

106. *Marāṭhī Ārti*: Dr. V. M. Gokhale. Pune, 1967. P.445. (In Marathi).

107. *Śrīṛddhipuramāhātmyā*, 3.82-83, 4.20-22.

108. Translators' Note: Kṣetra means a holy place. Nṛsiṃhakṣetra is a place of Nṛsiṃha worship,

109. *Śalyaparva*: Ed. Dr. Y. M. Pathāṇ, Aurangabad, 1964, Episode 4.

Ghosts and goblins such as Śankiṇī, Ḍākinī, Yakṣiṇī, Bhairava, Kṣetrapāḷa and Vetāḷa have all assembled there. They are busy consuming the flesh and blood of the dead. In this horrific atmosphere, Śakunī offered all of them ample meat and wine. He then discarded his clothes and in that naked state, established a sacrificial fire. He assembled the corpses upside down and began the offerings of four-legged animals into the fire. When he was nearing completion and was about to make the very last offering (pūrṇāhutī), the figure of Nṛsiṃha started appearing along with all the ghosts and goblins. Had he emerged completely, Śakunī's evil intention would have materialised. He thought to himself, 'I will kill all of the kings on Earth and rule the planet'. Suddenly, with Kṛṣṇa's orders, Arjuna blew the 'Devadatta' conch with great force and Hanuman gave out a thunderous and menacing roar. Because of the deafening sound produced by these noises, Śakunī, for a moment, could not chant the mantra properly. Then:

*mantra mukhīcā caḷalā || maga Narasiṃha tapta zālā ||
 krodhe uṭhāvalā || śakunīyāvarī ||
 karitā narasiṃhāce smaraṇa || jarī cuke mantrāce dhyana ||
 tarī āṅgī lāge piśācapaṇa || athavā tetheci mare || ||
 taisem śakunīyālagī jāleṃ || donhī ṭhāvo asatī antaraleṃ ||
 tav śkṛṣṇa arjuna pāvaleṃ || puḍhām samīpatva || ||
 puḍhām kopalā pañcānanu || mhaṇeṃ yāsī karāvā praśāntu ||
 maga apulī maṇḍī cirūna narasiṃha asuddhe simpalā || ||
 ānika kelem vidhāna smarileṃ narasiṃhāce janmasthana ||
 jaisā uthavilā hota jāṇa || taisā māgoutā baisavilā || ||*

(Śalya Parva.4. 54-58)

(Lit: Śakunī momentarily forgot the mantra he was reciting. However, because of that, Narasiṃha became very angry with Śakunī and he rose to punish him. If one starts reciting mantras for the appeasement of Nṛsiṃha, and if during that process one forgets the exact wording of the mantra, one either dies on the spot or is possessed by a ghost. This is what happened to Śakunī. He had lost it both ways. Suddenly Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa appeared there. In front of them was the very angry five faced Nṛsiṃha. Kṛṣṇa then said, 'the angry Nṛsiṃha must be pacified.' Then Kṛṣṇa cut his own thigh and pacified Nṛsiṃha by sprinkling sanctified water on him. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then reminded themselves of Nṛsiṃha's mode of birth and they sent him back the way he had appeared.)

The Nṛsiṃhasāadhanā which Śakunī was attempting to perform was very similar to the dreadful procedure employed to please a Vetāla or a Yakṣiṇī. The cemetery, ghosts and goblins, meat, wine, and the fear of self-destruction due to incorrectly chanting the mantra; the entire scenario is dreadful. From this description, one thing seems clear. It tells us that in the eyes of Navarasanārāyaṇa, Nṛsiṃha is a terrifying deity who belongs to the category of ghosts and goblins and is in fact their leader. Another fact to take notice of is that Navarasanārāyaṇa has often addressed Nṛsiṃha as a Vīra. Not only that, but he has, in this context, mentioned fifty-two Vīras and Vīra-Vetāla.¹¹⁰ He has, on another occasion, mentioned the relationship between Nṛsiṃha and ghosts.

*sarva bhūtansī baḷa dījeṃ || ādhī narasiṃha sādara kījeṃ ||
tevhā nidhāna siddhijeṃ || prthavīāntila || ||*

(Śalya Parva. 9.1068)

(Lit: One should make offerings to all of the ghosts and goblins. However, before that, one needs to appease Narasiṃha. That is when one would get everything materially that one would ask for).

The fact that Navarasanārāyaṇa includes Narasiṃha amongst the fifty-two Vīras and describes a terrifying ritual (Sāadhanā) to propitiate him through Yakṣiṇīs, says a lot about the true nature of Narasiṃha.

Bhūtāvalīcā pudhāru:

Another Mahānubhāva poet, Santoṣamuni Kṛṣṇadāsa, has, in his work called Rukmiṇīsvayamvara, portrayed a similar picture of Narasiṃha.¹¹¹ When Śrīkṛṣṇa was on the way to Dvārakā after putting Rukmiṇī in his chariot, he had to fight Rukmī, who was following him. Santoṣamuni Kṛṣṇadāsa describes details of this encounter. Rukmī enacted the terrible Bhūtāstra after suitably encoding it with mantras. This led to the birth of crores of ghosts and spirits which included Vetāla, Mairāla, Zoṭinga, Brahmagraha, Jogiṇī and others. They started devouring the Yādava army. In order to destroy these hor-

110. *Ibid*, 2.211; 3.253; 3.275; 3.280; 3.314; 3.349.

111. Santoṣamuni Kṛṣṇadāsa-viracita *rukmiṇīsvamayvara*: Ed. N.B. Joshi. Hyderabad, Śaka 1885-7.394.

rible ghosts, Śrīkṛṣṇa encoded the Narasiṃhāstra:

*maga narasiṃhāstra abhimantrunī | deveṃ ghātale tataḥṣaṇī |
tava narasiṃha cālale jānī | bhutānte grāsāvayā ||
bombyale khalute nara | varute siṃhāce kaḷivara |
aiseṃ narasiṃha cālale apāra | dekhā tiye veḷin ||
āvesen kinkāḷiyā detī | teṇe phuton pāhe ākāsa kṣitī |
kopu na samāye trijagatīm | narasiṃhu vīrāceṃ ||*

(Rukmiṇīsvayamvara, 22.71-73)

(Lit: Then Śrīkṛṣṇa encoded the Narasiṃhāstra with mantras and released it on the ghosts and goblins. This resulted in Narasiṃha going after the ghosts in order to gobble them. Below the navel, he was in human shape. Above that, he had the form of a lion. He let out piercing screams which reached the skies. The anger of the Vīr Narasiṃha occupied all three worlds).

Because of the dramatic effect produced by the powerful weapon Narasiṃhāstra encoded with mantras by Śrīkṛṣṇa, countless Narasiṃhās were generated and they started devouring all of the ghosts. Terrified, all of the ghosts and spirits pleaded with Narasiṃha:

*tūṃ taṃva āmacā ādiguru || āṇi tūñci ye bhutāvaḷisī puḍharu ||
tarī kā karitāsī saṃhāru || sevakañcā || ||*

(Rukmiṇīsvayamvara, 22.78)

(Lit: the ghosts pleaded with Narasiṃha: You are our important first Guru. You are the leader of us ghosts. Why then are you decimating your servants?)

Thus, according to Santoṣamunī, Narasiṃha is the first Guru (ādiguru) and leader of the ghosts and goblins. All of them are his servants. Santoṣamunī calls Narasiṃha a Vīra. It is also important to remember that he includes many of the fifty-two Viras among Narasiṃha's extended family. Finally, the composer of the Ṛddhipuramāhātmya, Kṛṣṇamunī, has included Narasiṃha in the list of ghosts and evil spirits in his work called Ātmatīrthaprakāśa.¹¹²

112. *Ātmatīrthaprakāśa*: Ed. Kṛṣṇadāsa Mahānubhāva. Hyderabad, Śaka 1885. 7.394.

Narasīmantre Bhute Jātīm:

Navarasanārāyaṇa, Santoṣamunī Kṛṣṇadāsa and Kṛṣṇamunī Ḍimbha are all Mahānubhāva poets. The Mahānubhāva sect does not recognize any other *avatāras* apart from Kṛṣṇa. Because of this, I agree that it is quite likely for these poets to deliberately poke fun at deities other than Kṛṣṇa. However, my argument is this: There are non-Mahānubhāva poets who believe in the ten avatāras and who recognize Narasiṃha as a deity and offer prayers to him. If then in their writing one sees the same picture of Narasiṃha similar to what we have seen, then I feel one ought to consider the situation seriously. Let me then quote some examples of the writings of Marathi Saint-Poets and find out how they have painted Narasiṃha.

vīra zoṭinga Narasinga Cheḍā || vetāḷacā pūjiti khoḍā ||
*śendūra mākhoṇiyā dhonḍā || śeḷi bokaḍa jīva ghetī kī ||*¹¹³

Eknātha

tukāi nā naraso māyarāṇi smaśānīm vasatīm ||
bhogem ghālitiṃ gondhaḷa ||
ajāputrāsa vadhiti bhakta mhaṇaviti ||
*pāpeṃ kariti tumbaḷa ||*¹¹⁴

Śekha Mahammad

bulagāvā munjā narasiyā zoṭinga ||
*pūjā kije sānga devatancī ||*¹¹⁵

Samartha Rāmadās

jākhinī jākhāi daivate aneka ||
vetaḷa mesobā preta zoṭinga ||
*narasyādi paḷatām na pāhatī māgem ||*¹¹⁶

Ātmārāmasvāmī

I can add many more examples to the above quotes. The important point to remember is the fact that according to the beliefs of many well-known

113. *Śrīekanāthamahārāja yāncyā abhaṅgācī gāthā*: Ed. V.H. Awate. Pune. Śaka 1830. No. 3890, p. 783.

114. *Śekha mahammadababā-kṛta kavitasangraha*: Ed. B.C. Bendre. P. 109.

115. *Rāmadāsancī Kavita*, Khaṇḍa 1: Rd. S.S. Dev. Dhule, Śaka 1830, p.201.

116. *Dāsaviśrāmadhāma*: Ed. S.S. Dev. Dhule, 3. 49.

Marāṭhī Saint-Poets, Narasiṃha is a god who lives in cemeteries and belongs to the class of Vīrs, similar to what Vetāla is. He is the leader of ghosts and hence, if one recites his name continually, one does not suffer from possession by ghosts. They are also destroyed.

Rāmādās Samartha has said, ‘*narasīmantre bhute jāti*’ (Lit. By recitation of Narasiṃha’s mantra, ghosts and evil spirits are destroyed).¹¹⁷ Other Saint-Poets such as Kṛṣṇayājñavalkī¹¹⁸ and Kṛṣṇadayārṇava¹¹⁹ have also reiterated this belief.

Avatāra Narasiṃha and Vīra Narasiṃha are the same:

Narasiṃha has been a favourite Family-God (Kuladaivata) for many families. He is considered to be an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Marāṭhī Saint-Poets considered him to be so and have written many devotional poems in praise of him. However, the Narasiṃha that is portrayed here by the Mahānubhāva poets seems to be very different to the one mentioned above. For them, he is a very minor *śūdra* deity. Thus, apart from sharing the same name, the two Narasiṃhas seem to be quite different. On the face of it, this appears to be a legitimate conclusion.

However, those who study the science behind godhood and associated mythology know very well that even when a god changes his character and myth through upward mobility, aspects of his previous form and function still remain in the minds of his devotees. A case in point is the gods Vināyaka and Khaṇḍobā. Marāṭhī Saint-Poets have always held these gods in high esteem and written volumes about them. However, through these writings, one often comes across examples where the original character of the gods seeps out. This is exactly what has happened to Narasiṃha. The god whom Śakunī invoked in the cemetery is the same Narasiṃha who came out of the post by breaking it.

*māgeṃ hiraṇyākṣāvarī || stambha phoḍoni nighālā bāherī ||*¹²⁰

(Lit. behind Hiraṇyākṣa, (the God) came out of the post by breaking it).

117. *Rāmādāsancī Kavita*, Khaṇḍa 1, p.428.

118. *Kathākalpatarū*, 5.3.104.

119. *Harivaradā*, 55. 184.

120. *Śalyaparva*, 3. 315.

Narasimha: One of the fifty-two Vīras:

The Marathi Śāhīrs belonging to the Kalgī-Turā sect have a special relationship with the fifty-two Vīras. They consider them to be sacred deities and invoke them in order to defeat their opposition during their concerts. These invocatory songs are also called Bir. These songs mention groups of Vīras such as five Vīras, fifty-two Vīras, etc. Included among these Vīras is Narasimha as well.¹²¹ For instance:

*cale āyegā betāla ragaḍakar, yāve narasiṅga zoṭiṅga ॥
tare lahuḱā ṭikā lagākara phira khaḍā hūn masānako ॥
mahābīrapara ṭolā marikā āyā hundāḍā bhairavakā ॥
narasiṅga zoṭiṅga alaga uḍā deu patā nā lāge śāhirakā ॥
āgāḍī caukī marī māṅkī ॥
pīchheṃ diye caukī bhairavakī ॥
ḍāvī caukī bīra narasingakī ॥*

Having carefully perused the writings of the Mahānubhāva poets, Marathi Saint-Poets, and the Śāhīrs of the Kalgī-Turā sect in relation to Narasimha, one can now be certain that Narasimha was a fierce god in the category of Vetāla and Zoṭiṅga. He used to be included in the fifty-two Vīras as well. What the above poets have described was most probably an inauspicious, malevolent, and lesser-known form (malarūpa) of the Narasimha who, highly pleased with Prahlāda's devotion, appeared on earth to kill Hiranyaśiṭṭi. Even when he established himself into the Vaiṣṇava fold as a prominent *avatāra* of the supreme creator, his original form kept appearing in folk minds.

This ambivalent character of Narasimha is seen not only in Marathi literature but in the literature of other Indian folk languages as well. The pan-Indian belief in Narasimha's *Vīra* form strongly suggests to us that it must have been his original form. However, to me, rather than researching the literature in Indian languages, one needs to investigate ancient literature. If one notices the same trend there, one would go nearer to the truth.

121. *Marāthavādyātīl Kalgituryācī Ādhyātmik Śāhirī*. Ed. Prof. P. B. Māṇḍe. Aurangabad, 1965, p. 57,118,120.

Narasimha: The Controller of the 'mothers'

The Purāṇās who lauded and sang praises of Narasimha's *avatāra* as a man-lion born specifically to kill Hiraṇyakaśipū, have also discussed Narasimha's other form as a Vīra. For example, Adhyāya 179 of the Matsya-Purāṇa discusses in some detail the prolonged fight between Śiva and Andhakāsura. The latter was in the process of taking Pārvatī away by force. This is when Śiva released the formidable weapon, Pāsupatāstra on Andhakāsura. When it hit Andhakāsura, blood started oozing out of Andhakāsura's body. However, due to a boon he had secured before, every drop of Andhakāsura's blood started producing thousands of Andhakāsuras who created havoc. To fight these gruesome creatures, Śiva produced the fierce and terrible blood drinking Mātṛkās.¹²² With their help, Śiva was able to destroy Andhakāsura. However, this resulted in another unexpected havoc. The bloodthirsty Mātṛkās said to Śiva:

bhagavan bhakṣayiṣyāmaḥ sadevāsura mānuṣān ||
tvatprasādāt jagatsarvam tadanujnātumarhasi || ||

(Lit. Oh Bhagavan, with your grace, all of us will devour the gods, demons, and humans as well. Please grant us this wish.)

However much he tried, Śiva was unable to dissuade the Mātṛkās from their horrible demand. Finally, Śiva prayed Narasimha and asked him to come to his aid. Narasimha, whose nails were red due to Hiraṇyakaśipū's blood, appeared and brought the Mātṛkās under control and ordered them to look after the populace.

These Mātṛkās are of course part of the three and a half crore ghosts and Narasimha who controlled them is the same god dear to *Prahlāda* (Hiraṇyakaśipū's son). This story once again sheds important light on the original character of Narasimha.

Ugra Vīra Narasimha:

The realization that Narasimha is a god in the Vīra category appears not only in Marathi and many other Indian languages but also in Sanskrit literature

122. *The Matsyapurāṇa*, 179, 10-34. This contains a detailed listing of the Mātṛkās. The Garuḍapurāṇa also gives a similar account.

dealing with the worship of Narasiṃha. For example, in a Stotra¹²³ called Ṛṇamocana Stotra, Narasiṃha has been praised as a Mahāvīra:

śrī nṛsiṃhaṃ mahāvīraṃ namāmi ṛṇamuktaye ॥¹²⁴

(Lit: I pray the great Vīra, Nṛsiṃha, so as to be able to free myself from [all kinds] of debts).

Thus Nṛsiṃha, is worshiped for *ṛṇamuktī* and is considered as a 'Mahavīra'. In the devotional regime of Nṛsiṃha, there is a well-known mantra called, 'Narasiṃhamantrarāja.' It says:

*ugram vīram mahāviṣṇuṃ jvalantam sarvatomukhaṃ ॥nṛsiṃhaṃ
bhīṣaṇaṃ bhadraṃ mṛtyurmṛtyuṃ namāmyahaṃ ॥ ॥*

(Lit: To the fierce and valorous (Vīra) *avatāra* of the great Viṣṇu, to the one who has fire emanating from his mouth to the terrible but auspicious Nṛsiṃha, to whom who is the destroyer of death, I bow).

In the above Mantra Nṛsiṃha is called as 'Ugra Vīra'

In another Stotra called 'piśācamocana stotra', Nṛsiṃha has been called a promoter of the Vīras and one who devours the devourers.

*yadgrāsakaṃ grāsakāṇāṃ vīrāṇāṃ ca vivardhanāṃ ॥
vyāpakaṃ vyāpakānāṃ ca taddhi brahmaṃ namāmyahaṃ ॥ ॥*

This Stotra calls him *Brahman* and has thus claimed him to be the ultimate divine. The adjective 'Ugra Vīra' (ferocious and valorous god) has also been used by the Nṛsiṃhottaratāpanīyopaniṣad¹²⁵ when it calls him the only Vīra:

eṣa evogra eṣa eva vīraḥ ॥¹²⁶

(Lit: He is the foremost and the only Vīra)

It is understandable that the devotees of Narasiṃha will always see him as a part of the ultimate being (*paramātmā*), and hence look at the adjective

123. Translator's Note: A *Stotra* is a devotional hymn.

124. Translator's Note: Sanskrit: श्री नृसिंह महावीरं नमामि ऋणमुक्तये ॥

125. *Nṛsiṃhapūrvottaratāpanīyopaniṣada: Āandāśrama Sanskritagranthāvali*: No. 30. Pune, 1929. pp. 27-29.

126. *Ibid.* p. 111.

‘Ugra Vīra’ in a laudatory and deeply respectful manner. However, one must remember that the adjective itself would have originated from his original fierce and dreaded form as a leader of ghosts. It would be worth our while to find out what the real meaning of this adjective is.

A Virā means a Yakṣa:

The word Vīra connotes a Yakṣa. The words Pañca Viras and Bāvanna Viras (Lit: Five Viras and fifty-two Viras) also denote the categories of the Yakṣas. The great pandit, Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal, has done a very detailed and painstaking work on the Yakṣas. In this work, he has discussed the term Vīra in great detail.¹²⁷ The list of the fifty-two Viras discussed in the literature always includes Narasiṃha as one of them.¹²⁸ Performed under the name of Vira-worship, the worship of Yakṣas is very popular in Indian folk religion. One can emphatically say that in the development of Indian folk-religion, these Viras alias Yakṣas played a crucial and major part.

Even though Vira is a term that means a Yakṣa, the term connotes one particular aspect of Yakṣahood: It signifies a valorous and brave being. It is usually believed that Yakṣas are ferocious and are endowed with the power of destruction. This is how one must now look at Narasiṃha, a ferocious Vira.

Yakṣa with a Lion Mouth:

Narasiṃha is a Yakṣa with a lion mouth. Several images of Yakṣas with faces other than those of humans have been found. Two of the greatest Indian scholars, Dr. Ananda Kumaraswami and Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal have brought to light many examples of bizarre Yakṣas faces other than human. In the context of the evolution of Gajānana’s image, Dr. Aggrawal wrote to Dr. V. V. Mirashi in which he specifically mentioned that during the Śaka-Kuśāṇa period, Gajānana’s images were not in his present form of a God, but were sculpted in the form of a Yakṣa with an elephant head. He referred Dr. Mirashi to Ananada Kumaraswami’s work ‘Yakṣa (Vo.1)’. Dr. Aggrawal felt that such an image of the Yakṣa was probably the progenitor to Gajānana’s present im-

127. *Prthvīputra*; Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal, pp. 319-334, 352-363. Also, by the same author, *Prācīna Bhāratīya Lokadharmā*, p. 118-143.

128. *Prācīna Bhāratīya Lokadharmā*, *ibid*: Appendix, pp.145-147.

age. The images of many other deities may have also been mixed up with the worship of the Yakṣas. There is a plinth at Mathura sculpted during the Kuśāna period which shows a row of elephant-headed figures. In all probability they are Yakṣas.¹²⁹ It is very much within the bounds of imagination, that just like the Yakṣas with the elephant heads, there would have been Yakṣas with a lion's head. In support of this conjecture, let me quote that in describing the Yakṣas belonging to Śiva's pantheon from the holy city of Kāśī, the Matsyapurāṇa has included lion-headed Yakṣas as well.¹³⁰

Having found that the ferocious lion-headed Yakṣa had a special place in the mind of the populace, Hindu religious leaders seem to have transformed him into an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. His ferocious demeanour was used in constructing a new myth about his *avatāra*. This Vaiṣṇavāization of the Yakṣa-Narasimha is an amazing and mysterious episode in the development of Indian religious culture.

The Mystery of the Wooden Post:

If one tries to analyse the nature of the iconographic forms attributed to Indian gods, one automatically stumbles upon the inner workings of the iconographer's mind who designed these forms. This is particularly so if the deity in question is either of foreign origin or is normally worshipped by the lower strata of the society. In the latter case, the deity is sculpted with all of the icons and the character necessary for the new status achieved through upward mobility. By the same token, the original character of the deity is not forgotten; it is skilfully embedded into the new identity. A case in point is the transformation of Yakṣa Nṛsiṃha into an *avatāra* of Lord Viṣṇu. It would not be wrong to say that the myth that was designed to explain this transformation had to incorporate all aspects of the original character of Yakṣa Nṛsiṃha. Of course, at this point in time, we do not have the background knowledge and the resources to delve more deeply into this question. One can however say that the part of the myth that claims that Nṛsiṃha appeared out of a wooden post does shed light on his original character.

In ancient times, Yakṣa images were carved out of wood. Not only that, but trees were often considered to be Yakṣas. In Jain Āgama literature, there

129. *Samśodhanamuktāvalī*, band 5; Dr. V.V. Mirashi. Nagpur, 1966

130. *The Matsyapurāṇa*: 183.64

are often mentions of such Yakṣas made out of wood. For example, in a Jain Āgama work called 'Antagaḍadasāo' there is a tale of a Yakṣa by the name of Moggarapāṇī (alias Mudgarapāṇī). In the city of Rājagṛha, there was a wooden image of Mudgarapāṇī in the Yakṣa shrine in the city. A devotee of Mudgarapāṇī used to perform his daily worship with great devotion. In spite of this, on one occasion, this devotee faced a great calamity. In this dire circumstance, the greatly disappointed devotee exclaimed, 'if this wooden post really had Mudgarapāṇī within it, he would have not put me into this terrible fate.' At this juncture, Mudgarapāṇī appeared out of the wooden post and severely punished those responsible for putting the devotee into this trouble.

With the above background, it will be logical if one deduces that the Yakṣa- Nṛsiṃha wooden image must have become the wooden-post from which Nṛsiṃha appeared in the Nṛsiṃha-Avatāra myth.

Nārasimha of the Yakṣiṇī:

We have now collected plenty of evidence to say that fundamentally, Narasiṃha is one of the fifty-two Vīras and also that the fifty-two Vīras are Yakṣas. It therefore follows that Narasiṃha is a Yakṣa. A Moslem Marāṭhī Saint-Poet by the name of Śahāmunī has explained the term Yakṣatva (Yakṣa-hood) in his work called, 'Siddhāntabodha'. Śahāmunī himself grew as a follower both of the Mahānubhāva and Bhāgavata sects. He has, under the heading of 'Cakradhara-Mhāimbhaṭṭa' discourse, written on several topics. One of these topics is the *avatāra* of Narasiṃha. In the opinion of Śahāmunī, there is a powerful goddess called Yakṣiṇī in the form of illusion (Māyā). He says:

jaga he devāce adhīna || tyā devāsa yakṣiṇī svāmiṇa ||
tiṇī ajnyā vandūna || sakaḷa deva vartatī ||

(Si. Bo. 17.116)

(Lit. the world is dependent on gods. The Yakṣiṇī is the leader of the gods. Gods therefore obey her orders and behave accordingly).

Even though she is the leader of thirteen crore gods on this planet, she is unable to offer mokṣa to the devotees. Narasiṃha is an *avatāra* of goddess Yakṣiṇī.

nārasimha avatāra gheūni yakṣiṇī ||
prakaṭalī viśāḷa stambha cironī ||
hiraṇyakaśipu asura vidārūni ||
prahlādā sāhya tī jāhalī ||

(Si. Bo, 26.104)

(Lit. The Yakṣiṇī assumed the *avatāra* of Narasiṃha and came out of the huge post by tearing it. She tore apart the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu, and thus helped Prahlāda).

Having heard this information provided by Cakradharasvamī, Mahimbhaṭṭa raises the following query: The whole world believes that it was Lord Viṣṇu who appeared out of the wooden post. How is it that you, Cakradharasvamī, is telling a different version of the myth? Upon this, Cakradharasvamī explains:

mahāviṣṇuḥ ajñādhara || *brahmādika Harihara* ||
indra, candra bhāskara || *gandgarva saṃba yakṣiṇī* || ||
jyasī mahāviṣṇu ajñā karī || *toci deva avatāra dhārī* ||
mhaṇoni purāṇa uccārī || *viṣṇuci gheto avatara* || ||

(Lit. Brahmā, Hari, Hara, Indra, Candra, Sun, Gandharva, Sāmba and Yakṣiṇī, all of these gods follow the orders of the great Lord Viṣṇu. Whoever is ordered by Lord Viṣṇu, takes the *avatāra* that is required of him/her).

(Si Bo. 26.83-84)

Although this idea of Narasiṃha's origin has a Mahānubhāva background, I have deliberately mentioned it because of its importance in the light of other sources.

Ugravīra and Sāmarāja:

Now that we know that Narasiṃha by his very nature is a ferocious Vīra and a fierce Yakṣa. With this background, it is easy to answer the question as to why his shrine is called a Rājamaṭha. Similar to the term Vīra, the term Rājā also denotes a Yakṣa. Because of this, Kubera, the leader of the Yakṣas, is known popularly as 'Rājarāja'. Thus, the great Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa has called Kubera 'Rājarāja' in his lyric poem, Meghadūta.¹³¹ Another Sanskrit poet, Bhāravī,

131. *Meghadūta*, Part 1, 3.

in his epic work *Kirātārjunīya*, has also called a Yakṣa 'Rājarāja'.¹³² In the *Mantrapuṣpāñjalī* Kubera has been addressed as 'Mahārāja'. Works such as the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa*, *Vāyupurāṇa*, *Padmapurāṇa*, and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* have all addressed Yakṣa as 'Rājā' and Kubera as 'Rājarāja'.¹³³

With all of this information in front of us, let us now summarise what we have learned from it. The folk mind in India has converted 'ugravīra' into 'sāmarāja'. In spite of being an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, he is still the controller of the ghosts and goblins. His main followers are the Yakṣas and his original wooden form has safely remained as a wooden post in the myth about his *avatāra* as Nṛsiṃha.

Nāga-Narasobā:

Narasimha's Yakṣa identity can be seen in one aspect of the folk religion in Maharashtra. We worship Nāga-Narsobā in the month of Śrāvana. We have however forgotten why we worship Narsobā along with Nāga, the serpent. In this regard, it is worth noting that according to Indian researchers, Yakṣa worship and Nāga worship was equally popular once upon a time. Also, there was a substantial exchange of ideas between the two, a fact that is accepted by scholars of Indian philosophy. In the pair Nāga and Narsobā, the latter is the representation of Yakṣas. Otherwise, there seems to be no reason why Narsobā is worshipped in the month of Śrāvana along with Nāga.

Narasimha is the favourite clan deity (Kuladaivata) for many households. Given that Narasimha is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, it would be understandable if he were popular among people. However, it seems strange that he is a favourite clan god (Kuladaivata) for many families. Normally, most favourite clan gods are original gods (Mūladaivata) and not *avatāras*. However, even after Narasimha became an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, his popularity as a Kuladaivata has continued. In this context, it is worth noting that Narasimha is worshipped not only in his fully Sāṅga-sāyudha (armed with weapons) iconographic form but also as an un-sculpted stone (tāndaḷa) smeared with red lead (Śendur).

This then is the mystery behind the Rājamaṭha. Embedded in this amazing term are elements of the all-inclusive, noble and generous nature of Indian culture.

132. *Kirātārjunīya*, 3.30. (The definition of the word Rājarājānucara according to Ghaṇṭāpatha is: 'rājarājau yakṣarājah || 'rājā praubhau nṛpe candre yakṣe kṣatriyaśakrayoh iti Viśvah' (Nirṇayasāgara, Mumbai, 1954, p. 49).

133. The *Mahābhārata*, Vanaparva 276.3, 282.23, 290.9; Śāntiparva 177.52 etc.

Why stay in the Rājamaṭha?

A question naturally arises as to why Guṇḍam Rauḷa and Cakradharasvāmī preferred to stay mostly in the Rājamaṭha? What was the special attraction for them at Rājamaṭha? We have already seen the answer Kṛṣṇamunī Ḍim-bha gave to this question. His answer however was on a devotional plane¹³⁴ and as a result, does not quite satisfy the inquisitive mind of the researcher.

To me, Cakradharasvāmī's mode of travel and method of imparting spiritual knowledge was very similar to that of the Buddha and Mahāvīra. He also seems to be greatly influenced by their contemplative and philosophical thinking. On their travels, both Buddha and Mahāvīra, the Dharma-cakrapariwartaka (religious revolutionaries) that they were, used to stay mostly at the places where Yakṣa worship took place. They would then influence the worshippers/ Yakṣa-followers by their profound knowledge and as a result, attract them towards their faith. One can find several examples of this in Jaināgamas and Buddhist Jātakas. Cakradharasvāmī adopted this successful method and hence decided to stay in Yakṣa abodes, known as Rājamaṭhas. Any researcher who wishes to conduct a comparative study of Jaināgamas, Buddhist Jātakas and Mahānubhāva literature such as the Liḷā-caritra, will find this amazing similarity between the nature and the method of imparting spiritual knowledge adopted by the Buddha, Mahāvīra and Cakradharasvāmī.

Facts about the Iconography of Gods:

It is difficult to say when the original Yakṣa with a lion mouth transformed and established himself as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. However, it is not impossible to postulate the discrete steps and the timeline that would have been required for such a transformation to take place. The light that we have already thrown on this topic is not a mean feat either. Even in this dim light, one can already see the progress made in identifying the steps in this path of transformation.

With some of the material that we already have with us at this juncture, we have been able to discern many important facts. These facts will

134. The well-known researcher V. A. Kānole had raised a query about the relationship between Narasiṃha and leading Mahānubhāva identities. However, he found answers to his query when he studied the literature of the Mahānubhāva sect. See: *Marāṭhawāḍā Vidyāpīṭha Patrikā*. 1.1.1961, p.20.

also provide us with the platform necessary to unravel the transformation and upward mobility of many deities in the Indian pantheon. What we have so far learned is:

- Yakṣas are some of the earliest and most powerful gods in the Indian pantheon. Their worship was in vogue especially in ancient times. Yakṣa's abodes were people's homes, forests, at the intersection of two major roads in a village and at the sources of water.
- Many of the major, well-established and higher gods in the Indian pantheon have originated from minor gods such as Yakṣas, often in discrete steps. Indian religious leaders seem to have routinely followed the practice of elevating popular gods and goddesses and their devotees to the next higher level of importance.
- Although these gods and goddesses have been elevated in their importance, they have not been able to completely discard their original form and character. Many aspects of their erstwhile character have remained with them. Thus, while their new elevated form is lauded, their original character has still remained in folk mind. It is because of the memory of their erstwhile form in folk mind that we have been able to solve many mysteries about them.
- It is our curiosity about Rājamaṭha that has led us to take a fresh look at a well-known deity in the Indian pantheon and shed important light on his character. Such a process can only sharpen our thirst for further knowledge.



A typical Śahira with his Tuntune

Chapter 5

*The Lineage of Śāhiri*¹³⁵

In spite of the incessant efforts by Saint-Poets for hundreds of years to spread the message of Bhakti, Marathi mind has always been mesmerized and tantalized by Śāhiri. This love affair is not only constant but seems to be growing in many subtle ways. Marathi mind is just as eager to listen to the sounds of Ḍaf-Tuṇṭuṇe¹³⁶ as it is of Ṭāla-Mṛdanga.¹³⁷ Marathi populace is as engrossed in the devotional *abhaṅgas* of Gyānbā-Tukārām as they are into the manly, often raw and erotic poetry of the Śāhirs. Once the strings of the Tuṇṭuṇe start strumming, the strings of Marathi mind automatically start strumming as well. Also, once a Śāhira raps the skin of the Ḍaf with his stretched palm, Marathi chest swells with pride.

It is true that the Śāhiri that ruled over Marathi mind blossomed with all of its colours and splendour during the time of the Peśvās, has its origin in the distant past. Although the term Śāhir seems to have come into Marathi through Muslim contact, the poets who handled its typical style of poetic recitation seem to have been in India ever since Yādava times.¹³⁸ In order to satisfy the visual curiosity of the unpolished Marathi mind, to cater to the wantonness of the uncultured folk mind, and simply to feed eroticism in

135. Translator's Note: Śāhiri is village bard tradition mainly in Maharashtra. A Śāhira is the village bard who writes and presents song and dance performances mainly to village audiences. These songs are often highly erotic.

136. Translator's Note: The Tuṇṭuṇe is a one string folk musical instrument very popular in folk music and is widely used in rural India from ancient times. One side of the string attached to a large hollow wooden resonator and other side into a small wooden resonator. The Ḍaf is a drum used along with Tuṇṭuṇe by village Śāhirs.

137. Translator's Note: The *Mṛdaṅgam* is a percussion *instrument* used as a primary rhythmic accompaniment. The Ṭāla is a pair of clash symbols. Together, the *Mṛdaṅgam* and Ṭāla are used by village bards in Bhakti tradition.

138. Translator's Note: The Yādavas ruled Western India during the 12th and 13th Centuries.

a straightforward manner, these folk-poets used their genius and obtained popularity in the folk mind. Because of the lack of depth in their writing and because their eroticism verged on the extreme, the Saint-Poets have always thought that Śāhirī poetry was a destructive force. The populace on the other hand did not care much for the opinions of the Saint-Poets and welcomed the Śāhirs with open arms. As a result of this, the Saint-Poets eventually had to unravel the reasons for the popularity of the Śāhiri literature. They then used some of the methods used by the Śāhirs to take their message of Bhakti to the populace.

*Bahurūpī*¹³⁹ *Saint-Poets:*

A Saint-Poet's heart is tender like that of a mother. It is sad when people suffer and happy when people are contended. It strives to help those who are about to destroy themselves by resorting to misguided ideas. It does so by a variety of means: by the use of love, anger, derision or by supplication. Because of their intense desire to uplift the populace, to spread their message, Saint-Poets adopted only those methods that would appeal to the populace. They steered clear of the methods adopted typically by Pandits. Instead, they used folk songs, folk tunes, and the language used by folk groups. They predominantly used those tunes that immediately attract the attention of the folk mind and incorporated their thoughts within. The Saint-Poets adopted a large number of roles in order to spread their message. They came in the form of Pāngūla, the representative of Aruṇa¹⁴⁰ who visits village folk early in the morning and spreads the message of Dharma. They visited the village as Vāsudev, who sings the songs of Lord Kṛṣṇa and entertains the folk with his melodious flute. They came as the Gondhaḷī who plays his Sambaḷ and sings praises of the Goddess. They became the Bharāḍī who, with the help of his Ḍamaru, sings praises of the god Bhairava. They became the Vāghyās who, with the help of their instruments Khanjirī and Tuṭtuṭe, danced with the Murḷī and described the play of Lord Khaṇḍobā. The Saint-Poets played all these parts. At times, they became the Bhāṇḍ, the Bahurupīs and Śāhirs as well.

The Bhāruḍ which the saint-poets wrote in their role as Bahurupīs are reasonably well-known. Their Śāhirī however has been somewhat neglect-

139. Translator's Note: Lit: many faceted.

140. Aruṇa is the Sun.

ed. The Saint-Poets were forced to resort to Śāhirī because of its popularity amongst the village folk. However, there are a number of misconceptions about the background to Śāhirī among scholars. I have therefore chosen to include the following notes in the hope of dispelling at least some of them.

Dhīṭa, Pāṭha and Prāsādika:

Samartha Rāmdās, in his well-known work Dāsbodh, has classified poets into three types: bold, those who learn things by heart and those whose poetry is in the form of blessings. He has defined the three emotive definitions as follows:

*dhīṭa mhaṇije dhīṭapaṇe kelem || jem jem apuṇyā manāsa ālem || baḷeci
kavitva racilem || yā nāmva dhīṭa bolije || 14.3.8 ||*
pāṭha mhaṇije paṭhāntara || bahuta pāḥile granthāntara ||
tayāsārikhā utāra || āpaṇahi kelā || 14.3.9 ||
devācena prasannapaṇe || jem jem ghaḍe bolaṇem ||
te te atyanta shlāghyavāṇem || yā nāmva prāsādika || 14.3.6 ||

In Svāmi Samartha's opinion, one should strive to stay away from the first two classes of poetry: the bold and the regurgitated 'learned by heart' poetry, and heed only the Prāsādika. This is because the first two lead only to one succumbing to desires including sexual ones. He says:

mana zāleṃ kāmākāra || taiseci nighatī udgāra ||

(Lit: once the mind becomes engrossed in physical desires, the speech reflects the same).

The only difference between the bold and the regurgitated poetry is the former is often uncultured and may not follow the norms of poetics. It is written just for the sake of writing. The regurgitated poetry on the other hand can be quite clever in its construction. Samartha explains that these first two types mostly include physical desires, enjoyable and erotic material, things that make one laugh, etc. Hence such poetry interferes with one's progress towards salvation.

When one examines this classification of poetry by Samartha Rāmdās, which includes the characteristics of each of the three classes, the informed reader will easily see that the three terms, Prāsādik, Pāṭha and Dhīṭa, are older but belong to the same classes that we recognize today. These are, Sant, Pant and Tant. In his work called, Santavijaya, Mahīpatībuvā Tāharābādakar has specifically said the same thing:

dhīṭa kavī to śāhīramata || tamoguṇa āgaḷā tyāmta ||
pāṭha kavī to rajoguṇī satya || cāturya dṛṣṭānta itihāsi ||||
satvaguṇī te sant niscitī || tyāncī prāsādika kavitva sphūrtī ||
karuṇasvareṃ devāsī gāti || teṇem śrīpatī santoṣe ||||

(Lit: A Śāhīr is a poet who belongs to the Dhīṭa class. His poetry is full of Tamoguṇa. The poet who displays the Pāṭha character belongs to Rajoguṇa. His poetry is full of clever use of history. Poets who possess Satvaguṇa are no doubt Saints. Their poetry seeks blessings from God on behalf of the devotee. They do this with sincere devotion and as a result, Lord Viṣṇu is pleased with them and with the devotees who chant this poetry).

Not a Śāhīr but a Gāṇa:

Svāmī Samartha used the term Dhīṭa for those poets who wrote povāḍe and Lāvṇyā.¹⁴¹ Traditionally however, such poets have been called Śāhīra in Maharashtra. Because of this, some scholars have come to believe that Śāhīrī poetry has its roots in Muslim culture.¹⁴² Several scholars have shown that this belief is incorrect. However, to my knowledge, no one has as yet thought about what the original term was for a poet who wrote Lāvṇī before the term Śāhīra came into vogue.

Those poets who are called Śāhīra and also those who are folk singers, are collectively called, 'Gāṇa'. Gāṇa literally means a singer. A Saint-Poet by the name of Kanho Pāṭhak has defined the term Gāṇa in one of his abhaṅgas.

gāye to Gāṇu || nāce to nācaṇu ||
parise to jāṇa || bhedavādī || ||

141. Translator's Note: A Powāḍā is a heroic ballad sung to the tune of a *daff*. A Lāvṇī is a traditional Maharashtrian song and dance performance which has strong erotic undertones.

142. The word Śāhīra is thought to have come from the Arabic word, *Śāhar*.

(Lit: The one who sings is the Gāṇa, the one who dances is the nācaṇa. Know you that this is the difference).

The word Gāṇīva, made obviously from the word Gāṇa, is an abstract noun meaning ‘a style of singing’. The Jñāneśvarī has used it a few times with this meaning in mind (18.1716, 1720). Similarly, in archaic Marathi, one sees the word nācaṇī (a female dancer), derived from the masculine word nācaṇa (= a male dancer). The Jñāneśvarī has also used the word gāṇī (a female singer), derived from the masculine word Gāṇa (a male singer) (9.320). A contemporary and close friend of Jñāneśvara, Santa Nāmadeva, has used the words Gāṇa and Gāṇīva much more specifically when he says:

tarī mī gāṇa navhe gāṇīva karī ||
jeṇe tumatem harī santoṣa upaje || ||

(Adhyāya 219).

(Lit: I am not a singer, I write poetry. As a result of which (listening to it) Hari will be pleased with you).

Interestingly, even to this day, there is a caste of professional singers and dancers in Gomantaka. The men in this caste of professional female dancers (Kalāvantiṇa) in Gomantaka are called Gāṇa. They offer accompaniment to their female dancers and singers. On the same note, the ‘Mahikāvaticī Bakhar’ mentions¹⁴³ that when Bimbadeva Yādava went to the Koṅkan, the families that accompanied him included Gāṇas amongst them. Interestingly, the composer of this Bakhar has mentioned that these Gāṇas belonged to Pratiloma families.¹⁴⁴ In addition, all of these families were looked down upon and were called, ‘adulterous’ and hence unacceptable in marital relationships.

Janī Janārdana, a well-known Saint-Poet who was a contemporary of Eknātha, composed a work called, ‘Jānakīsaimvara’. This work lists a variety of different Gāṇas several times. Included in this list are Gāṇas such as Pānagāṇa, Pahāṭagāṇa, Ṭipagāṇa, Mācegāṇa, and Dhavalagāṇa. From this list

143. *Mahikāvaticī Bakhar*,; ED. V. K. Rajwade, Pune, Śaka 1846. pp. 67, 71.

144. Translator’s Note: In Hindu thought where caste ruled supreme, Brāhmin men marrying any of the lower castes was accepted. Similarly, a Kṣatriya man could marry either a Kṣatriya or a Vaiśya woman. These were termed *Anuloma* marriages. On the other hand, a lower caste marrying a woman of the higher caste, termed *Pratiloma*, was looked down upon and prohibited. The offspring from such prohibited unions were normally given a caste lower than their previous one.

composed by Janī Janārdana, it would appear that in ancient Maharashtra, there were several classes of folk singers who were given particular names depending on the type of songs they sang. Obviously, those who are called Śāhīra at present need also to be included in the list of Gāṇas. It is but natural that they would have also acquired a special name at that time.

The Gāṇas that we are discussing here used to sing accompanied by the percussion instrument *Ḍaf*. The songs which they sang used to be called 'Ḍaf-songs'. The folk singers used to be called 'Ḍaf-Gāṇas' or just Gāṇas. Samartha Rāmdās imitated many of the Ḍaf-Gāṇas alias Śāhīrs when he wrote some 'Ḍaf-songs'. In some of these, he has called himself a Gāṇa. For instance:

*gāṇa vihangameṃ gelā || ghabāḍa avacita pāvalā ||
deva javaḷica fāvalā || cahūṃkaḍe ||* ¹⁴⁵

(Lit: The Gāṇa flew like a bird. Suddenly, he found a treasure. He was able to see God all around him).

Tukobā's disciple, Bahiṇābāi Śiūrkar has called herself the Gāṇa from Śiūr (the Śāhīra from Śiūr) in a similar Ḍaf -song. She says:

*mī tari Śiūrīmacā gāṇa || tumhī yethīlaci jāṇa ||
tumhṇa āmhāṃ āji lagana || lagaleṃ ase ||* ¹⁴⁶

(Lit: I am the Gāṇa from Śiūr. I know you are from here as well. Therefore today, the two of us are closely connected).

Even when the word Śāhīra came into common use, Gāṇa, the original term for it, was never totally forgotten. Many a Śāhīra, during his competitions with other *phaḍas*,¹⁴⁷ has used the word in a modified form to address the opponent. The frequently used words are Gāvana or Gāvaṇa Viz.¹⁴⁸

*gangū haibatī kavī gāvana || lāvitī biradeṃ bāvana ||
is kankaṇme tuze bāndhūm || kullā bandhūṃ tere gāvanakā ||*

145. *Dāsaviśrāmadhāma*, Ed. S.S. Dev, Dhule, Śaka 1834, Prasanga (Lit. Episode) 15, p. 111 and Prasanga 36, p. 274.

146. *Śrīśanta Bahiṇābāi Yāncī Abhaṅgāncī Gāthā*: Citraśālā, Pune, 1956, No. 611, p. 168.

147. Translator's Note: A *phaḍa* is a troupe. The word is used in Marathi to denote members of a Tamāsā group.

148. See the collections of unpublished *Lāvṇīs* by Rāmjośī, Saganbhāu, Honājī Bāḷā, Paraśārām and Prabhākar published by the Citraśālā Press, Pune.

gāvana bhāī, khapā na honā, savāla sun, mata ghabarānā ॥
praśna sāṅg nāgeśā gāvanā ॥ nako basūṃ gāyā ॥
aika re gāvanā, padācī hālālī pāhuna ॥
kaḷalī tuzī caturāī yethem avaghem śahāṇapaṇa ॥ ॥
vastāda khaṇḍu haibaticī matī ॥ gāvaṇālā khuṇa pusatī ॥
gurūcyā bālakā gāvanā, praśna māsā tulā ॥
gāytrīpuna cāra veda gāvanā, tumhī sāṅgatām ॥
rangarūpahī rekhā dākhava gāvanā, khūṇa ॥
bhale bhale gāvana, tumhī āja basalā yeuna ॥
ḍhoṇḍī sālī mhaṇe gāvanā, āja sāvadhā hoī ॥

(Lit: Gangu Haibatī calls himself a singer! He also displays his many accolades! I will put all of your singing in this one bracelet of mine. I spit upon your singing. Oh great singer! Do not be afraid now. Listen to my question. Alright alright. Do not just sit here and sing. Fire away your question Nāgeśa. Listen to me, you singer! By the very construction of the words in your song, I can see your cunning and your extra smartness. Just think of it! The great Khaṇḍu Haibatī is asking questions of the singer! You are a mere child. Let me now ask you a question. You singers tell us about Gāyatrī and the four Vedas. But show us at least some proof of their existence. Show us some sign. You call yourselves great singers. You have chosen to come and sit here today. Dhoṇḍī Sālī says, ‘Oh Singer! Be careful today’).

One can see that until quite recently, the words Gāṇa, Gāvaṇa and Gāvana have been used by great Śāhīrs from Prabhākar to Dagaḍūbābā. To them, all of these words mean ‘a Śāhīr’. The evidence that we have gathered so far unequivocally proves that those folk singers and poets who are addressed today as Śāhīr were, in the past, called by the inclusive term, Gāṇa. Those who made use of the *Ḍaf* during their performance, were called *Ḍaf-Gāṇa*. These folk singers entertained the populace even before the time of the Yādavas.

Ḍaf-Songs were Spiritual Puzzles:

Ḍaf-Songs presented by *Ḍaf-Gāṇas* often consisted of spiritual puzzles. The tendency of weaving complex spiritual motifs into songs and thereby defeating the opposition in a question-answer performance called *Savāl-Jabāb*, is often seen in Marathi folk theatre. This ensures the intellectual superiority

of the winner. The songs of the dead, the songs of the Kāpaḍa-Kheḷe from the Konkan area, Gaurī-Gaṇapati songs and the Kānbāi songs from Khandesh are all full of such spiritual puzzles. Since almost all of the *Ḍaf-Songs* included such acrobatics of words on spiritual themes, the Gāṇas who presented them often had the temerity to try to out-do the Saint Poets. They would thus bedazzle the village folk with their mysterious and clever sounding but often barren play of words. Scholars who have studied Śāhīrs and their *Ḍaf-Songs* have often admired their poetry. One must however say that in terms of scholarly and philosophical depth, there is little in these *Ḍaf-Songs* that would stand the test of time. That is precisely why the Saint-Poets did not hold them in any esteem. Instead, they showed the Gāṇas how meaningless and ineffective their poetry was, and persuaded them to turn their attention to spiritual pursuits.

Saint Poets and Ḍaf-Gāṇa:

We have seen that even though the Ḍaf songs were full of spiritual gloss, Saint-Poets had absolutely no regard for the Ḍaf-singers and the Ḍaf-songs. In their opinion, this spirituality was nothing but a play of words and a game designed to outdo the opposition during their performances. In view of the deep devotional fervour that seeps through the poetry of the Saint-Poets, this was but natural. Ḍaf-Gāṇas who exhibited their laurels on their Ḍufs and wandered through the countryside fighting with other similar Śāhīrs, have been derogatorily named 'rabid dogs' by the Saint-Poet Śekh Mahammad Śrigondekar. He says:

sarajyā ankuśa ḍafāvarī lāvūna || hātoḥāṭīm umagatī bhāṇḍaṇa ||
jaisen pisāḷaleṃ śvāna || kimvona jhaḍa ghalita ase ||
daṇḍāita ḍafagāṇīyāncī ekaci matī || dāṭūna khavaḷūna kaḷī karitī ||
pari te neṇatī brahmasthitī || svayēṃ anubhavem || ||

(Yogasāṅgrāma, 1.66-67)

Svamī Samartha has also declared that Ḍaf-Gāṇa cannot be compared with the poetry of the Paṇḍits, and that Ḍaf-Gāṇa poetry is definitely inferior. (Dāsboḍha, 7.66-67).

Śāhāmuni also has denigrated Ḍaf-Gāṇa poets by saying that comparing the Ḍaf-Gāṇa Śāhīrs with the great Vyāsa is like comparing the chiefs of the fisherfolk with the moon. He also says that the noise the Ḍaf-Gāṇa poets make is very loud. They take a story and beat the hell out of it. The well-

known poet of the Nāth sect, Devanāth, has said the following about those who love Ḍaf-Gāṇa:

If he sees a Brāhmin, he is enraged. On the other hand, he is happy in the company of prostitutes and Ḍaf-Gāṇa singers.

It is but natural for the Saint-Poets to demean Ḍaf-Gāṇa and Ḍaf-Gāṇa poets. However, when a Śāhīr like Paraśurāma himself criticizes people's liking for Ḍaf-Gāṇa performances over Kathā-Kīrtanas, one sees the place of the former in the society of the day. Saint-Poets and Paraśurāma have specifically answered those who believed that the Saint-Poets may value Ḍaf-Gāṇas because of their spiritual puzzles content.

Egoistic Character:

The Saint-Poets repeatedly found that the spiritual knowledge of the Śāhīrs was often very limited, superficial, confused, and ambiguous. In spite of this however, the latter often displayed an arrogance and false pride about their so-called spiritual background. It appears that there were many occasions when the Saint-Poets attempted to rid the Śāhīrs of their arrogance and false pride. Both Mahīpatībuvā Tāharābādakar and Ātmārāmasvami Yekkehālikar have in their respective works, 'Santavijaya' and 'Dāsaviśrāmadhāma' have described one such occasion. Both of these works are biographies of Svamī Samartha. Apparently, two Ḍaf-Gāṇas had come to the Svamī to resolve a philosophical dispute between themselves. They wanted the Svamī to mediate between them. Mahīpatībuvā has painted a remarkably convincing picture of the two Ḍaf-Gāṇas. He says:

bolavitāncī te veḷām || sannidha pātālā sakala meḷā ||
ḍafācā kaḍkaḍāta jhālā || ghoṣa kondalā nirāḷim ||
jaise polyātīla baila sajatī || śāhīra naṭale taiśā rītī ||
ārakta vastreṃ aṅgāvaratīm || sajale disatī prṣṭabhāgīm ||
bisanī pagaḍyā bāndhalyā niscitīm || cālata cālata viḍe ghetī ||
ubhe tilaka lāvile asatī || uddhaṭa cālātī utāṇe ||
vibhūtī lāvilyā netrāmvarī || ḍafaḍīm ghetalīm ase karīm ||
nīśāṇeṃ rovilīm faḍāvarī || jhānjā jhaṇatkārīm vājata ||
śmaśrū piḷoni sarasāvatī || ḍaf jhāḍoni gaṇa bolatī ||
ekamekāmsī caḍha ṭākitī || umāñī ghalitī paraspareṃ ||

(Santavijaya, 18.194-197. 206)

Having heard such arrogant blabber by the Ḍaf-Gāṇas, Svāmī Samartha produced his own Ḍaf-Gāṇ (song) containing many unanswerable and meaningless questions, such as, 'How much the earth weigh?' and 'what is the length of the sky measured in fingers?' etc. Finally, the Svāmī said that 'everything in the world is immeasurable and incalculable. He advised that the Śāhīrs needed to do away with their ego.

Similar to what Svāmī Samartha did, Ajñānasiddha Nāgeśa had also defeated Ḍaf-Gāṇas. Sadhu Gopālanāth from Tripuṭī belonged to the Nāth sect. He made fun of the Kalgī-Turrāh Śāhīr 'Śekh Sultān' who was unable to explain the meaning of one of his own Gāṇas. The Sādhū thereupon showed Śekh Sultān the spiritual way.¹⁴⁹

All of the above discussion clearly shows us the relationship between Saint-Poets and Śāhīrs.

'Kalgī-turā' or 'Kaḷage-Tarrāh'?

In the field of Marathi Śāhīrī, there are two types of poets who compose Ḍaf-Gāṇa songs full of spiritual mysteries. The first is the Śaktipakṣa and the second is Śivapakṣa. The former is also called, 'Kalagī' whereas the latter is called, 'Turā'. According to etymologists, Kalagī means either a plume of feathers or a gem-studded ornament for the turban. Turā also means an ornament for the turban. The word Kalagī seems to have come from the Turkish language (kalghī, kalghā) where it means 'a peak'. The word Turā is from Arabic where it means 'the curly hair flowing over the face'.

When one thinks about the above explanations concerning the meaning of the two words, it becomes clear that there could be no possible relationship whatsoever between an ornament worn on a Pagḍī¹⁵⁰ or Pāgoṭe and the Śiva and Śakti sects in Śāhīrī poetry. Professor Prabhakar Mande, a well-known collector of spiritual Śāhīrī poetry from Marathawada, has been faced with exactly the same question. He has unequivocally said that these two words do not resonate with the spiritual thinking of the Śāhīrs. It is totally unclear as to why the two words, Kalgī and Turā have become associated with a specific kind of spiritual philosophy. It is said that just as the word

149. *Śrī Gopalnatha Caritrāmṛta*, Ed. V. B. Gholap, Satara, 1971. A. 32.

150. Translator's Note: The Pagḍī and Pāgoṭe were both head-gears worn by males in Maharashtra society in the 18th and 19th century.

Śāhīra came into Maharashtra through Moslem contact, it is possible that these two words came from that source as well.¹⁵¹

Professor Mande is right in thinking that the two words Kalgī and Turā do not come to us through our interaction with Moslems. If at all it was the Moslem influence that brought anything to us, then logically, there should have been alternative words for Śaktī and Śiva that should have come instead. Why should some small ornaments on Marathi head-gear be associated with Śāhīrī poetry? This has been a mystery to this date.

An explanation of these two names is to be found in the form of a myth in North India. This myth has been recorded by a scholar of folk literature, Dr. Shyam Parmar, in introducing the tradition of Kalgī-Turā Śāhīrī in the region of Mālṣvā.¹⁵² He writes:¹⁵³

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, a sage called Tukangīra Mahātmā and a fakīr¹⁵⁴ called Śāha Alī went into the court of a local Marāṭhā king. Both sang many impressive Lāvṇī songs for the king. As a result, they earned a lot of praise from the members of the court. The king was very pleased and as a reward, presented the Turā from his crown to Tukangīra and Kalgī to Śāha Alī. Since then, the two branches of Śāhīrī came into existence.¹⁵⁵

To me, the above explanation belongs to the class of folk-tales and hence imaginary and outright fictitious. M.N. Sahasrabuddhe has gone even further when he suggests a relationship between Turā and the spiritual state of Turiyā¹⁵⁶ and also the musical instrument called 'Tūr'. With his eyes always look-

151. *Marāṭhavadyatila kalgīturyacī ādhyātmic Śāhīrī*: Ed. Prof. P.B. Mande. Aurangabad, 1965. Introduction, pp.3-4.

152. Translator's Note: Mālṣvā covers west-central India, comprising a large portion of western and central part of Madhya Pradesh state and parts of southeastern Rajasthan and northern Maharashtra states.

153. Translator's Note: Parmar wrote in Hindi. Mine is a translation of the Hindi writing quoted by Dr. Dhare.

154. Translator's Note: A fakir is a Muslim Sufi holy man who lives on begging. He is a kind of wandering monk.

155. *Vīṇā* magazine (in Hindi), Indore, Year 30, Issue No. 4, February 1957, p. 188.

156. Translator's Note: In Kashmir Śaiva philosophy, turiya is the fourth state. It is neither wakefulness, dreaming, nor deep sleep. It exists at the junction between any of these three states.

ing for mystery, it looks as though he was able to see Śiva and Śaktī in their symbolic form in Kalgī-Turā. He thus said:

If one interweaves together individual garlands to make a larger one, the resulting figure resembles this figure. Our philosophy tells us that in nature, complex forms and patterns start from the smallest elements. Thus, the smallest element is the Turā and its modified form is the Kalgī.¹⁵⁷

The intelligent reader will surmise that this commentary by Mr. Sahasrabuddhe falls within the ambit of folk-tales.

The question once again arises as to how the terms Kalgī and Turā came into existence? Also, how did they become symbols of Śiva and Śaktī sects? The answer to this question is buried deeply into the dark unknown. I feel that one needs to look at this answer not through the influence of Moslems who came into India from outside, but through the influence of the South Indian culture within India. I feel this way because of the fact that the development of Marathi folk culture has been influenced in a major way by the culture of the South. And one is of course aware that the mysterious spiritual poetry of the Gāṇas is closely related to this folk culture.

In order to unravel the mystery of the terms Kalgī and Turā, one needs to examine one of the folk dances in the state of Kerala. In Kerala, there is an ancient traditional folk dance by the name of Kaḷiyāṭṭam (etymologically, Kālī + Āṭṭam = Kālī dance). This dance is performed to appease Śiva and Śaktī and other members of the Śaivite pantheon. Songs in praise of Śiva and Śaktī are sung during the performance. Over the time, Kaḷiyāṭṭam evolved into many variations such as Teyyam keṭṭu (Teyyaṭṭam), Kolam Keṭṭu and Tiryaṭṭam. Tiryaṭṭam was born in the kingdom of Kōṭṭyam in Kerala. This was the period when the worship of Vīras was popular in Kerala. Stories in the form of ballads about the great battles and the valorous men who fought in these battles (Vīras) were sung all over Kerala. The folk artists who staged Kaḷiyāṭṭam started including tales of these valorous men into their dances along with the myths about Śiva and Śaktī. They started wearing Kolam (dance costume) and dancing in front of the Tarrās (raised quadrangular platform) built to honour the Vīras. Because this dance was performed in

157. *Marāṭhī Śāhīrī Vāṅgmaya*: M.N. Sahasrabuddhe. Pune, p. 230.

front of a Tarā, it became known as Tarryāṭṭam or Tiryṭṭam. Kaḷiyāṭṭam is a very popular variation of this dance.¹⁵⁸

It is this Tarryāṭṭam dance that is connected to Kalgī-turā. It is important to remember that Tarryāṭṭam is performed not only in front of shrines housing gods, but also in front of memorials to the Vīras. Those who study folk culture know that such memorials hold a godly status in the minds of Indian villagers. There is no specific need to tell this to the experts who study Culture. Such memorials to Vīras are called ‘Tarā’ in Malayālam and ‘Kaḷa’ in Kannaḍa.¹⁵⁹ Kaḷa means a stone, more appropriately, a memorial stone. Just as in Karnāṭakā, memorial stones to Vīras are spread all over Maharashtra. They have become holy shrines for the villagers. In Marathi, we call them Vīragaḷa (Vīrakaḷa in Kannaḍa language). There are many compound words in Indian languages such as, Bājārhāt, Kāgadapatra, Arjavinantī¹⁶⁰ etc. Similarly, the Malayālam word ‘tarā’ was imported in Karnāṭakā and through the process of compounding, the Kannaḍa word kaḷ with the same meaning was added to it. To the compounded word tarā-kaḷa, a Kannaḍa suffix ‘ge’ was added and the word ‘tarā-kaḷage’ was born. Over time, this etymological synthesis of the word ‘tarā-kaḷage’ was totally forgotten. Because it sounded similar, it was connected with the word, kalgī-turā. That is how the myth of the visit of Tukangīra and Śāha-Ālī to the court of a Maratha king, and their being awarded prizes of Kalgī and Turā, came into existence. It is worth remembering that even to this date, just as it was done in the past, performances of Kalgī-Turā are staged in villages on the occasion of the annual celebration of the Grāmadevatā or in the memory of a saint or Vīra who passed away on that day.

I re-iterate that once the meaning of a word becomes broader, in giving its imagined etymological definition, people tend to connect it to words which sound similar. This tendency is familiar to those who study folk-culture and folk languages.

158. *Yugaprabhāta* (Hindi fortnightly, Kalikat, Keral), 1st November 1965 and 16th November 1965.

159. Translator’s Note: Malayālam and Kannaḍa are the State languages of Keraḷa and Karnāṭaka respectively.

160. Translator’s Note: What Dr. Dhere says is this: Both the words Hāt and Bājār mean the same thing. So do Kāgada and patra and Arja and Vinantī. In spite of that, there are compounded and used as such.

Vaḍavāḷasiddha Nāgnāth: The Founder of Nāgeśavaḷi:

Between the two sects of Kalgī-Turā Śāhirī, Haridās is thought to be the founder of the Turā sect whereas Nāgeśa is thought to be the founder of Kalgī sect. Shree N.B. Joshi has recently written about Haridas. However, there is no definitive opinion as yet among scholars who have studied Śāhirī about Nāgeśa, who founded Nāgeśavaḷi. I believe that the person known as Vaḍavāḷasiddha Nāgeśa alias Nāgnāth is the same person who founded Nāgeśavaḷi (vaḷa-> oḷa -> Paramparā). My reasons for this belief are as follows:

- 1) In his work called 'Dāsaviśrāmadhāma (71.118), Ātmārāmasvāmī Yekke-hāḷikar has said:

*māgeṃ ajñānasiddhasvamīni || śāhirusa jintile śarta karoni ||
tai śāhirice sangika durguṇi || na tarale tyhūni viśeṣa he ||*

This goes to show that Nāganātha's main disciple and the main propagator of Nāgeśa sect, Ajñānasiddha, was very well versed in Śāhirī.

- 2) Ātmārāmasvāmī also wrote about another Sādhu by the name of Ālamkhān (121.109). He wrote:

gondhaḷyadi bhovata tayāce.

(Lit: He was surrounded by Gondhaḷis and others).

This tells us that Ālamkhān had close contact with Śāhirī poets.

- 3) One of Nāgeśa's well-known disciple by the name of Manmathaśivaliṅg-asvāmī was a Liṅgāyata. He was also an eminent Śāhira. Basvaliṅga said this about him:

bāḷapaṇi dāṇḍu ḍafācā dhundhakāra || jinkile Śāhir neṇo kitī ||

(Lit: from his very early age, he produced such a clamour of his Ḍaf and club, thus winning contests against so many Śāhirs).

There is a famous story about him that once in a contest held at Kāśī, he won against seventeen Śāhirs.¹⁶¹ Shree M. M. Datto Vāman Potdār has published a Lavṇī written by Manmathaśivaliṅga about the Goddess at Karhad. In that

161. *Manmatha Śivaliṅgakṛta anubhavānanda-Svayamprakāśa*: Ed. Dr. Pandit Avalikar. Dharwad, 1966. Introduction, p. 4.

Lavṇī, he gives some details about himself:

guru nāganāth prasanna jāle tyālā ||
kavī manmathaśivaliṅga bārasīta raṅgelā || ||

(Lit: The poet Manmathaśivaliṅga has been blessed by his Guru Nāgnāth and is happily living at Bārsī).

Researchers in ancient Marathi know that Manmathaśivaliṅga, the writer who wrote works such as Paramarahasyasārāmṛta amongst others, was a disciple of Vaḍavālasiddha Nāgeśa. When one looks at the close relationship of the famous disciples of Vaḍavālasiddha Nāgeśa with the Śāhirs, there should be no doubt in our minds that he was the one who was the founder of Nāgeśavaḷī.

The Antiquity of Gaṇa-Gauḷaṇī:

The Gaṇa-Gauḷaṇī, an essential ingredient of the repertoire of Śāhīrī performances, have always held an important place in the development of Marathi folk culture. The Gaṇa has of course more so. The Gondhaḷa for the Goddess, the Jāgaraṇa for Khaṇḍobā and the Bharād performance for Bhairava; none of them would begin without first invoking the Gaṇa. Just as erudite writers and gifted poets do not begin their work without first invoking the blessings of Gaṇeśa, in the same manner, folk-poets and folk playwrights do not start their work without first invoking the blessings of Gaṇa. There is evidence to say the same about Gauḷaṇī. They seem to have appeared in literature and on stage even before the time of Eknātha.

‘Rūp Karaṇe’ (Lit: to imitate someone) is a figure of speech that has appeared in Marathi literature many times during the time of the Yādavas. One often sees mentions of guise and its accomplishment even before the time of Eknātha. Śekh Mahammadabābā Śrigondekar was the brother of Eknātha’s Guru. He was like Kabir: worshipper of the attribute-less truth, a free thinker. He has severely criticized everything that went on under the heading of ‘*Sa-guṇabhakti*.’¹⁶² The Śekh has unequivocally said that in Harikathā, under the

162. Translator’s Note: Bhakti (devotional worship of God) in Hinduism has described two paths to attain Mokṣa (Salvation). Sa-guṇa Bhakti and Nir-guṇa Bhakti. Sa-guṇa Bhakti uses physical objects such as god’s images in order to achieve the goal. Nir-guṇa Bhakti on the other hand worships a formless God and relies on concentration, Yoga and the like. It is of course more difficult and most people prefer to adopt the former.

pretext of showing god's biography, a 'Lālam-lālā'¹⁶³ is presented. In his opinion, this results in the audience getting sexually aroused. The Śekh is highly critical of the practice of male actors wearing women's clothes, a practice that was very common at that time. He has used the derogatory word 'naṭyā'¹⁶⁴ to describe a male actor who wears women's clothes. Naṭyā means Nācyā, a girly male dancer. Śekh Mahammad's description of such a person is most persuasive:

*kṣaura karuṇi ḍoḷāṃ kājaḷa || dise strīhūni deha dhāḷa ||
tethem pahātā karitī taḷamaḷa || mahāvyaṣanī unmatta || ||
bāpa putra jāvai piśuna || sāsarā bhācā mehuṇā bandhujana ||
nātū culatā saḍū soyare sajjana || pāparūpeṃ pahātī || ||
avagheci pātale cancala anusandhānīṃ ||
māge sangitalīṃ nātīṃ gelīṃ moḍunī ||
avagheṃ kāya hota ekamekānlagunī || tem oḷakhāveṃ śrotejanīṃ || ||
puruṣa strīrupe naṭyā naṭalā || pāparupeṃ sabhenēṃ abhilāśilā ||
tom pāpāncā sangraha prabaḷa jāḷa || mṛgajāḷa jaisā ḍoho || ||
naṭyā dekhoni īśvarāteṃ dhyatu || aisā virālā koṇi puṇyavantu ||
yer bhūteṃ jaise avaguṇāitu || ṭakamakā pāhātī || ||*
(Yogasaṅgrāma, 18. 219-223)

In another short verse, Śekh Mahammad has described a Naṭyā as 'an expert who performs clever acts and knows how to imitate someone' (naṭyā jaṇe songe).¹⁶⁵ The Śekh has described in detail the Naṭyā or Nācyā, his highly suggestive acting and the result of this, the sexual arousal of the spectators. Most of the time, the Naṭyā used to play the role of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's consort. This becomes clear from the following mention by Śahāmuni who describes the role of the Nācyā in a Tamaśā performance. He says, 'the Nācyā has dressed himself as Rādhā and beautified himself. What a mockery of manhood?' (Siddhantabodha, 43.111). Another poet called Rāmasuta, in his work called, 'Sādhuvilāsa' has written in detail about the role of Rādhā played by a Naṭyā in Tamaśā performances (13.67-80). He says:

163. Lālam-Lālā is a mixture of several things under the name of devotional regime. The ingredients are often cheap and erotic.

164. Translator's Note: The derogatory masculine singular form of the word 'Naṭa'

165. Śekh Mahammadabābā Śrigondekar yāncā kavitaśaṃgraha: Ed. V.C. Bendre, Mumbai, 1961. P. 81.

rādhā mhaṇaje stricā veśa || devuniyā puruṣāsa ||
tayākaḍūna nṛtyāsa || karavuni vādyāsa vājaviṇeṃ ||
aise nindyakarmālāguna || na pāhati sajnanaajana ||
strīveśa ghetalā puruṣāne || tyāce vadana na pahāveṃ ||
parī pūrvī kṛṣṇāvatārī || vrajī kunjavanāntārī ||
rādhāviyogeṃ pūtanārī || nījāntarīm vivhaḷa ||
nānā prakāre anya vilāsa || karūni pāhati jagannivāsa ||
parī swastha na hoyā mānasa || jem kā rādhāmukhāsa vedhaleṃ ||
maga svayem rādhece rūpa gheunī || striyance alamkāra ghalunī ||
pudheṃ ādarśa māṇḍunī || mājīm nayanī vilokitī ||
tamva pratyakṣa rādhā dekhilī || aisī manī bhāvanā jālī ||
cittavṛttī ānandalī || udāsa jālī hotī je ||
taye divasāpāsuni || ājñā karī mokṣadānī ||
strīveśa ghetām puruṣānūṇ || pañcadina nayanī pahāveṃ ||
śīsira ṛtu phālguna māsa || paurṇimepāsuni pāmca divasa ||
avalokitā tayāsa || doṣa nase kāhim pai ||
tīca rahāṭī adyāpavarī || cālatase urvīvarī ||
mhaṇauni rādhā nāma nirdhārīm || loka sārī vadatātī ||

In the above verse, Rāmasuta has shed important light on several things. He comments on the prohibition on men wearing women's clothes and the clever way out of it. He describes the imaginary tale which tries to explain the origin of the custom of the Nācyā playing the role of the female, Rādhā. Finally, he talks about the performances of many Tamāsās during the season of Śimgā.¹⁶⁶ Although Rāmasuta belonged to the previous century, the language he uses is archaic. It must be remembered that he describes a Tamāsā performance as ‘*Ḍaḡgānyācā faḍ*’,¹⁶⁷ an earlier name for Tamāsā.

The above verse by Rāmasuta clearly tells us that in Ḍaḡgāṇa performances, along with spiritual quizzes submitted to the opposition in the form of singing, a ‘Kṛṣṇa Līlā’ performance was also staged. In such a performance, a male actor used to perform the role of Rādhā. Through his acting, the erotic atmosphere necessary for ‘Saguṇabhakti’ used to be created. In this connection, it is important to remember the following famous, fascinat-

166. Translator's Note: The Śimgā or Hoḷī festival runs for five days around March. It represents the destroying of Holikā, a demoness and the arrival of gods into the home. Hoḷī is celebrated in a big way by villagers and many plays and Tamāsā competitions are held.

167. Translator's Note: Lit. a collective performance of the Daf players and singers.

ing, picturesque, and endearing Gauḷaṇa by Eknātha:

wāriyāne kuṇḍala hāle || dōḷe moḍita rādhā cāle ||

(Lit: Due to the wind, Radha's earrings are dangling. In this manner, Rādhā is suggestively walking, making eyes at Kṛṣṇa).

On the same note, a similar colourful Gauḷaṇa by Vitthalanāth is worth noting:

Rādhe tujhā ranga pāhunī || kṛṣṇa danga jhālā ||

(Lit. Oh Rādhā! Having seen your enchanting complexion, Kṛṣṇa has been mesmerized.

Tamāśā or the arena of the Śāhirs blossomed and came to its hay-day during the reign of the Peśvās. It has now obtained recognition from the (Maharashtra) Government as well. Our discussion above will convince the readers that its roots go back even before the reign of the Yādavas. Gaṇa, Gauḷaṇa, Ḍuf-Songs and Lāvṇyā are some of the many parts of Tamāśā. Marathi Saint-Poets pondered over all of these, and through their medium, taught spirituality to the populace. This Śāhirī poetry of the Saint-Poets is rich and worthy of scholarly study.

The Vīras venerated by Kalgī-Turā Śāhirs:

We have already noted that Kalgī-Turrā (Kaḷage-tarryāh) performances usually take place during the annual memorial celebrations for the Vīras. In his collection called, 'The

Spiritual Śāhirs of the Kalgī-Turrā artists of Marāthawāḍā', the songs presented by Dr. Prabhakar Mande include mentions of various Vīras who are objects of veneration by the

Kalgī-Turrā artists. We know these Vīras as 'Bāvan Vīras',¹⁶⁸ who are low-grade godlings.¹⁶⁹ During their competitions, the Kalgī and Turā sects depend upon their superior knowledge, intellect and imaginative power to defeat their opposition in the poetic question and answer sessions (Sawāl-

168. Translator's Note: In Marathi, 'Bāvan' means Fifty-two.

169. Translator's Note: Śūdra class godlings.

Jabāb). They also invoke the Vīra godlings and seek their blessings in order to defeat the opposition. The songs they use to invoke these Vīras are called Bīras. Among the gods which the Śāhīrs invoke are: Mahāvīra, Hanumān, Vetāl, Narasiṃha, Mahammadyā, Kalbā Śokyā, Jindā Śāmdār, Raktyā, Masṇyā, Khāpryā, Mhaśāsūra, Āgiyā, and Munjā. One can see that these consist both of Hindu and Muslim names. The inclusion here of Hanumān and Narasiṃha is surprising. Let us have a look at a Bīra of the Turā sect here:

mahābīrapara ṭolā marikā āyā hundāḍā bhairavakā ||
narasinga Zotiṅga alaga uḍāūṃ patā lagena śāhīrakā || ||
āge cale ye coṭa marikī, pīche kālabhairav soṭā ||
bāvana bīr kī gardana cābūṃ, tuṭā kalijā bajarangakā || ||

In this Bīra, the Turā sect artist talks of the defeat of Mahāvīra, Narasinga, Jhotiṅga, Bajarāṅga and in fact all of the fifty-two Vīras in the hands of Marī and Bhairava. In the poetry of the well-known Kalgī Śāhīra ‘Śāhā-alī’, there is a mention of five Vīras in addition to fifty-two Vīras. He also adds the sixty-four Yoginīs to the list. In a verse by a

Turā sect poet, there is mention of two other Bīrs with the names: Baḍābīra and Lahubīra. This ardent and rather strange devotion to the Bīrs by Kalgī and Turā poets and their invoking these Bīrs, as a result, opens up a new field of study in Marathi folk culture.

Bīras (Vīras) are Yakṣas:

Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal, the doyen of the study of Indian Yakṣa culture, has unequivocally shown that the term Vīra is an alternative name for a Yakṣa. He has also shown that since ancient times, Bāvana Vīras (Fifty-two Vīrs) and Pañca Vīras (Five Vīrs) have been the two counting systems classifying the Yakṣas. He has been able to acquire several lists of the Bāvana Vīras and has also assiduously studied the literature on the Pañca Vīras. Dr. Aggrawal was told by Pandit Sukhalal Sanghavi that whenever the Bāvana Vīras were worshipped, the sixty-four Yoginīs were also worshipped.¹⁷⁰ These sixty-four Yoginīs are none other than the major and well-known Yakṣiṇīs. The worship of Pañca Vīras is still prevalent all-over North India under the name of Pañca

170. *Prācīna Bhāratiya Lokadharmā*: Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal. Ahmedabad, 1964, pp. 134, 145-149.

Pīras. Similarly, two Pīras by the names of Lahurā Bīra and Biulā (Vipul-Baḍā) Bīra are still present in the city of Kāśī. These are the same as Baḍābīra and Lahubīra mentioned by the Śāhirs.

To conclude, the above discussion tells us that the Vīras or Yakṣas are the deities who look after, protect, and help the Śāhirs of the Kalgī-Turrā sects. In India, Yakṣas have been ancient godlings and have held an important place in the worship regime of Indians since pre-Vedic times.

The Archaic Relationship between Yakṣas and Puzzles:

The Kalgī-Turrā Śāhirs consider Yakṣas as their gods. The poetry they compose and sing is in the form of riddles. They challenge the opposition to unravel the riddles and elaborate their answers also in the form of poetry. Often, these challenges and counter-challenges result in severe confrontations. With this background, it is extraordinary to observe that the Yakṣas themselves have had a close connection with puzzles and riddles since the time of the Yajurveda. In this context, one immediately thinks of the Yakṣapraṣṇas (questions asked by the Yakṣa) in the Mahābhārata.

Yakṣa's Questions in the Mahābhārata:

At the very end of the Vanaparva of the Mahābhārata, a miraculous event has been described.¹⁷¹ Having freed Draupadī from the clutches of Jayadrath, the forest-dwelling Pāṇḍavas left Kāmyakavana and came once again to Dvaitavana. All of them were extremely hungry and thirsty. In that perplexed, despondent, and tired state, they rested under a Ficus tree. However, the mere shade of the tree was not enough to quench their thirst. Yudhiṣṭhira therefore asked Nakula to climb the tree and check if he could see any signs of greenery or water close by. Nakula did so and told Yudhiṣṭhira that he could see trees which grow near water. He could also hear the call of Sārasa birds who prefer to be close to water. Yudhiṣṭhira therefore ordered Nakula to go to that place. Nakula took his bow and arrows and went to that place where he saw a beautiful lake full of clean water. Sārasa birds were flying around the beautiful, healthy trees. When the thirsty Nakula was about to drink the water, he heard the following addressed to him:

171. *Mahābhārata*. Vanaparva, Adhyāya 313-315. Citraśālā Press.

You are not allowed to drink water from this lake, because the lake belongs to me. Oh, Son of Mādri, if at all you wish to drink this water, then the first thing you need to do is to answer my questions. Only when I am satisfied with your answers, then only I shall allow you to drink or take this water.

Nakula ignored this warning and drank the water. As a result, he lost all of his senses and fell to the ground. Because Nakula took such a long time, Sahadeva went and suffered the same fate. The same happened to Arjuna and Bhīma. Finally, Yudhiṣṭhira approached the lake and saw all four of his brothers dead near the lake. He was devastated. While He looked around for the cause of their deaths, he could not see any signs of weapon-inflicted wounds. Neither did he see any suspicious footmarks. Yudhiṣṭhira thought that this calamity may have been the result either the actions of a ghost or the waters may have been poisoned by the enemies of the Pāṇḍavas. He decided to test the waters of the lake and was about to enter the water when he heard the following words;

Oh King, if you do not answer my questions before entering this lake, you will suffer the same fate as your brothers. Do not touch this water. First answer my questions.

These words came from a Yakṣa who had assumed the form of a heron. The Yakṣa was the owner of the lake. Yudhiṣṭhira said to him: First of all, tell me who you are because a mere bird does not have the power to kill my valorous brothers. Upon this, the Yakṣa assumed his original form. He was as big as a Tāla tree and lustrous like Agni, the god of fire. Yudhiṣṭhira agreed to answer the Yakṣa's questions and a conversation between the two ensued. The Yakṣa asked Yudhiṣṭhira many different questions. Strange as it may seem, some of these questions are very similar to the ones found in a mantra called 'brahmodya' in the Yajurveda.

The Brahmodya from Yajurveda:

In the Aśvamedha-Karmakāṇḍa of the Yajurveda, the questions and answers

between 'hotā'¹⁷² and 'Rājamahiṣī'¹⁷³ are known collectively as Brahmodya. Similar to Vīra, Brahma is also a term that signifies Yakṣas.¹⁷⁴ Brahmodya means 'Yakṣa's speech; in some ways, the same as 'questions by a Yakṣa.' Let us look at the questions and answers in Brahmodya:

Question:

kaḥ svidekākī caratī ka u svijjāyate punaḥ ||
kimsviddhimasya bheṣajaṃ kimvāvapanaṃ mahat || ||

(Yajurveda, 23.9)

(Lit: I ask you: who travels on his own? Similarly, even when he has disappeared, who is he who is born again? Tell me, what is the medicine for cold weather? And which is the best place to sow a seed?)

Answer:

sūryaḥ ekākī caratī, candramā jāyate punaḥ ||
agnirhimasya bheṣajaṃ, bhūmirāvapanaṃ mahat || ||

(Lit: The sun travels alone. Even after he vanishes, the moon is born again. Fire is the only medicine for cold weather, and, for the seed to sprout, earth is the best place).

In the Yakṣa questions in the Mahābhārata, the only change from the above Yajurvedic verse is that the word 'ekaḥ' replaces 'ekākī.' Otherwise, the verse is more or less the same.

kimsvideko vicarate, jātah ko jāyate punaḥ ||
kimsviddhimasya bheṣajam kimsvidāvapanam mahat || ||

sūrya eko vicarate, candramā jāyate punaḥ ||
agnirhimasya bheṣajam, bhūmirāvapanam mahat || ||

(Mahābhārata, Vanaparva. 313.67-68)

172. Translor's Note: The word 'Hotā' means 'invoker' or 'offerer of oblation'. The Hotā is responsible for reciting mantras and offering oblations to the gods. He leads the prayers and rituals, and ensures that they are performed correctly.

173. Translor's Note: Rājamahiṣī means the chief queen.

174. *Pracīna Bhāratīya Lokadharama, op cit.*, p. 123.

Yakṣapraṣṇa in Buddhist Literature:

The Yakṣapraṣṇa tradition, which has been known since the time of the Yajurveda, can be seen in Buddhist literature as well. Amongst the Buddhist Jātakakathās, there is a Jātaka called ‘Devadhammajātaka’ which consists of questions and answers between a Yakṣa and Bodhisatva.¹⁷⁵ As the story goes, once Bodhisatva took birth as the son of the king of Vārāṇasī. His name was Mahimsāsakumāra. He had a brother called Candrakumāra and a step-brother called Suriyākumāra. Once, all three of them went to the Himalayas. While they were resting under a tree, Mahimsāsakumāra asked Suriyākumāra to fetch some water. The lake where Suriyākumāra went to collect water was being guarded by a Yakṣa under the orders of Kubera. Because he did not heed the Yakṣa’s warning, he suffered the same fate as the Pāṇḍavas in the previous story. His step-brother Candrakumara followed suit. Finally, when Mahimsāsakumāra went to the lake, he recognized the Yakṣa and asked him if he had harmed his brothers. When asked why, the Yakṣa replied that the lake belonged to him and anyone entering the lake without his permission is destroyed. Only those who answer his question correctly are able to drink from the lake. The question is, ‘who is really like god?’ Mahimsāsakumāra agreed to answer the question but said that he was very tired because of his travels. Upon this, the Yakṣa bathed him, gave him food and water, adorned him with lotuses and made him sit on a special seat in a decorated pavilion. After this, Bodhisatva said to the Yakṣa, ‘I will now tell you who is almost like god.’

pāpānpāsoni je virat, puṇyakarmāce je bhakta ||
śukla nara hṛdayāta, devānsāarakhe asata || ||

(Lit. Those who are sinless, those who are devoted to performing meritorious deeds and those who possess a pure heart, are like God).

We have seen that after being pleased with the answers given by Yudhiṣṭhira, the Yakṣa was prepared to bring one brother back to life. That is when Yudhiṣṭhira asked him to bring Nakula, the son of Mādri, back to life. Similarly, the Bodhisatva opted to bring back to life his step-brother, not the real

¹⁷⁵. *Jātakātīl Nivādaka Goṣṭi-Prathamārdha*: C.V. Joshi. Baroda, 1930. pp. 9-13.

brother. When one looks at such similarity between the Mahābhārata and Devadhammajātaka, one feels that such myths must have existed since ancient times among the populace. One probably sees the original version in the Jataka whereas in the Mahābhārata, the myth has blossomed and has been enriched by the imaginative power of the composer.

One also sees episodes of Yakṣas and their questions in the Buddhist work, Suttanipāṭa. They occur in the Sucilomasutta and Āḷavakasutta.¹⁷⁶ This is when the Buddha stays in the abode of a Yakṣa. The Yakṣa warns the Buddha, 'Śramana! I am now going to ask you a question. If you do not answer it correctly, I will make you insane, or I will pierce your heart or I will hold you by your feet and throw you beyond the Ganges.'

Yakṣa Yātrā and the Jatrās¹⁷⁷ of today:

Kalgī-Turā performances are traditionally held during the annual festivals (Jatrās) of the village gods and goddesses (Grāmadevatās). The tradition of the Jatrās seems to be very old. Jain Āgamas mention Yātrās or Jatrās for the festivals in honour of the Yakṣas and other Grāmadevatās.¹⁷⁸ Another term used for such celebrations was 'maha'. The Mahābhārata has used the term 'Brahmamaha' for Yakṣayātrā. After Bhīma killed the demon Bakāsura, the joyous residents of Ekacakrā city celebrated the occasion with a Brahmamaha.

*tataste brāhmaṇāḥ sarve kṣatriyāṣca suvismitāḥ ||
vaiśyāḥ śūdrāṣca muditāścakrurbrahmamaham tadā || ||*

(MBH: Ādiparva, 152.18)

(Lit: After this, the delighted Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras [of Ekacakrā City] celebrated a Brahmamaha).

A similar Brahmamaha was celebrated in Virāṭanagarī four months after the Pāṇḍavas returned. During that celebration, Bhīma killed a wrestler called

176. *Suttanipata*: Translated by Dharmananda Kosambi, Ed. P.V. Bapat. Mumbai, 1955. pp. 56-62, 84-86.

177. Translator's Note: Jatrā is a generic word in Marathi which signifies many things: a festival in honour of a deity, a fair or a pilgrimage.

178. *Jaināgama Sahityame Bharatiya Samāḥ*: Dr. Jagadīśacandra Jain. Varanasi, 1965. p.443.

Jimūtavāhana in the wrestling ring.¹⁷⁹ The description of the wrestling ring resonates well with the current format of Jatrās in Maharashtra. The Jain Āgamas describe Jatrās held in honour of Yakṣas and similar godlings. Thus, in a Jain work called ‘Aupapātikasūtra,’ a Jatrā in honour of a Yakṣa called Pūrṇabhadra is described. The festival took place at Campānagarī (the present city of Bhāgalpur).

The following is the description of this Jatrā:

Both the rich and poor took part in this festival. The Yakṣa was worshipped in a very elaborate manner with flags, bells, sandalwood, a kalaśa, various incenses and flowers. Singers, actors, story-tellers, Śāhirs, wrestlers and organizers of many games attended the fair.¹⁸⁰

To reiterate, this description of the Yakṣa-Yātrā closely resembles the present form of the Jatrās for the village gods and godlings in Maharashtra. When one thinks collectively about the Kalgī-Turā sect and their protective Yakṣa gods, the mode of the ancient celebrations for these gods and the spiritual riddles associated with the performances of the Kalgī-Turā sect, one logically comes to the conclusion that the origin of Kalgī-Turā performances are the Yakṣapraṣṇas, the Yakṣa-riddles.

These Vīrs and those Vīrs:

Let us now summarise what we have learned up till now. The terms Turā and Kalgī are transformations of South Indian terms tarrāh and kaḷage. The knowledge of this transformation was lost sometime in the past from the collective memory of the populace. After this, as a result of the natural human desire for pursuing etymological relationships, these two original South Indian words were somehow connected to two ornaments of Marathi headgear of the time, Kalgī and Turā. Both of these words have Islamic origin. This background led us to the two original words, i.e. Tarrā (a memorial post) and Kaḷa (memorial stone). The belief system of the Kalgī and Turā Śāhirs is closely connected with these two words. There are a large number of memorials called ‘Vīragāḷa’ in South India. Many of them have achieved the status of Grāmadevatās in village India. The annual celebrations in their honour

179. *Mahābhārata*, Virāṭaparva, 13. pp. 14-15. (Citrasāḷā Press Edition).

180. *Prācīna Bhāratiya Lokadharma*, op cit., p.141.

stage Kalgī-Turā performances. We have learned this from the etymology of these two words.

When we went even further in our quest in the past, we discovered that Kalgī-Turā are closely connected with Yakṣas. One of the meanings of the word Vīra is a Yakṣa. The question that now arises is, 'which of the Vīras are connected with Kalgī-Turā Śāhirs?' Those valorous fighters who died during a battle and hence were called Vīras or the Yakās who are also called Vīras? If both of these are worshipped by the Kalgī-Turā Śāhirs, then who are the original ones? Which of the Vīras would have given rise to Kalgī-Turā sects? In order to find answers to these questions, we need to closely examine memorial stones to the Vīras (Vīragāḷa) and also the shrines dedicated to the Yakṣas. We must also investigate if there is any similarity in the worship regime for these two.

The Comprehensive Nature of Caitya Worship:

In this connection, it is going to be highly beneficial for us to investigate Caitya worship in ancient India. During ancient times, anything worth worshipping used to be called Caitya. Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal opines that etymologically, the original meaning of the word 'Caitya' is linked to Citā, the funeral pyre (*citāyāṃ bhavaḥ caityaḥ*)¹⁸¹ and I believe he is totally right.¹⁸² The tradition of planting a tree as a memorial for a person on the third day of his death and subsequent cremation is still in vogue. The tree is planted after the ashes have been collected. It is also customary to erect a 'Gaḍgā'(stūpa) made out of stone and soil at the place where a dead person's body or body parts are buried. Such memorial trees or erected monuments were called Caitya for the right reason. These memorial trees and stupas were worshipped with great devotion. These trees had reached divine status and it was considered a great sin to pluck their leaves. Mentions of such trees frequently occur in purāṇic and historical writing. For instance, the Bhāgavatam has mentioned that after breaking the rope tied around him, the stone mortar and the two Arjuna trees, Kṛṣṇa brought down the two trees as well. These two trees were Caitya trees and two Yakṣas, Nalakūbara and Maṇigrīva, used to live inside them (10.9. 22-23). It is customary to plant Vāṭa¹⁸³ and Pipal trees¹⁸⁴ as me-

181. Translator's Note: Skt. चितायां भवः चैत्यः॥

182. *Prācīna Bhāratiya Lokadharmā, op. cit.* p.141.

183. Translator's Note: *Ficus benghalensis*.

184. Translator's Note: *Ficus religiosa*

morial trees in the cremation grounds. 'To plant Vaṭa and Pipal trees' was a phrase used to infer cremation at the time of the *Līlācaritra*.¹⁸⁵ As a matter of fact, both of these trees are thought to be Yakṣas themselves. It is also said that Yakṣas often occupy such tress, and as a result, they are worshipped by the populace.

A Jain Āgama work called 'Sthānāṅga' mentions Caitya-trees several times. It calls the Vaṭa tree a 'Yakṣa-Caitya.' The places where Yakṣas reside are called 'Yakṣa-Caitya in Sanskrit and 'Jakkhaceiya' and 'yakkhacetiya' in prakṛt. The history of the ideas behind Caityas is a topic too detailed and elaborate to include in this discussion. I do not feel that it is appropriate to expand this discussion any further in here. For us, the important thing to remember is the fact that the memorials to the dead and places occupied by the Yakṣas carried the same name and their external appearance was also the same. As a matter of fact, the worship procedure for the two was the same. The Jatrās which were celebrated annually and are still celebrated in villages and towns all over Maharashtra, in the name of Yakṣas and Grāmadevatās were the same as those celebrated in memory of those who passed away and were later deified. Just as there was a cohesiveness between the type of memorial, the name of the memorial and the celebrations at the memorial, similarly, there was oneness between the memorial to a Yakṣa and a memorial to a human being. In fact, there is ample evidence to say that there was a common belief among people that many humans turned into Yakṣas upon their death. Many Yakṣas also advised their devotees that a temple for them should be built on human bones.¹⁸⁶ This detail about memorials to Yakṣas is same as the memorials to Vīras. With this background, one can easily surmise that the Kalgī-Turā Śāhīrs, the original worshippers of Yakṣas, and who took part in poetry competitions in Yakṣa-Yātrās, would naturally be willing to take part with equal enthusiasm in the annual memorial celebrations for the Vīras who had attained divine status. In his well-known work, 'Epic Mythology', Hopkins has stated that, 'Guhyaka's world belongs to those who died with valour at the (enemy's) sword.'¹⁸⁷ Guhyaka is yet another word for the Yakṣas. Those who protect Yakṣa's wealth, are called

185. The *Līlācaritra* is thought to be the first book in Marathi. It is a biography of Cakradhar Svāmī, the guru of the Mahānubhāva sect. It was written in the late 13th century by his disciple Mhāimbhaṭ.

186. *Jaināgama Sahityamem Bhāratiya Samāj*, op.cit. p.441.

187. *Epic Mythology*: E.W. Hopkins. Vārāṇasī, 1968, p. 148.

Guhyakas.¹⁸⁸ This statement by Hopkins is supported by a dictum from the Mahābhārata¹⁸⁹ which states that those who die as a result of being hit by a weapon, become Guhyakas. This makes it clear that those who die with valour obtain Yakṣa-loka. This relationship between Yakṣas and people who have died as result of valour supports our argument succinctly. Maybe the Yakṣas have also been called Vīras because of the belief that the Vīras become Yakṣas after they die.

From Fifty-two Vīras to Śiva and Śaktī:

After all of this discussion, an obvious question would come to the reader's mind. That is, if the Kalgī-Turrā performers are basically the devotees of the five or fifty-two Vīras, why do they sing songs in praise of Śiva and Śaktī? This question, to me, looks fundamentally into the very heart of the history of Indian devotional theism and its major transition. Once upon a time, the worship of Yakṣas was prevalent in every nook and corner of India and dominated the religious regime of the populace. Slowly and steadily, Yakṣa worship was replaced by devotion to Hari and Hara, and to Buddha and Jina. The history of this transition is most interesting and instructive. Added to this, the very nature of Śaivism and Śaktism is closer to the mind of the common man. Śiva is the one whose abode is the cremation ground, who wears animal skins, who smears the ashes from the cremation ground to his forehead, who holds a human skull in his hand and happily lives with his retinue of ghosts and goblins. With this background, there is no need for me to inform people that it would be very natural for that Rudra-Śiva to accommodate Yakṣas and their associated godlings into his family. In purāṇic literature, there are several stories which describe Śiva's victory over Yakṣas and the inclusion of the devotional worship of Yakṣas into Śiva's worship regime. One of these tales, described below, appears in the Matsyapurāṇa (Adhyāya 180):

In the distant past, there was a famous Yakṣa called Pūrṇabhadra. His son Harikeśa was valorous and gentle and was devoted to worshipping Śiva. Right from his childhood, he was so engrossed in this single-minded devotion that his whole life centred around it. His father however was not at

188. Nidhiṃ rakṣanti ye yakṣāḥ tesyuhu guhyakasaṃjnakaḥ || (Trikāṇḍacintāmaṇī).

189. śastreṇa nidhanam prāptā gatāste guhyakānprati (M.Bh. Strīparva, 26.14)

all happy with this. He felt that having been born in a Yakṣa family, his son should behave like a Yakṣa and not spend his whole life in worshipping Śiva like a mere human being. He believed that this was an insult to the Yakṣa race. His son did not display the natural ferocity and ruthlessness typical of the Yakṣas and he had also given up eating raw meat. He was against killing any life. Pūrṇabhadra angrily said to his son, 'If you are my real son, you should give up all of this nonsense. Otherwise, I will believe that you are born of a mere human'. His father's rude and undignified outburst failed to sway Harikeśa from his devotional path. Pūrṇabhadra expelled him from his home. Thereupon, Harikeśa moved to Vārāṇasī and performed a long and extremely severe penance for obtaining Śiva's blessings. His body became a mere skeleton. Pleased with his devotion, Śiva appeared before him with Pārvatī. He made him the guardian of Vārāṇasī and also the chief of his entourage.

The above story is a clear testimony to the superiority of the devotion to Śiva as compared to the devotion to the Yakṣas. Pūrṇabhadra, the Yakṣa in this story, has often been mentioned in ancient Indian literature as an important Yakṣa. His worship was extremely popular amongst the populace. Harikeśa must also have been an important and major Yakṣa in Pūrṇabhadra Yakṣa's devotional territory. It is important to know that the populace of Vārāṇasī, instead of denying Harikeśa's worship altogether, made him an important person in the cult of Śaivism and placed him as a Kṣetrapāla, a protector of Vārāṇasī. It is no wonder, that because of this, the devotees of Harikeśa became devotees of a far more important god in the Hindu pantheon, Śiva. This story is a telling example of how, the populace of Vārāṇasī, steeped in the worship of the Yakṣas, were converted to the worship of Śiva.¹⁹⁰

Harikeśa Yakṣa, described in great detail in the above Matsyapurāṇa story, is to this day worshipped in the environs of Vārāṇasī under the name Harsū Baram, which obviously stands for 'Harikeśa Brahma'. We already know that Brahma is an alternative name for a Yakṣa. The presence of Harikeśa at Vārāṇasī is not an exception. He is the representative of hundreds of godlings in the Yakṣa class spread all over India under the generic name of Kṣetrapālas. The above story is thus not a mere myth but a historical fact. Even if one confines oneself to Maharashtra and tours the villages, it

190. *Purāṇam*, (Vārāṇasī, six monthly), 1.2 February 1960, pp. 198-201.

would be difficult to find a village where a godling of the Yakṣa class is not worshipped as a Bhairava. This Bhairavization of Yakṣas convincingly shows the blanket and comprehensive influence of the worship of Śiva over that of the Yakṣas. Here then is the answer as to why the Kalgī-Turā Śāhirs, who originally were worshippers of the Grāmadevatās of the Yakṣa class, became worshippers of Śiva and Śakti.

This history that we have unravelled during our quest to find the origin of Kalgī-Turā sect, is a fine example of the open-minded, unbiased, lenient and harmonious nature of Indians. It shows how leniently and softly the subscribers of the higher Brāhminic Hinduism treated those of folk religion in order to accommodate the latter's devotional regime. Without showing any disrespect for their traditions, they brought them within pan-Hinduism. In this regard, another bit of information provided by the Matsyapurāṇa is also important. It informs us that just like Harikeśa, many other Yakṣas also became Śivagaṇas, part of Śiva's entourage. Not only this, but the great Kubera, leader of all the Yakṣas, offered all of his good deeds to Śiva and by virtue of that, stayed in Śiva's kingdom. This gave him Gaṇeśa-like status. It is worth reiterating that Kubera is the king of the Yakṣas, and according to Purāṇic thought, he is a devotee of Śiva. Not only this, but the Purāṇa tells us that:

*kuberastu mahākāyastathā sarvārpitakriyaḥ ||
kṣetrasamvasanādev gaṇestvamavāpa h ||||*

(Lit: The gigantic Kubera offered all his creation to Śiva and became Gaṇeśa after living in Śiva Territory)

Keeping the Original Faith Intact:

Our discussion so far has told us that, the Kalgī-Turā performers were originally worshippers of Yakṣas. It is generally believed that those who die valorously on battlefield (Vīras) become Yakṣas after death. Because of this belief in the mind of the populace, the Kalgī-Turā performers started worshipping Vīras as well. They started celebrating Yātrās both for the Yakṣas and Vīras. The terms Kalgī and Turā are linked to the memorials to the Vīras. Similarly, the word Vīra means a Yakṣa and it has come about because of interrela-

tionship between the two. They are both objects of the devotee's devotion. Before the names Kalgī and Turā were coined, this type of poetry was called, 'brahmodya'. After the worship of Śiva came into dominance, Kalgī and Turā performers became the worshippers of Śiva-Śaktī. All of this means that the Yakṣas, the Vīras who had reached Yakṣa status and Śiva-Śaktī are the three devotional focuses of Kalgī and Turā performers. It is however important to note that even when they accepted the devotion to Śiva-Śaktī, they did not sever their devotional ties to the Yakṣas and Vīras. This behaviour resonates well with their image among the populace.



Depiction of a Pahāṭagāṇa (Singer)

Chapter Six

Kalyāṇa and Pahāṭagāṇa

A folksinger used to be called ‘Gāṇa’ in Maharashtra. Gāṇa means someone who sings. An alternative name, a ‘Gāyaka’ is also used. Similarly, a person who dances was called Nācaṇa. In one of his Abhaṅgas, Kāṇho Pāṭhaka has explained the terms precisely:

gāye to gāṇu || nāce to nācaṇu || ¹⁹¹

(Lit. one who sings is a Gāṇu, one who dances is a Nācaṇu)

Sant Nāmdeva has also used the term Gāṇa as described below:

tari mī gāṇa navhe gāṇīva karī ||
jeṇe tumateṃ harī santoṣa upaje || ¹⁹²

Marathi Śāhirs have used a similar alternative form of the term Gāṇa, namely, ‘Gāvana.’ Both of these terms mean the same thing. Although the word Gāvana literally means any kind of singer, it was mainly used to denote a folk-singer. Janī Janārdana,¹⁹³ in the *ovī* described below from his work ‘Janakīsvayamvara, has used Gāṇa in its original meaning.¹⁹⁴

padopadīm thirāvaṇeṃ || nṛtyāṅganānceṃ pekhaṇeṃ ||
*vādyadharancheṃ vāhāṇeṃ*¹⁹⁵ *|| susvara gāṇeṃ gāṇānceṃ ||* 34.62

191. *Bhāratiya Itihās Saṃśodhan Maṇḍala*, Annual Itivṛtta, Śaka 1834/2 p. 254.

192. *śrīnāmdevamahārāja yāncyā abhaṅgāncī gāthā*: Ed. T.H Avate, Pune, Śake 1830. Abhaṅga No. 219, p.66.

193. Translator’s Note: Janī Janārdana was a 16th century Marathi Saint-Poet who wrote many books and also composed Marathi and Hindi Bhakti songs.

194. *Janī Janardanakṛta Janakīsaivara*: Ed. D.R. Bhaṭ, Dhule, 1964, p. 269.

195. Translator’s note: Vāhāṇeṃ means playing an instrument.

(Lit: The great Rāvaṇa used to enjoy dancing of the female dancers, music-playing by the players of various instruments and melodious singing by singers all the time.)

The Ancient Meanings of Gāyana-Nartana:

Both of the words Gāṇa and Nācaṇa come from the original Sanskrit words Gāyana and Nartana respectively.¹⁹⁶ These days we use both of these Sanskrit words rather loosely as common nouns, meaning to 'sing and to dance'. I had a discussion with Dr. P.L.Vaidya about the real meaning of these two words. He told me that in the ancient hand-written manuscripts of Sanskrit works, both of these words have been used as nouns, i.e. Gāyana is someone who sings and Nartana is someone who dances. Later on, however, the clerks who reproduced the original manuscripts, changed the words from Gāyana to Gayak and Nartana to Nartaka. This change seems to be quite marked in the later versions of manuscripts. Having looked at several manuscripts (pothis), I have now formed an opinion that merely by looking at the way these two words have been used, it would be possible to decide the age of any particular hand-written manuscript.

This tells us that the ancient meaning of Gāyana-Nartana that was lost in the later Sanskrit literature was preserved by Marathi language.

Various Classes of Gāṇas:

Janī Janārdana has, in his verse quoted above, mentioned several types of folk-singers. Included among them are Ṭhākur, Kalyāṇa, Ṭīpagāṇa, Pāṇagāṇa, Bhāṭa, Nāgārī, Mācegāṇa, Ḍourī, Ḍākulate, Haḷade, Dhavaḷagāṇa, Pahāṭagāṇa and others. Out of these, we know the Bhāṭas and others in their class such as the Ṭhākurs, Kalyāṇa and Nāgārī. All of these are known as 'Bandijana'. We also know the Ḍourī and Ḍākulate. However, no information is available to us about Pāṇagāṇa, Mācegāṇa, Dhavaḷagāṇa and Pahāṭagāṇa. Only because of Janī Janārdana, we know for the first time that there was a separate class of folk singers called 'Dhavaḷagāṇa' who sang Dhavaḷagīts.¹⁹⁷ Also, because of

196. The Rāmāyaṇa 1.18.19, The Mahābhārata 12.63.4.

197. Translator's Note: It is difficult to know what Dhavaḷa (White?) songs were. Dr. Dhare has not commented upon their meaning either.

the mention by Janī Janārdana, we only know the names of some folk singers. However, we do not at all know who they were, what kind of attire they wore, what kind of songs they sang and on what occasions did they sing those songs, etc. At this juncture, we have no evidence or means whatsoever to answer any of the above questions. The institutions which at one stage performed the admirable function of entertaining and at the same time imparting spiritual knowledge through their singing to the Marathi populace have mostly vanished. There are some which exist in name only and survive a miserable existence.

The Quest for unknown Folk Literature:

It is futile to look for the means to search for institutions which are either extinct or on the brink of extinction. However, I strongly feel that the literature of ancient Marathi Saint-Poets would be most useful for such an investigation. In order to imprint the importance of spirituality on the minds of the populace, the Saint-Poets made ample use of folk poetry and songs. These would also be valuable material for the study of folk culture in general. The Saint-Poets made enormous efforts to bring out the divine truth within the reach of the common man. To this end, they used the medium of the music of folk singers such as the Gondhaḷī, Bharāḍī, Ḍourī, Vaghyā-Muraḷī, Pāṅgūḷa, Bālasantoṣa, Vāsudeva, Kaiko and others. I have now formed a firm opinion that by looking for hitherto unknown literature of the Saint-Poets and by thoroughly studying their available literature, it would be possible to fathom the nature of unknown folk singers. To illustrate my point, I give two examples of successful efforts in this area.

The Kalyāṇakīrtī of Narendra:

The great poet of the Mahānubhāva sect, Mahākavī Narendra, has written an epic called 'Rukmiṇīsvayamvara'. In this work, he has portrayed many minor but new characters. Among these, a Bhāṭa by name of Kalyāṇakīrtī and his companion, Kinnara, are two characters who have been the subject of a lot of discussion among scholars.¹⁹⁸ The original verse from the Mahābhārata,

198. *Narendrakavikṛta Rukmiṇīsvayamvara*: Ed. Dr. V. B. Kolate. Malkapur, 1949, Introduction, pp. 19-27; Maharashtra Sahitya Patrika Issue No. 117, pp.23-25, also, Issue No. 141, pp.18-25.

which has been instrumental in producing these two characters is as follows:

*sopaśrutya mukundasya rūpavīryaguṇaśriyaḥ ||
grhāgatairgīyamānāstaṃ mene sadṛśaṃ patiṃ || ||*

(MBH: 10.52.23)

All that this śloka tells us is that (the king) Bhīmaka heard about Kṛṣṇa's charming looks and his virtues from those who were visiting him. The composers and those who wrote the detailed commentary on the Mahābhārata have given no detail whatsoever as to who these visitors to Bhīmaka's court were. This is exactly why the poets who created new work on the basis of the story of Rukmiṇī's 'Svayamvara'¹⁹⁹ were able to use their imagination freely to describe the event. Out of the two actors that Narendra has imagined at this juncture, Kinnara is one. The well-known researcher in Marathi literature, Mr. N.B. Joshi from Bijapur, has successfully unravelled the origin of the word Kinnara.²⁰⁰ Therefore the only remaining person is the Bhāṭa by name of Kalyāṇakīrti. Narendra has described his arrival as follows:

*aiseṃ rāo pradhāneṃsīṃ bole || taṃva avasvāriyeṃ juhāṛileṃ ||
hāta joḍunī vinavileṃ || vaidarbheśvarāteṃ || 127 ||
devā māze hote bāhirī || tehūṃ niśāṇa āikaleṃ durī ||
aiseṃ bolijātāe nagarābhītārī || jeṃ nāgārī yeku yetāye || 128 ||
taṃva bhūmaku mhaṇatu āheṃ || he āmhī ādhiṃci aikileṃ āhe ||
hā kāsīśvarācā bhaṭu bhetōṃ yetāye || kalyāṇakīrti || 129 ||
ravo mhaṇe, 'āmhāṃ āti kīrticā pāngu ||
hā mahādānī māgadhu cāngu ||
yāteṃ āṇāvayā karā vegu || neyā soḷāseṃ coudantā' || 130 ||
rāyādhākuṭā narapurandharu || sarādīsangītasuddhākaru ||
he doghai sāume dhāḍile ādaru || karuniyāṃ || 131 ||
cakravartī māneṃ bahuteṃ || bheṭōṃ āṇila bhāṭāteṃ ||
tayā kīrtimaḷayāñilāteṃ || rāyānceyā || 132 ||*

199. Translator's Note: In the past, women of high class, mostly King's daughters, were able to choose their own husbands in a ceremony called, 'Svayamvara' (Lit. choosing a husband on her own). The king would organize a grand gala where prospective suitors would be invited. The Bhāṭas would then sing praises of the prospective suitors. The daughter of the king would then go around and examine every suitor and choose the one she favoured by putting a garland on him.

200. *Maharashtra Sahitya Patrika*, Issue 149, pp. 18-25.

*kalyāṇakīrti yetāye asthānīṃ || teṇeṃ bhīmaku dekhilā simhāsanīṃ ||
 jaisā nakṣetramāṇī gaganīṃ || pūrṇacandra || 133 ||
 bandījanu dekhilā bhīmakeṃ || sāumām bolāvilā javaḷike ||
 maga pavaḷeyāceṃ simhāsana kavatikēṃ ||
 ghataleṃ baisāvayā || 134 ||*

Over here, Narendra has used three alternative words for a *Bhāṭa*, namely, *Nāgārī*, *Māgadha*, and *Bandījana*. He has named the *Bhāṭa* 'Kalyāṇakīrti'. Employed by kings, *Bhāṭas* used to visit various other kings and sing praises of their employer. This explains Narendra's statement that 'the *Bhāṭa* from Kāśīśvara is coming to visit.

The Other Names for Kalyāṇakīrti:

There should now be no doubt whatsoever that *Kalyāṇakīrti* was a professional *Bhāṭa*. In that role, it would have been but natural for him to visit King *Bhīmaka* and sing the praises of suitable young princes, especially his patron *Kṛṣṇa*, for the hand of Princess *Rukmiṇī*. The *Mahānubhāva* poetess *Mahadambā* has also, in one of her *Dhavalīyas*, imagined the arrival of a *Bhāṭa* at this juncture. She says:

*dvārakehūnī kauṇḍaṇyā āle nāgārī ||
 tinhīṃ sarvemśvaru vākhāṇile nānā parī ||*

(p.3)

Here, she has used the word *nāgārī* to describe a *Bhāṭa*. In this connection, another poet *Samarāja* of the same period, says:

*stavārtha bandījana nitya yetī ||
 tehūṃ prasaṅgeṃ vara varṇijetī || ||*

(*Rukmiṇīśvayamvara*, 2.59)

The Saint-Poets, *Eknātha* and *Moropanta*, in describing this episode, have made use of a *Brahmin* devoted to *Kṛṣṇa* as an alternative to a *Bhāṭa*. On the other hand, *Vitthal* has called this person a *Naṭaśreṣṭha* (the greatest actor).²⁰¹

One can see that various poets have described *Bhāṭa*-the poetic messenger, in their own ways according to their preference and imagination. How-

201. Translator's Note: Dr. Dhare gives no detail of who this *Vitthal* is.

ever, it is clear that the character of a Bhāṭa is ideally suited here.

The question now remains about the meaning of the name Kalyāṇa-kirtī for the Bhāṭa. After Narendra, several poets have used this name. For instance:

māgā vedaghokā śrāpu ghaḍalā || to kīnaru vanīm jālā ||
kalyāṇakīrtina dekhilā || to ālā kaunḍanyapurā || ||

(Paṇḍita Damodarākṛta, Padmapurāṇa, 2269)²⁰²

taṇva bolilā bhīmacakravartī || mhaṇe heṃ āmhī ākaleṃ ase śrutīm ||
jo bhāṭu yetāye kalyāṇakīrti || bheṭī āmacīye || ||

(Santoṣamunī Kṛṣṇadāsakṛta, Rukmiṇīsvayamvara, 2.98)

raja mhaṇe śruta ase nṛpa kāśīyecā ||
kalyāṇakīrti varamāgadha hā tayācā || ||

(Kṛṣṇamunī Ḍimbhakṛta, Rukmiṇīsvayamvara, 1.61).

Some other Mahānubhāva poets such as Nṛsiṃha and Lakṣadhīra²⁰³ have named the Bhāṭa, Kalyāṇakīrtī as well. Narendra was the Guru of the Mahānubhāva poets. Hence, it is logical that other Mahānubhāva poets would follow him in this regard. One must however note that Mahānubhāva literature was not available for others outside that sect. Therefore, I find it quite surprising that the non-Mahānubhāva poets have also named the Bhāṭa character in this episode 'Kalyāṇakīrtī' or similar. Thus, Eknātha has named him, 'Kīrtināmā Brāhmaṇa (1.18), whereas Vitthal calls him 'Kīrtināmā Naṭaśreṣṭha'(1.11). Many other non- Mahānubhāva poets address him as just 'Kīrtī'. Kṛṣṇa-Yājñavalkī, a non- Mahānubhāva poet calls him 'Kalyāṇakīrti' (*Kathākalpatarū* 4.8, pp.81-83). There is some similarity between the two words, Kalyāṇakīrti and Kīrtī. How it is then that both the Mahānubhāva poets and non-Mahānubhāva poets chose to select this name for the Bhāṭa? I feel that there must be a common thread between the Mahānubhāva poets and their non-Mahānubhāva counterparts in terms of the name of the Bhāṭa. In other words, such a person may actually have existed.

202. *Narendrakavikṛta Rukmiṇīsvayamvara*: Ed. Dr. V. B. Kolate. *op cit.*, Introduction, p. 24.

203. Dr. Dhare's Note: I have examined in detail the hand-written manuscript of Lakṣadhīra's *Rukmiṇīsvayamvara* in the 'pothīśālā' of the Bhārata Itihāsa Samśodhaka Maṇḍala (No.s 21, 14). However, the MS had problems with the numbering of the Ovis and hence I have not used it as a reference. Another Mahānubhāva poet Cakrapāṇi Yeḷambakar has, in his Hindi work 'Rukmiṇīsvayamvara Tīssā', mentioned a servant called 'Kalyāṇa'.

Kīrti Varṇitī Kalyāṇa:

When one thinks of the name Kalyāṇakīrtī, the first thing that comes to mind is that because he is a Bhāṭa, he must be closely connected with the music that is used to sing praises for someone. Narendra has called him 'Rāyāncā Kīrtimaḷayāniḷa' (the sweet and fragrant breeze from the Malaya Mountain which carries the fame of the kings). He has also suggested that because Bhīmaka was keen on hearing his praises (*kīrticā pāngu*), he was very happy about Kalyāṇakīrtī's visit. Santoṣamunī Kṛṣṇadāsa has used the adjective 'kīrtipātra' for Kalyāṇakīrtī (2.98). In this context, kīrtipātra means the singer who sings songs of praise. This means that in the name Kalyāṇakīrtī, the second half of the name, 'Kīrti' is connected with Bhāṭa's profession as a singer of praise. We are now left with only the first part of the name, 'Kalyāṇa'. At this stage, I suggest that 'Kalyāṇa' is a class of Bhāṭas who sing praises of the host. I shall furnish proof of this assertion from now on.

In the Eknātha poet-quintet (pañcāyatana), Janī Janārdana is well-known. In his epic poem, 'Jānakī Svayamvara', one finds several mentions of the Bhāṭa 'Kalyāṇa' along with Bhāṭas of other classes. I list them below:

*yeka tyāga deti nṛtyapātrām || bhāṭām nāgariyām kīrtipātrām ||
yeka vidyāvantām ṭhākuraṁ || yeka supātrām dvijavṛndām || 9.39 ||*

*tāna māna garjatī gāṇa || ṭīpa ṭākitī tipagāṇa ||
vamśāvalī varakalyāṇa || padhatī cāraṇa brīdāvalī || 14.10 ||*

*kalāpātreṁ nānā āna || pahātagāṇa pānagāṇa ||
padhatī sukīrti kalyāṇa ||
rāmanāmāviṇa āna paiṁ vacana na bolatī || 18.54 ||*

*breedem paḍhatī nāgārī || kalyāṇa kīrti nānā parī ||
raghuvamśāvalī apārī || vara uttarī ṭhākura || 18.83 ||*

*ānandadeśika ṭhākura || māgadha cāraṇa vidyadhara ||
kalyāṇa bhāṭa nāgāra || āna baikāra bhṛngī || 21.22 ||*

*bhṛngī ṭhākura kalyāṇa || rāvaṇahastī pahātagāṇa ||
gopaḷa cauṇḍake nācaṇa || pānagāṇa divaṭṭiye || 27.52 ||*

*kīrtikāra bandījana || thākuravara pānagāṇa ||
dhavaḷa mhaṇatī pāthakajāṇa || vedoccāraṇa dvijavara || 29.60 ||*

*dhavaḷagāṇa dhavaḷa gātī || kīrti kalyāṇa padhatī ||
thākura pavāḍe varṇitī || uccāritī vamsāvaḷī || 29.143 ||*

*thākura kalyāṇa nāgārī || naṭa naṭave veṣadhārī ||
nṛtyaka nācaṇī apārī || vastrīṇ aḷaṇkārīṇ toṣavilī || 30.64 ||*

*jayajayakārīṇ bhaktajana || svasāmarthyem karitī stavana ||
kīrti varṇitī kalyāṇa || brideṇ paṭhaṇa thākura || 32.47 ||*

*vīrarasābda thākurānce || kīrtivanta kalyāṇāncell
vāṇthivece tyā vāṇthice || paiṇ brīdāce brīdāvaḷī || 34.28 ||*

As one can see, Janī Janārdana has mentioned Kalyāṇas along with Bhāṭa, Cāraṇa, Nāgārī, Bandijana and Thākura. He calls the Kalyāṇas Kīrtipātra and Kīrtikāra. He says that their words spell fame (Kīrtivanta). Finally, he has unequivocally said that singing praises is the function of Kalyāṇas. All of this goes to prove that the name Kalyāṇakīrti used by Narendra and later poets to describe a Bhāṭa, must have been coined from the Kalyāṇas whose profession was to sing Kīrti (praise) songs for their patrons.

The 'Chhando 'Nuśāsana' of Hemacandra gives several examples of 'Dhavalagītas'. One of these is called, 'Kīrtidhavaḷa'. It would be interesting to know if there was any relationship between Kīrtidhavaḷa songs and the 'Kīrtigāṇa' repertoire of the Kalyāṇas. Future researchers need to pursue this possible connection. Until then, what we have so far discovered is that, Kalyāṇakīrti means the Kalyāṇa who sings 'kīrti' songs for the patrons.

Pahāṭagāṇa:

Some evidence is becoming available to suggest that just like the Kalyāṇas, another group of folk singers called 'Pahāṭagāṇas' once existed in Maharashtra. I have been able to get hold of two songs in the Pahāṭagāṇa style. I would like researchers to study them and that is why I gave this rather long background to folk singers. My sincere wish is that scholars should ardently pursue this long-neglected field of research.

Janī Janārdana, in his 'Jānakīśaimvara' has mentioned the Pahāṭagāṇas twice as quoted below:

*kālāpātreṃ nānā āna || pahāṭagāṇa pānagāṇa ||
padhatī sukīrti kalyāṇa ||
rāmanāmāvēṇa āna paiṇ vacana na bolati || 18.54 ||
vamśāvalī pahāṭagāṇa || brīdeṃ padhati bandijana ||
ṭhākura karitī kīrtivarṇana || rāmakṛṣṇa vāsudeva || 27.11 ||*

Janī Janārdana was an influential poet and made sure that all of the folk singers of the time wrote and presented their poetry only in praise of Lord Rāma and no one else. Because of this, it is difficult to learn anything about the original slant and perspective of these folk singers.

However, a mention of the Pahāṭagāṇas by the 15th century Jain Marathi writer Brahmaguṇadās is quite telling.²⁰⁴ The episode is from the work, 'Śreṇīkacaritra'. Śreṇīka is a Buddhist king. He marries a Jain princess called Celanā. The princess had actually vowed not to marry outside Jainism. King Śreṇīka however masquerades to belong to Jainism and marries her. When the newly married Celanā arrives at her quarters in the palace, the women and attendants there pretend to be Jains as well. However, Celanā's close friend and personal attendant is there as well. She is clever and sees the deceit played by the king. She says to her:

*maga sakhi mhaṇe celane || yeṃ taṇva navhatī jaineṃ ||
he sikavilyā vacaneṃ || bolati dekhā || ||*

*jaina dharmācā bhedu neṇati || lataki baḍabaḍa kariti ||
pahāṭagāṇācyā pari gheti || nāṃva dekhā || ||*

(Śreṇīka Caritra, 3.190-191)

There is an implied criticism here of the Pahāṭagāṇas. The verses say that without understanding the real difference between things, the Pahāṭagāṇas resort to mere chatter for the sake of their profession. They know little about Jainism.

Before the time of Brahmaguṇadāsa, a Mahānubhāva work in prose, 'Nāmāce Dahā Ṭhāya' mentions Pahāṭagāṇas.²⁰⁵ In discussing the greatness

204. *Brahmaguṇadāsa-Vīracita Śreṇīkacaritra*: Ed. Dr. Subhāsacandra Akkoḷe. Solapur, 1964, p.124.

205. *Śrī Cakradharokta Sūtrapāṭha (Nityadinī Līḷesaha)*: Ed. H.N. Nene, Nagpur. p. 27.

of chanting (Guru's or God's name), this work says in the very beginning:

*'pahāṭagāṇa, bhāṭa, dhādiva nāma ucārīti: and,
deyāve: maga aiseṃ upaje: taisēṃ: īśvara brahmavidyā nīrūpīti:
tevhaḷi ādhī nāma sāṅgheti'*

In 'Ṣaṭdarśanavivarāṇa, a work of the later Mahānubhāvas, the names of most folk artists such as Gondhaḷī, Bhutye, Bharāḍī, Bahurūpī and Vāsudev have been mentioned. The list also includes the Pahāṭagāṇa.²⁰⁶

From their name, it would appear that the Pahāṭagāṇas used to roam around the villages before dawn while singing their songs. In Maharashtra, among the folk singers, the Pāngūḷa would visit villages at sunrise whereas the Vāsudevas would visit immediately after sunrise. The Pahāṭagāṇas must therefore have visited before the Pāngūḷa and Vāsudevas. We do not know what kind of attire they wore. However, the type of songs they sang can be surmised from the two songs I produce below.

Of these two songs, the first one is from the Samartha-Vagdevatā-Mandir (Bāḍ No. 618) and it has been written by Samartha Rām-dās. The second song has been written by a saint-poet by the name of Narahari Mālo. I found it in a dilapidated state in my collection which was affected by the Pune floods. The title of this work is '॥ Pahāṭagāṇa ॥'. Both of these works are 'Bhāruḍas'.²⁰⁷ Just as the Bhāruḍa 'Vāghyā' informs us about Vāghyā's style of songs, similarly, the above songs are in the style of early morning songs of the Pahāṭagāṇas. Both of these songs start with the Dhrupad,²⁰⁸ *'Māī yeka bhikṣā sambhave Parvatī'*. Both of these songs contain spiritual riddles. Should these be considered the common denominator of Pahāṭagāṇa songs? It is difficult to answer this question until more of these songs become available.

206. *Matiratnākara* and *Darśanaprakāśa*: Publisher H. N. Nene, Nagpur. p.27.

207. Translator's Note: Bhāruḍa is a genre of folk song in the Marathi language. Through its simple language, it teaches common sense and spiritual concepts.

208. Translator's Note: Dhrupada in any song consists of the first one or two lines which form the recurring phrase of that song.

*Pāhāṭagāṇa No. 1*²⁰⁹

*prathama namana yekadantā || śivaśaktisutā ||
brahmavidyecā tūṃ dātā gā || tuzem caranīm māthā || 1 ||*

māi yeka bhikṣā sambahve pārabati || dhrupada ||

*caranī māthā brahmasute vo || śārade vedamāte ||
śabdālaya śabdasarito vo || māzem namana tūtem || 2 ||*

*namana tūtem sadgururāyā gā || tuvām nirasili māyā ||
tuzya padarajem ḍavarīna kāyā gā || lagena tuzyā pāyām || 3 ||*

*pāyām santāncyā lagena || je kām svānandaghana ||
tyāncī kṛpā hotā pūrṇa gā || tuṭe bhavabandhana || 4 ||*

*bandhana toḍile rāmem || bhaktajanapūrṇakāmem ||
yāce rūpa hṛdayī dharilem premem gā ||
jīvā japa karī nemem || 5 ||*

*nāma rūpa jayā nāhī gā || yeka āhe aiseṃhī ||
je pāhatām na dise netrīṃhi gā || karṇem sāvadha pāhīm || 6 ||*

*pāhātām sanmukhaci dekhilem || hātem na vace dharilem ||
ugemci pāhātām pātalem || ādaḷalem navala bhaḷem gā || 7 ||*

*kāmhīm nāhīm tem bolilem ||
temci ṭhakavale yeṇem bolem gā || ādhomukha jālem || 8 ||*

*adhomuka vṛkṣa dekhilā || ati vistāralā ||
phaḷātīla pakṣī bhukelā || tṛptīsi mūḷa gelā || 9 ||*

*mūḷīm pāhātām dise jīvana || tayā nāhīm dravaṇa ||
dravaṇem vāṃconiyā jāṇa gā || pāṇī kheḷenā panopāna || 10 ||*

209. Translator's Note: In spite of a major effort by this translator and other experts in the Marathi language, it has been very difficult to translate the verses of this song. I have however included here for the sake of completeness. I strongly believe that Marathi scholars need to seriously investigate Pahāṭagāṇa and similar poetry of this genre.

*pāñī saraḷe ase athāṃva || māji buḍāle sarva ||
āñjoḷineṃ jātaṃ gheva gā || hātā na cadhe pāhā ho || 11 ||*

*pāhili dṛṣṭivīṇa pahāṭa || teja āparūpī dāṭa ||
udo astu hoyā savitā || tarhūṃ na moḍe satyā || 12 ||*

*tyāce candrevīṇa cāndineṃ || jive melyām dekhileṃ ||
rātri disa āse sancaleṃ || pāhoṃ na śakati ḍoḷe || 13 ||*

*ḍoḷā āvaghāci pahi || tyāsi āṅgaci nāhī ||
āṅga nāhī te kāye gā || yekāki nāhī || 14 ||*

*yekā cārā causī saralā || vyamamukhī bharalā ||
pāncatila yeke dharilā || jīvanāmāji purilā || 15 ||*

*purileṃ vāriyāṃta ṭhevaṇē || jatana karaṇeṃ ||
jayāsi na sāmpaḍela teṇeṃ || sadā bhika māgaṇeṃ || 16 ||*

*bhikārī āleṃ māgateṃ yācaka || āleṃ dātyāsanmukha ||
nenduni haritā sakaḷika || abhara keleṃ teṃ yeka || 17 ||*

*yekā āṅgī pañca bhuteṃ gā || kheḷatī paroparī ||
hātā paḍataṃ ḍākevarī gā || ghumoṃ lāge śējārīṃ || 18 ||*

*sejārī baisale dona pakṣī gā || yeki yeka vṛukṣīm ||
yeka pāhātase yekāsī || bheṭi nāhī doghānsī || 19 ||*

*dohi pakṣī yekalāci || jāgā vāṭe viśrāntī rāhe ||
rāhātāṃ yeka sthira hoyeṃ gā || dujā kramatu āhe || 20 ||*

*āhe mātā pativratā gā || tyāsi doni bāpa dekha ||
pahilā to nighālā sāvatra || ādhāntarīcā sakhā || 21 ||*

*sakhī māye bāpa noḷakhati putra || putra voḷakhe pitā ||
māyeci voḷakhi kādhitāṃ || jālī pityāci duhitā || 22 ||*

*duhitā doghi yekī bāyiko || tisi gharabharī leka ||
yekī marata vānja || dusare nāhi janmalā dekha || 23 ||*

*dekhili dīpāmāji ghare gā || ujaḷaleṃ sānjeṃ ||
vārā vāje taṃva pājaḷe || vārā rāhātā vījhe || 24 ||*

vijhe dīpa lāgatām vāyu gā || teṇeṇ andhakāra jāye ||
tiṇa ujjiyeḍa pāhātām || kāmhiṇ na dise te hoye || 25 ||

kāmhiṇ na dise ḍoḷasāṃsi gā || andha sakaḷahi pāhe ||
ḍoḷasāṇ na khupati || andhā kaṇu na sāhe || 26 ||

na sāhe aṇuhi gā || roḍā tethe dilhā yeṇka stambha ||
tayāvari ubhaviliṇ || tihi tāḷe svayambha || 27 ||

svayambha dise pari phuṭake || tyāta sijavileṇ sagaḷeṇ ||
tayāsi prāśāvayā je gele || teci teṇeṇ prāsile || 28 ||

prāsītām jiveṇci marije || te to amṛtaphaḷa ||
gāṇṭhi tvacā tayā nāhiṇ gā || avaghā svānanda nikhaḷa || 29 ||

nikhaḷa navanīta virajaleṇ || tyaceṇ jāhāleṇ tāka ||
tayāsi sevitā mānjareṇ || paḷati atyantika || 30 ||

atyanta viśaye pāhāṭa || āṭa āpaṇiyā nā dise ||
aisiye āndhārīṇ || pheriyā ghatalyā bahuvasa || 31 ||

bahuvasa hinḍatām kopaṭeṇ || jālā śramu ||
thorīliṇ dhavaḷārā yetāṇci || dātā bheṭalā rāmu || 32 ||

rāmeṇ prakṛti puruṣeṇ || yogiyēṇ kaisiṇ nirbhara kelīṇ ||
rāmi rāmadāsahi donihī || nijadhāmāsi gelīṇ || 33 ||

|| iti pāhāṭagāṇeṇ sampūrṇamastu || ²¹⁰

Pāhāṭagāṇa No. 2

jogī jogiyācā pārakhī re: manojaya to joga ||
vāsanecā kṣaya karāvā re: maga kaiṇcā bhavaroga || 1 ||
māi yeka bhikṣā sambhave pārvatī || dhrupada ||

sanga sarvātmanā nako re nako re: karisī tarī satsaṅga ||
kṛtaghnāce sanghaṭasaṇ re: hoya manā bhaṅga ||

|| māi--- || 2 ||

²¹⁰. Lit. This is the end of the Pāhāṭagāṇa.

<i>pārāvarī yeka pāra re: tethem ubhī nārī </i> <i>ichhāmātreṃ viśva vyālī: ājhunī karuṇa kumārī </i>	māi 3
<i>pīmpaḷāceṃ jhāḍa jogiyā re: tethem pakṣī dona </i> <i>yeka vyālā viśva avaghe: dujā saṅga to kona </i>	māi 4
<i>jo antarbāhya ughaḍā vāge re: jogī mhaṇāveṃ tyāsa </i> <i>varakaḍa śabda sampādanī: avagheṃhī upahāsa </i>	māi 5
<i>jo sakaḷa kaḷānteṃ prakāsī re: aisā jāñije to yeka </i> <i>yera kaḷā tyā vikaḷā re: jeṃ heṃ vartatī loka </i>	māi 6
<i>vairagya teṃ jāñije re: jo manamukta udāra </i> <i>sahaji sahaja svabhāveṃ dekhe: māthāṃ neghe bhāra </i>	māi 7
<i>kṣamā dayā heṃ puṇyadvāra re: parapīḍā teṃ pāpa </i> <i>abhilāṣāncī gāṭhī na suṭe: toṇvarī moha santāpa </i>	māi 8
<i>viṣayādhīna to bāndhalā re: āśā tṛṣṇā kāma </i> <i>paḍalā samsārabāndhavaḍī: kaisā hoya ārāma </i>	māi 9
<i>chhāyā taisī māyā avaghī re: aiseṃ jāñije teṃ jñāna </i> <i>sadvivekīṃ śudhi nasatāṃ: kām hīnḍāveṃ rāna </i>	māi 10
<i>svatantra teṃ parama sukha re: parādhīna teṃ dukkha </i> <i>sūrya jaisā svabhāveṃ cāle: sarvatrāṃ sanmukha </i>	māi 11
<i>nitya tṛpta mukta mhaṇāvā re: uralā to saṃsāra </i> <i>kathanī vadanīṃ kathilī jehī: to avaghā lokavevhāra </i>	māi 12
<i>deha sandeheṃ khatelā re: sandeha jāge āṃta </i> <i>varī veṣācī āṭāṭī: kāya karī yekānta </i>	māi 13
<i>pātra koṇateṃ jāṇa pām re: jyāsī buddhi viśāḷa </i> <i>apātra teṃ voḷakhāveṃ re: māyāmohajanjāla </i>	māi 14

*hansa hansācīṇ pāuleṇ jāṇe re: santa jāṇatī santa ॥
narahari malo voḷakhi hotāṇ: pure manācā anta ॥*

māi ॥ 15 ॥

Translation of Pahāṭagāṇa No.2

An ascetic knows asceticism. One who conquers the mind is the ascetic. One must reduce all of one's desires. If one does so, then there is no suffering in this world. ॥ 1 ॥

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. ॥ ॥ Dhrupad ॥ ॥

Never ever blindly associate with everyone. Always do so with good people. If you associate with the ungrateful, you will suffer in the end.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. ॥ 2 ॥

A woman stands on the mound around the Pipal tree. Because of her desire, she produced the entire universe. However, she is still a virgin.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. ॥ 3 ॥

Oh Ascetic! On the Pipal tree are two birds. One of them gave birth to the entire universe. Tell me who the second one is.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. ॥ 4 ॥

An ascetic is the one who is open both outside and within. What he says, he does it. Others on the other hand, are full of derision in their speech.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. ॥ 5 ॥

Know you that the one who destroys misgivings and quarrels, he is the only one. Others continue their quarrels.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. ॥ 6 ॥

Know you him as an ascetic, who is very generous from within. He looks at everyone with equal understanding and does not keep any misgivings in his heart.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 7 ||

Forgiving and compassion are the entrances to obtaining merit (for your next life). Harming others on the other hand is a sin. Until you have conquered your craving and greed, anger and temptation will remain with you.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 8 ||

That person who is engulfed in hope, thirst and physical pleasures, is bound. He will keep struggling but will never get eternal peace.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 9 ||

One should always know that one's shadow is itself an illusion. Then, if one is not travelling the path of righteousness, why wander in search of it in the forest?

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 10 ||

Remember that freedom is the ultimate happiness. Depending upon someone else is nothing but sorrow. Follow the Sun. Does he not face everyone?

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 11 ||

For the one who is always satiated, the mundane existence means nothing. Whatever one says by one's speech, or acts accordingly, it is only on the physical plane of the society.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 12 ||

The body is being destroyed by uncertainty. That uncertainty is within. Even when one tries on different clothes, one is not happy within.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 13 ||

How does one recognise a worthy person? One does so by his immense intellect. On the other hand, one knows an unworthy person by seeing that he is engulfed in the illusion and in the bother of illusion.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 14 ||

The Swan knows the steps of a Swan, the Saints know the steps of a saint. Once one knows the writing of Narahari Malo, that is all one needs to know.

Oh Mother Pārvatī! Please give me alms. || 15 ||



Depiction of a Bhāṇḍa with his drum

Chapter Seven

Bhāṇḍānce Bhaṇḍapurāṇa

Sant Jñāneśvara has said that there are often abnormalities associated with sleep, laziness and mistakes and blunders, which somehow tempt people from the very beginning to the end to do nothing about any of them. In such an inactive and dull state of mind, people find it comforting to listen to the speeches by the Bhāṇḍ.²¹¹ The Bhāṇḍ consist of a class of folk entertainers whose brief is to entertain people by deliberately speaking obscene and loathsome language. However much a virtuous person like Jñāneśvara detest such speech and finds it inauspicious, the average person often finds it interesting. In human life, sexual urge is the most pervasive and powerful impulse. In cultured society, it manifests itself in the form of amorous behaviour, whereas in uneducated and uncivilised society, it comes out in the form of obscene talk and actions. It is indeed rare to find people who are averse to speaking or listening to blatant, salacious and titillating talk about sex. In fact, most people enjoy listening to such talk. It is precisely this aspect of human behaviour that the Hindu lawmakers must have taken into account when they publicly instituted a festival such as Śimgā. The normally suppressed sexual and often pervert feelings can be freely expressed during this festival when the populace gets the social and religious licence to do so. As a result, one hears a lot of swearing in public places. Also, Tamāśa performances flourish everywhere and the Bhāṇḍ stage their unique performances – ‘Bhaṇḍapurāṇa’. It is no wonder that the Saint-Poet Eknātha has said:

*Kāṃ bhāṇḍānce tonḍi bhaṇḍapurāṇa ॥
tyāvarī ālā śimagyācā saṇa ॥*

211. The *Jñāneśvarī*, 18. 804, 806

*maga karitāṃ vāgvitambana
āvari kon tayāsī ||*

(Ekanāthi Bhāgavata, 88.2)

(Lit. Why are the Bhāṇḍas chanting their Bhāṇḍapurāṇa now? On top of that the festival of Śimgā is here as well).

The Origin of Bhāṇḍas:

The word Bhāṇḍa comes from the Sanskrit root ‘*Bhaṇḍa*’ which means ‘to make fun of someone, to talk using obscenities etc’. In Sanskrit literature, one often finds it used to describe a clown, one who talks using inauspicious language and someone who makes people laugh. The ‘Sarvadarśanasamgraha’ of Madhavācārya quotes the followers of Cārvāka, who say the following about the Bhāṇḍas:

*trayo vedasya kartāro bhaṇḍa dhūrtaniśācarāḥ ||
jarpharī turpharīyādi paṇḍitānāṃ vacaḥ smṛtam ||
aśvasyātra hi śīśnam tu patnīgrāhyaṃ prakīrtitam ||
bhaṇḍaistadvatparam caiva grāhyajātaṃ prakīrtitam ||
māvsānāṃ khādanaṃ tadvanniśācarasamīritam ||
tasmād bahuṇāṃ prāṇināmanugrahārthaṃ cārvākamata-
māśrayaṇīyamiti ramaṇīyam ||*

(Sarvadarśanasamgraha, 1.25)

(Lit. The Vedas have been created by the Bhāṇḍas, demons and cunning people. For instance, Paṇḍits have used imaginary names such as Jarpharī and Turpharī for Ṛṣis. Bhāṇḍas are known to have uttered obscenities such as a wife should insert horse’s penis into herself. Verses regarding flesh eating are demonic. Because of this, instead of following the path suggested by the Vedas, it would be better if one accepts Cārvāka’s philosophy and path).

The Mahābhārata has mentioned folk artists called ‘Prahāsaka’ who entertain people. The composer of the ‘Śabdakalpadruma’ has said that a caste by the name of Zalla has been mentioned in the Manusmṛtī (10.22). Produced by intermingling of castes (Varṇasaṅkara), the Zallas, like the Bhāṇḍas, entertain people by uttering obscenities.²¹² The abstract noun, ‘Bhāṇḍam’ is formed

212. Śabdakalpadruma, Part 2, p. 569 (Prahāsakaḥ: Iti Mahābhārataṃ || Bhāṇḍa iti Bhāṣā ||).

from the verb 'Bhaṇḍa' is used to mean clownliness. In the state of Andhra, there is an important class of entertainers who are called 'Vikaṭakavi'.²¹³ Their brief is to come on the stage now and then during 'Yakṣagāna' performances and make the audience laugh by talking obscenities.

The Bhāṇḍs from Rajasthan:

There is a distinct caste of Bhāṇḍs in Rajasthan.²¹⁴ Sociologists believe that this caste is a sub-branch of the Ḍholīs who roam the streets dancing, and singing on Ḍhol (a type of drum) beats; and asking for alms. During their performances, these Bhāṇḍs dress up and play a variety of diverse roles such as monkeys, kings and queens, Ḍakīṇs (female ghosts), businessmen, clerks, and the like. They use obscene language and thereby make the gathered audience laugh. Their prowess in this repertoire, full of obscenity, is amazing. During their performances, they would make use not only of ancient and historical characters but also present-day politicians and leaders. Often, they would expose embarrassing secrets about such public figures for the general entertainment of the populace.

One of the other functions of the Bhāṇḍs is to perform at festive occasions such as weddings and other celebrations. They would of course perform on the day of the Hoḷī (Śimgā), the day on which social norms of behaviour can be done away with. Many Bhāṇḍs also go to people's homes on invitation and perform. The Bhāṇḍs from Jodhpur however provide their services only to the royalty.

Bhāṇḍs belong both to the Hindu and Muslim faiths. In Rajasthan they are mostly Hindus. Here they have 'gotra' identity as well. These gotras are called, 'Khāpe.' Marriage is prohibited between those of the same gotra. The Bhāṇḍs in Madhya Pradesh and Kashmir are mostly Muslims. They were converted to Islam and because of this, their customs are often Hindu. However, their weddings are performed by a Kāzī according to Muslim rites. They are non-drinkers and do not eat pork. The Bhāṇḍs from Kashmir perform a dance called, 'Pāther'. They are also known to be good at imitating people.

213. *Āndhrakā Sāmājika Itihāsa*: Suravaram Pratāpa Reddy. New Delhi, 1959, p. 184.

214. *Rājastānaki Jātiyā*: Bajarangalāla Lohia, 1954, pp. 148-149.

The Fame of The Bhāṇḍ:

The Bhāṇḍ have permanently settled in Rajasthan and North India. They used to travel all over India and earn their living by entertaining audiences. Although their profession is in decline now, at one time they were very well-known. The royalty and the rich used to employ them to entertain themselves. They also gave the Bhāṇḍ holding land and other gifts. Famous Bhāṇḍ used to have competitions. It is said that a Bhāṇḍ by the name of Dhanarūpa, who was in the court of Mahārājā Bhimsimha, defeated another Bhāṇḍ called Karelā who was employed by Amīrakhāna in a competition. For this feat, the king of Mārvāḍ gave him the gift of a town.

Gopāla Bhāṇḍa, a resident of Nadia in Bengal was so clever and well-known a Bhāṇḍa that he could have been easily placed in the ranks of Birbal in the North and Tenālī Ramaṇa in the South.²¹⁵ He was in the court of Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra (18th Century). Like Kabir, he had an open mind towards religion. Myths about his wisdom, adroitness and quick-wittedness abound in Bengal. Once, a Paṇḍit from another state visited the court of Kṛṣṇacandra. He was so proficient in a number of languages that it was impossible for any resident Paṇḍit to pick out what his mother tongue was. Finally, Gopāla Bhāṇḍa played a trick on him. While he was totally unaware, Gopāla shoved him so hard that the visitor automatically burst out with swear words in his mother tongue. A similar story is told about the Peśvā minister, Nānā Phaḍṇis.

The Saint-Poets and Bhāṇḍa:

The Saint-Poets were steeped in Bhakti and because of that, their language was necessarily full of devotional idiom and practically nothing else. It was therefore natural that they would detest the type of language used by the Bhāṇḍ when they entertained the populace. We have already noted that Jñānadeva has called the pleasure obtained by listening to the Bhāṇḍ repertoire, 'darkness of illusion'. Eknātha on the other hand calls it 'simply disgraceful speech.' Also, through many of his *abhaṅgas*, Eknātha has severely criticized the performance of the Bhāṇḍ.²¹⁶ In one of his *abhaṅgas* he says:

215. Radio Saṃgraha, 1.1 (July-September 19630, pp.9-11.

216. *Eknāthagāthā*, Adhyāya No. 1942, 1987. (Avate Edition, Śaka 1830).

*bhāḍāce toṇḍa bhāṇḍapurāṇa || varī śimagyācā saṇa ||
 kāya uṇe maga bhāṇḍā || bolatī vāugeṃ teṃ toṇḍāṃ ||
 veda śāstra nīti nāhī || sairā vairā bolaṇeṃ pāhī ||
 ekā janārdanī pāṣāṇḍa || hāṇoni phoḍāṃ tyāceṃ toṇḍa ||*

(Adhyāya 1942)

Eknātha wanted to break the very mouth of the Bhāṇḍ who, according to him, ‘uttered nonsensical stuff’ just to feed himself. Similarly, Eknātha’s spiritual prodigy, Śrī Tukobārāya, has also expressed similar bitter words about the Bhāṇḍ, who uses inauspicious language. He says:

*nako bolūṃ Bhāṇḍā || khīḷa ghālūna baisa toṇḍā ||
 aika viṭhobāce guṇa || karī sādara śrāvaṇa ||
 premasukhāḍa kaya vājateṃ cābhāḍa ||
 tukā mhaṇe hitā || kām re nāgavasī thitā ||*

(Adhyāya 1718)

Śekh Mamammadabābā Śrīgondekar is known as the ‘Kabir of Maharashtra’ among Marathi Saint-Poets. In a typically abrasive manner, he has criticized the Bhāṇḍs many times.²¹⁷

One must however remember that the populace enjoyed many things that the Saint-Poets did not like and Bhāṇḍ performances was one of those. The Bhāṇḍ roamed all over India even before the time of Jñānadeva. Their imitations of gods, goddesses, and the rich were a source of pleasure not only for the well-to-do but also for the poor. Young children would always form circles around them and roam with them. Not only that, but even the older people yearned to get a glimpse of the Bhāṇḍs and listen to their humour. It is said that the Nizām of Hyderabad deliberately invited Govindarao Kāḷe, the legal messenger of the Peśvas, and staged a tamāśā performance by the Bhāṇḍs. The Bhāṇḍa performers, on this occasion, imitated Nānā Phaḍṇīs, Daulatrao Śinde, Paraśurāmbhāu Paṭwardhan and others and ridiculed them. It is said that this event was the instigator²¹⁸ for the war at Kharḍā.²¹⁹

The Saint-Poets were well aware that the performances of the Bhāṇḍ were highly popular among the populace. Because of their sincere concern

217. *Yogasaṅgrāma*: Ed. B.S. Bendre, Mumbai, 1959, pp. 79, 81, 87, 163; and Śekh Mahamad-abābā Śrīgondekar Yāncā Kavitasamgraha, Ed. B.S. Bendre, Mumbai, 1961, p. 105.

218. *Marhātī Lāvṇī*: Ed. Prof. M.V. Dhondā, Mumbai, 1956. Introduction, p. 60.

219. Translator’s Note: *The Battle of Kharḍā* took place in 1795 between the Nizām of Hyderabad and the Maratha Confederacy. The Nizam was defeated in this battle.

for the spiritual uplifting of people, the Saint-Poets were therefore forced to adopt the style and mode used by the Bhāṇḍ to spread their message. We have noted previously that Sant Eknātha expressed dismay at the language which the Bhāṇḍ used and talked about breaking their very mouths. It is interesting to note that the same Eknātha has written many songs using the language of the Bhāṇḍ. In this way, the Saint-Poets such as him spread the message of Bhakti and Vedānta in a very comprehensive manner. In this endeavour, Eknātha seems to be at the forefront. This is seen from his verses advising the Bhāṇḍ to discard the world of illusion (Māyā) when he says:

māyā chhāṇḍa suno jī || achhā bhāṇḍa bano jī ||||

(Lit: give up this illusory world and listen to me. Be a better Bhāṇḍa (Adhyāya: 3962).

In explaining how even the gods such as Brahmā got entangled in *māyā* and suffered ignominy, Eknātha has made full use of the colourful and at times obscene language of the Bhāṇḍ. He says:

*brahmadevane veda padhāyā || māyā mīṭhi lagī ||
sarasvatike gale paḍā || usakī kīrata bhagī || ||
viṣṇuke pīchhe lagā hai || māyākā dhandā ||
khela karate fasala paḍī || mīṭhi lagī vṛndā || ||
mahādeva baḍā deva || saba devanakā bābā ||
bhīllinike pīche lagā || karatā tobā tobā || ||
ahilyāku dekhanake || indra bhūla made ||
gautamane gāṇḍa mārī || āngabhara huve phode || ||*

(Adhyāya 3962)

(Lit: Although Brahmadeva taught the Veda, he succumbed to the world of illusion. He went after his daughter Sarasvatī and thereby lost his prestige. Illusion did not escape Viṣṇu either. He tricked Vṛndā into having sex with him. Mahādev is the highest god, the god of all gods. However, he fell for a Bhil woman and thus suffered. When the god Indra saw Ahalyā, Indra lost his senses and seduced her. Her husband Gautam then fucked Indra's arse and as a result, Indra got cunts all over his body).

Further on, Eknātha quotes examples of Hanumāna, Viśvāmitra, Nārada and Śrīkṛṣṇa and then concludes by saying:

janardana sāl merā || sub khela khelā ||
eknātha bhāṇḍa hoke || unake caraṇa milā || ||

(Lit: Janardana is my true friend. He has played every play on this earth. He has thus elevated the Bhāṇḍa to a higher spiritual pedestal).

Eknātha has thus elevated the Bhāṇḍs to a higher spiritual level. Two more Bhāṇḍa works of Eknātha (Adhyāyas 3963-3964) also deal with the effect of Māyā by quoting purāṇic stories. Similar to Eknātha, the Saint-Poet Acyutāśrama from Marāṭhawāḍa, a strong devotee of Rāma, has also composed several Bhāṇḍa songs.²²⁰ With his thunderous proclamation, ‘āye rāmjike bhāṇḍa || saba toḍata kubhāṇḍa’, (Lit: Here comes the Bhāṇḍa of Lord Rāma. He will destroy all the fraud) he is cautioning the populace against succumbing to Bhāṇḍa performances. He addresses people by saying,

kathā kare tāna gāve || rāmaprema nā milāve || bane jorūke bhaḍave ||

(Lit: One may tell stories or sing, but one would not get the love of Lord Rama. All that such people will become would be the pimps for their wives).

For such people caught in the spiral of hypocrisy and deceit, Acyuta Bhāṇḍ says with genuine anger,

‘zuṭā macāvata baṇḍa || gaddhese marāve gāṇḍa ||’

(Lit: Stop creating unnecessary noise. Go and get your arse fucked by a donkey instead)

It is worthwhile seeing how Acyutāśrama, while acting as a Bhāṇḍa in the employment of a king (hujarātī), teaches spirituality through the medium of obscene language.

haṃ hujarātī Bhāṇḍ || uṭhāuṃ sadbodha lāṇḍa ||
māruṃ kālakī gāṇḍa || ||
cidbhavanamoṃ jā baiṭhe || unmanī so luṭapuṭa ||
jam kyā kare jhāṭa || ||
jinhe jalā dīyā kām || vohī saccā pāyā rāma ||
aur sab harāma || ||

220. *Pratiśthana*, November-December 1964, pp.53-55.

*pīve citbrahmakī bhaṅga || inhe dila kiyā guṇa ||
 halamon masta rahata || saba duniyā hai cyuta ||
 mill rahe rāma aṅga || kahata Bhāṇḍ acyuta ||*

These Bhāṇḍ are representatives of the Saint-Poet's role as those wishing the welfare of the populace. They are also representative of the type of language the Bhāṇḍ used to entertain people. It is no wonder that the common man was pacified and felt contented with that.

Prākṛt Bhāṇḍ: Sanskrit Bhāṇḍ:

The institution of the Bhāṇḍa belongs necessarily to Indian folk culture (Prākṛta). However, there is reason to believe that this Prākṛta Bhāṇḍa has some connection with Sanskrit dramaturgy, especially a type of Sanskrit drama called 'Bhāṇa'. Both of the words Bhāṇa and Bhāṇḍa mean one and the same thing. They have been derived from the Sanskrit roots, Bhaṇa and Bhāṇḍa respectively. It is quite possible that both of these roots may have come originally from Prākṛta. Viśvanātha, the composer of 'Sāhityadarpaṇa' has given the following definition of Bhāṇa:

*bhāṇaḥsyāddhūrtacarito nānāvasthāntarātmakaḥ ||
 ekāṅka eka evātra nipuṇaḥ paṇḍito viṭaḥ || 5.3 ||*

This means that the Bhāṇa is a one act play with only one actor. It has embedded in it the character sketch of a witty and cunning person. This actor known as 'Viṭa' often makes fun of fortune-tellers and Brāhmaṇas well-versed in Purāṇas. He is also highly critical of political and societal leaders and takes great delight in bringing out their dirty secrets. Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal, one of the editors of 'Caturbhāṇī' opines that, 'the Bhāṇa plays as a rule are based mainly on humour. Also, they include a large amount of obscenity and depiction of physical love.'²²¹

When one examines Bhāṇa and the character played by the Viṭa, one is left with no doubt that there is a close relationship between the Sanskrit Bhāṇa and Prākṛta Bhāṇḍa. In this context, Dr. Dasharath Oza's discussion

221. *Caturbhāṇī*, Eds. Drs Moticandra and Vasudevasharan Aggrawal. Mumbai, 1959, Introduction, pp. 2-4.

dealing with the origin and development of the Hindi drama and the place of the Bhāṇḍa within, is worth noting:²²²

Some scholars believe that the word Bhāṇḍa is a transformation of the Sanskrit word Bhāṇa. In this drama, a character often acts saying, 'what are you saying' or 'I told you' (*kim braviṣi* in Sanskrit plays). His main subject during the play is 'love' and his object is to make people laugh. However, I am not that happy in accepting this take on Bhāṇa. The style of 'what are you saying' is not that common in other Sanskrit plays. It therefore seems to me that this style is essentially based on folk-plays. I believe that it is the other way around. The Bhāṇḍa in folk-play has been taken the form Bhāṇa in Sanskrit plays.

If Dr. Oza is correct in his interpretation, then one must accept that the Bhāṇḍs have made an important contribution to Indian literature on dramatics. One feel indebted to them for this unique contribution. Although their speech may seem obscene in the eyes of the present Indian culture based on Western values, one must accept that until quite recently, swear words were a part and parcel of village life. In addition, those who spoke it and the ones who listened did not have any qualms about it. The Bhāṇḍ's capital was a lot more than the obscene language. With it, went their ability to bring into the public domain their knack of exposing public scandals. They did this with their amazing command of language skills. That is what gave them the high popularity among the populace. The institution of the Bhāṇḍs is no more. Their amazing feats with their language skills have remained only as a historical curiosity and memory. Thankfully, the Bhāṇḍs who entertained the populace for centuries and were one step ahead of the Birbals of India, are still a subject very dear to the scholars of folk-culture.

222. Translator's Note: Dr. Dhare has reproduced the original Hindi wording of Dr. Oza's article here. I have translated that into English.



A typical Sahadev holding an almanac

Chapter Eight

Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī

To know what the future holds for us is a very natural and common wish for any human being. The science of 'Phalajyotiṣa'(astrology) was born precisely to answer this question. It seeks to warn people against possible calamities in the near future and also informs them how to ward them off. It suggests ways to ensure good fortune and wealth. Even in this present age of science, not only do the common folk, but the well-educated people as well are firm believers in astrology in India. Before the beginning of this age of technology, almost every person used to depend on the advice of an astrologer. People were guided by good and bad omens. No one would start anything anew unless an auspicious time (Muhūrta) for it was given by the astrologer. The village astrologer (Grāmajoshī) looked after these needs of the villagers. Although his knowledge of fortune-telling was somewhat limited, his findings were based firmly on mathematical calculations according to astrology.

The Fortune-tellers of Maharashtra:

Fortune tellers are found all over rural Maharashtra. For their fortune-telling, they do not resort to mathematical astrology which depends upon the calculations of planetary orbits and the planets' exact positions. Their fortune-telling depends upon certain conjectures, speculations, and also intuition. Ḍavarī Jośī, Kuḍbuḍe Jośī, Piṅgle Jośī and Sahadev Jośī are four such fortune-tellers. Apart from the above, the fortune-teller Sarodā or Ḍākojī and the omen-telling female Kaikāi should also be included in this group. Many Marathi Saint-Poets including Eknātha have composed Bhāruḍ on most of

these fortune tellers. In one of Eknātha's Bhāruḍs, a fortune-teller Jośī declares:

āmhī alakṣapūrace jośī || śakuna sāṅgūṃ niscayemsi ||

(Lit: I am the Jośī from Alakṣapūra. I shall tell you about the good omens for sure).

Similarly, Eknātha's Kaikāī says:

*kaikāya kaikāya tuja sāṅgate śakūna ||
yeṇem mārgem gele nāhī āle paratūna ||*

(Lit: I am Kaikāya, Kaikāya, telling you all about good omens. Those who did not go on the return path, please came back)

Among these folk fortune tellers, the Sahadev Jośī consider themselves the descendants of Sahadev. They say that this ancestor of theirs was born out of a union between a Brāhmin fortune-teller and a Kuṇbī²²³ woman. They are located mainly in the districts of Pune and Ratnagiri. They make their living by fortune-telling and by begging for alms. Their customs and religious behaviour are similar to Marāṭhā-Kuṇbīs except for the fact that they bury their dead and not cremate them.²²⁴

Sahadev, the ancestor of Sahadev Jośī is thought to have been the creator of 'Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī Mata', also called the 'Bhāḍaḷī Mata', a collection of conversational pieces between himself and a woman called Bhāḍaḷī. These pieces consist of conjectures and intuitive opinions about the future. In other words, they constitute intuitive fortune-telling on the level of the common man. In rural Maharashtra, these aphorisms have been widely known among the farmers and villagers for hundreds of years. The reason for their high popularity is that they are most useful as guides for the day-to-day living of the farmers.

223. Translator's Note: Kuṇbī is a term applied to a collection of famer castes in Western India, mainly in Maharashtra.

224. *Mumbai Ilākhyātīla Jātī*: G.M. Kalelkar. Pp.290-91.

The Form of Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī-Mata in Marāthi:

The main subject covered by Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī Mata is prediction of rainfall. However, these aphorisms also include many predictions on good and bad omens. The foretelling of rainfall takes the form of conjectures. For instance, the aphorism will say that rain will fall on a particular day in a particular month, etc. For instance:

*āṣādhī navamī ye śanī kimvā maṅgaḷa ॥
tarī kaḍakaḍatī cārī maṅḍaḷa ॥ ॥
udakākāraṇeṃ gharogharīm hotīm bhāṇḍaṇeṃ ॥
aise bhāḍaḷī sahadevā mhaṇe ॥ ॥
rohiṇī vāje gaḍagaḍāṭa ॥ maga paḍe divasa āṭha ॥
bhāḍaḷī mhaṇe sahadevajī, nadyā vāhatī kāṭhokāṭha ॥ ॥
pascimesa camake vīja, dakṣiṇe sūṭe vārā ॥
bhāḍaḷī mhaṇe sahadevā, dhānyacā hoya māterā ॥ ॥*

Apart from these aphorisms in the form of poems attributed to Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī, a number of other sayings are commonly found in the speech of the villagers in Maharashtra. For instance:

*paḍatil maghā, tar culipāśī haḡā ॥
paḍatil hattī, tar pāḍatila vaṇyābāmaṇāncyā bhintī ॥
paḍatil citrā, tar bhāta khainā kutrā ॥
paḍatil swātī, tar pikatīla māṇika motī ॥*

These sayings have also been attributed to Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī. Apart from those dealing with agriculture and rainy season, many other aphorisms also include the hallmark, ‘bhāḍaḷī mhaṇe sahadevāśī’ (Lit. Bhāḍaḷī says to Sahadev), obviously giving more importance to Bhāḍaḷī. These include predictions about the good and bad days for travel, consequences of hearing the chirping sound made by the household lizard (pāl in Marathi), the sound of sneezing, and hearing the call of the spotted Indian owl. Interestingly, one of the aphorisms ends up by saying, ‘Bhāḍaḷī says to the sage Garga’.²²⁵

225. Marathi wording: ‘bhāḍaḷī mhaṇe gargamunī’

*Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī's Composition called, 'Meghamālā' in 'Ovi'
Meter:*

There is a composition in Ovi meter called 'Meghamālā' attributed to Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī. It consists of only 78 Ovis. The subject of this work is forecasting rain and the format is a conversation between Śiva and his consort Pārvatī. The work begins as follows:

*kailāsaśikharīṃ trinayana || jyāce kapāḷī candra pūrṇa ||
daśabhujā pañcavadana || miravita ase || 1 ||
muguṭṭīṃ gangā vāhe sunīḷā || kaṇṭhī mirave ruṇḍamālā ||
ardhāṅgī pārvatī bālā || ase jyācyā || 2 ||
jyāsī vanditī brahmādika || deva yama indradika ||
jyāce ichhene trailokya || ghaḍe mode || 3 ||
to draṣṭā tribhuvanāncā || kāryakartā sakaḷāncā ||
utpatti-sthiti-praḷayācā || adhikārī to || 4 ||
tyāsī puse pārvatī || deva megha koṭhem asatī ||
koṇa kaise vartatī || tem majapratī sāṅgāve || 5 ||
aisā kelā śabdancā ādara || maga kailāsīṃ śankara ||
vallabhesī praśnaprakāra || sāṅgatā jhālā || 6 ||
śankara mhaṇe kānteteṃ || tuvāṃ jem pusileṃ mātem ||
tarī tūṃ ekacitteṃ || avadhārī gaurī || 7 ||*

Having led into the subject with the above introduction in the form of a conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī, the composer has then explained various topics connected with rains such as the relationship between a rainbow and rainfall, the types of clouds, direction of winds and their effect on rainfall and the possibility of rains during certain days of the months according to Hindu calendar. He also discusses the resulting position of crops. The composer finally ends with the following verses.

*śrī śankara bolile || bhavānīneṃ aikileṃ ||
tem mṛtyulokīṃ āṇileṃ || śrīvyaśānūṃ || 77 ||
tem hotem saṅskṛta || bhāḍaḷīneṃ keleṃ prākṛta
sahadeveṃ aikileṃ niscita || umajalā manūṃ || 78 ||*

It is obvious from these verses that the composer intends to convey to the reader that the work 'Meghamālā' was originally composed in Sanskrit by

none other than the sage Vyāsa, as a conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī. Bhāḍaḷī then translated it into Prākṛt and expounded it to Sahadev.²²⁶ This is typical of a stance taken by comparatively modern writers to show the antiquity and hence the authenticity of their writing.

The Biographies of Sahadeva and Bhāḍaḷī:

The life-story of Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī has been described in many miraculous stories about them. Śri Nāro Appāḷī Goḍbole has collected and published the following myth about Sahadev:

Born as a Śūdra, (Sahadev) was one of the most prominent fortune-tellers with great intuition. The following myth is told about his birth. Once, a fortune-teller Brāhmin wanted his son to be born as a great fortune-teller as well, and he was looking for an auspicious moment (in the horoscope) when he could cohabit with his wife to produce such a progeny. He was able to find such an auspicious moment but it was going to be after quite a while. The Brāhmin then happened to go out of town on business and totally forgot about the auspicious moment. While he was away, he suddenly remembered it and also found that the moment was to be on the very next day. He therefore left what he was doing and started early in the morning for his journey back home. Unfortunately, it rained so heavily that day that the river near his town had swollen and broken her banks. There was nothing he could do to reach his place. He therefore decided to stay with an old woman and her daughter-in-law whom he knew in the nearby village. It was midnight but the Brāhmin was unable to sleep. Uttering deep sighs, he kept saying that it was God's wish for him not to reach his wife that day. The old woman heard this and asked him why he kept doing so in spite of the fact that he was smart and a learned man. The Brāhmin replied that he was most unfortunate. Today was the day when he could have fathered a great fortune-teller son and that is why he started very early this morning so as to reach my home in time. However, it was not to be. On hearing this, the old woman asked the Brāhmin if he would consider

226. A work by the same name, 'Meghamālā', on the same topic, is available in the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat in their local languages as well.

her daughter-in-law instead of his wife for his mission. She said that there was no way he could reach his wife that night and therefore he should consider her proposal. The Brāhmin thought for a while and finally agreed. The Śūdra daughter-in-law became pregnant out of this liaison and the son she produced was Sahadev.

The myth does not give any information about the period during which he lived. It is said that right from his birth, knowledge of fortune-telling was so ingrained in Sahadeva that whatever he said used to come true. Astrology also benefitted greatly because of him. It is said that his last name was 'Bhāḍaḷe' and he lived in a Mughal occupied area of India. Because of this, he wrote his poetry both in Marathi and in Hindustani.

Mr. Goḍbole makes a further comment about the word 'Bhāḍaḷe'. He says that although Sahadev often called his mother Bhāḍaḷī, one should not assume that it was her true name.²²⁷ Mr. Goḍbole believes that Bhāḍaḷe was the surname of Sahadev. However, Sahadev's aphorisms themselves give no information about this. On the other hand, we have already seen that most of the aphorisms contain the phrase, '*Bhāḍaḷī mhaṇe sahadēvāsī*.'²²⁸

Other collections of Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī aphorisms have also been published, perhaps with the help of Mr. Goḍbole as well. In the introduction to one of these collections, yet another myth is told about Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī. This is as follows:

In the town of Paiṭhaṇa, there was a learned Brāhmin by the name of Mārtaṇḍa Joṣī. He was a highly regarded fortune-teller. He had a son named Sahadev from his wife and a daughter called Bhāḍaḷī from his Śūdra concubine. Mārtaṇḍa died young. Sahadev was learning astrology right from his childhood. However, he had not been able to master the science of 'Trikāḷajñānavidyā'.²²⁹ He therefore reasoned that this elusive science would not be able to be mastered without a Guru and went to the abode of a Gosavī.²³⁰ However, the Gosavī

227. *Sahadev- Bhāḍaḷī matāce jyotiṣaratna*: Nāro Āppājī Goḍbole. 5th Edition, 1886. Introduction.

228. Lit. Bhāḍaḷī says to Sahadev.

229. Translator's Note: Trikāḷavidyā is the science of being able to know not only the future but the past and the present as well. Fortune tellers usually concentrate on the future.

230. Translator's Note: A Gosavī is a religious mendicant who has renounced worldly pleasures. He wears ochre robes and lives on begging.

told him that he did not know that science. His father was an expert in that but unfortunately took Samādhi²³¹ before the Gosavī could acquire the science from him. Had he been alive, he would have certainly given this knowledge to Sahadev. The Gosavī further said that there was still one way of acquiring this knowledge. Sahadev should go to the village of Dhārānagarī where the Gosavī's father is buried. The burial site can be recognized by a Nīma tree²³² which shades it. The Gosavī asked Sahadev to dig the grave, collect the skull, and take it home. Every morning, he should grind the skull with water on a smooth rock and drink that water. Within no time, he would acquire the science of Trikalajñānavidyā and would be an expert in astrology.

Sahadev followed the Gosavī's advice and went to Dhārānagarī. He was able to locate the Samādhi and collect the skull. He brought it back to his own town and buried it in the sand on the banks of the local river. Every morning, after he completed his daily ablution rituals, he would grind the skull on a stone and drink that water. He would then deposit the skull in the same place. Due to this daily routine, he started acquiring the extra sensory perception which slowly made him adept at Trikalajñānavidyā.

While he was drinking this water one day, he was seen by Bhāḍaḷī, his step-sister. When Sahadev went home after he had completed the morning rituals and had drunk the water obtained by grinding the skull, Bhāḍaḷī went to the river, bathed herself, collected the skull and went to her home. She broke the skull to pieces and ground them in a large pestle and mortar to make a large amount of powder. She mixed the powder with water and drank the entire amount. Because of this, she was able to get Trikalajñānavidyā immediately and

231. Translator's Note: Samadhi is a state of deep concentration with the ultimate aim of being one with the almighty and leaving this worldly life. Ascetics who feel that they have fulfilled all their worldly duties choose one day to go into this state, never to be woken up again. After they pass away, their bodies are cremated and the ash and bones are buried, often under a tree as a memorial. These memorials are themselves called 'Samadhis'.

232. Translator's Note: The Nīma tree (*Azadirachta indica*) is fast-growing tree native to India. It is thought to have medicinal properties. The liquid obtained by crushing the leaves is insecticidal.

became an expert astrologer. Whatever she told the populace used to come true and she became very famous.

Next day, when Sahadev went to the river, he was unable to find the skull. He was full of sorrow, went to the Gosavī and told him the sad tale. With his power of extra-sensory perception, the Gosavī was able to figure out what had happened. He said to Sahadev, 'whatever knowledge you were supposed to have gained according to your horoscope, you did gain. There is no way you would get any more. Although Bhāḍaḷī is a low caste woman, it was destined that she would gain this knowledge. Since she consumed most of the powdered skull, she has become an expert in astrology. This is what the fate has decided. You should now become Bhāḍaḷī's disciple and acquire more knowledge from her'.

As per the Gosavī's advice, Sahadev, without thinking much about Bhāḍaḷī's low caste background, became her disciple. From then on, their predictions in the form of questions and answers in prose and poetry became famous. Both of them became well-known in astrology.²³³

Some other forms of Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī's stories are also seen in Maharashtra, and all-over North India. From Gujarat-Rajasthan to Bengal and Asam, stories about fortune tellers like Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī are found with minor differences. We are going to examine those stories and the minor changes within them in the next few pages.

The Period of Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī:

Not enough material is available to ascertain a definitive period during which Sahadev and Bhāḍaḷī may have operated. According to the eminent historian Rājwāde, Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī's prophesies are remnants of very early Marathi literature. He thinks that their period could be as early at 1200 C.E. Some Lāvaṇīs based on some of the prophesies of Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī have been composed by Haibatī, the Marathi Śāhīra from Pusesāvalī who wrote at the end of the eighteenth century. He has specifically mentioned Sahade-

233. *Sahadeva- Bhāḍaḷī*, Tāḍ-dev Book Depot, Mumbai. Introduction.

va-Bhāḍaḷī in one of his Lāvaṇīs. He says:

satya bolāveṃ mhaṇe haibatī jyotiṣyācī ṭikā ||
sahadevā sāṅge bhāḍaḷīākā ||

(Lit. One should always speak the truth, says Haibati. That is what elder sister Bhāḍaḷī [Akkā] tells Sahadev).

Another poet called Navarasanārāyaṇa, who belonged to the Mahānubhāva sect, composed a work called ‘Śalyaparva’ in 1485 CE. He has mentioned Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī in this work. The occasion he has portrayed is the annihilation of the Kauravās on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. That is when their mother Gāndhārī comes to the battlefield, screaming and crying loudly because of the loss of her sons. On the battlefield, she meets a fortune-teller by the name of Kaikāī. Gāndhārī asks her:

gāndhārī mhaṇe vo tū koṇa || yerī mhaṇe mī kaikāḍiṇa ||
tū raḍatesī kavaṇālāguna || mhaṇonī pusūṃ ālī || ||
te veḷim gāndhārī bole || mājhe putra pāṇḍvīṃ vadhile ||
mahājohara keleṃ || āmaceṃ tehūṃ || ||
mhaṇe mī yekalī paradesī || rudanā karitā putrānpāsī ||
maga te bujhāvī tiyesī || nānā prakārīm || ||
mhaṇe tūṃ āika mājhā sakuna || ātām tūṃ na karī vo rudana ||
bhāvārtha mājheṃ vacana || anyathā navheci || ||
myām sakuna saṅgitalā sahadevāsī ||
tetheṃ jyotisa vistāriḷeṃ prithivīsī ||
bhāḍaḷī mājhī bahiṇa pariyesī || mājā āṇī Bhāḍaḷīsī antara nāhī || ||
mājhā sakuna āikāsī || tarī tūṃ kāḷāpāsoni suṭasī ||
punarapi rājya pāvasī || daivācenī baḷeṃ || || ²³⁴

As one can see, the episode described by Navarasanārāyaṇa has no connection whatsoever with the Mahābhārata epic. It is merely his imagination. However, the fact that he was able to imagine such a story means that at the time Navarasanārāyaṇa wrote, Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī and their astrological pre-

234. *navarasanārāyaṇaviracita śalyaparva*. Ed. Dr. U. M Pathan, Episode 14, Ovis 63-67. P.193.

dictions were very much in vogue in the populace of the day. One can also surmise that the aphorisms of Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī would have been popular at least two to three centuries before the time of Navarasanārāyaṇa, i.e. around 1500 C.E.

The famous eleventh century Marathi astrologer Jyotirvid Śrīpatibhaṭṭa, wrote his work, 'Jyotiṣaratnamālā' in Sanskrit and its Marathi translation is freely available. Needless to say, that this work was written in order to satisfy the need for people to ascertain auspicious times (muḥūrtas) for various occasions. It is more than likely that when this work was produced, Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī's aphorisms would have been in place among the populace. It is also possible that many others would have included their own works under Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī's name. Finally, it is quite possible that Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī did not exist at all. Budding astrologers may have put their writing under the name of Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī for it to be acceptable to the general public.

Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī in Hariyānī language:

A question arises as to why the aphorisms of Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī published in Maharashtra often contain some in the Hindi language. Is it possible that they composed in Hindi as well? Alternatively, were these kinds of aphorisms common in the Hindi-speaking areas of India and that they were published under Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī's names at a later date? Before we attempt to answer these questions, let us look at some of the aphorisms in Hindi which have been included in their Marathi collection.

*mṛga karī jhāḍājhāḍa ॥ ādrā na paḍe koy ॥
bhāḍaḷī kahe saḥadevajī, pṛthvīpralaya hoy ॥ ॥*

(Lit: Bhāḍaḷī says to Sahadev: If, during the Mṛganakṣatra time, only the wind blows [without rains], and in the subsequent Ādrā Nakṣatra time, if it does not rain at all, then, there would be a *pṛthvī-pralaya*, (a horrible end of living period without water.)

*pūrvake dhaga pascima āve, uttara chhute vāva ॥
bhāḍaḷī kahe saḥadevajī, gharamēṃ bachhaḍā lāv ॥ ॥*

(Lit: If the clouds are coming from the west to the east, and if at the same time, the wind flows from the North, then, the mothers need to bring the chil-

dren from the courtyard inside the house, because, as soon as they are inside the home, rains will start.)

uttara paḍe cāra dina, hasta na paḍe koya ॥
bhāḍaḷī kahe sahadevajī, pṛthvīpralaya hoyā ॥ ॥

(Lit: Bhāḍaḷī says to Sahadev: If it rains only for four days during the time of Uttara Nakṣatra, and then if it does not rain during the time of the Hasta Nakṣatra, there would be a severe drought).

Although these aphorisms have been around for years in Maharashtra, there is no doubt that the language used is Hindi. I was trying to work out as to why these Hindi aphorisms should be attributed to Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī, two Marathi folk-astrologers. While I was thinking about this, I heard that in the south-west of Delhi, in the state of Haryāna, Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī aphorisms are well-known. The language they use, Hariyānī, is a spoken language only and is a mixture of Punjabi and Rajasthani dialects. Some two hundred and twenty thousand people around Delhi, the districts of Karnāl, Rohaṭak and Hisār and parts of the princely states of Nābhā and Jhind, speak this language. There are a large number of aphorisms attributed to Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī in the oral literature of this language.²³⁵ For instance:

sahadeva kahe suna Bhāḍaḷī, jeṭha galia mata ro ॥
jo sāvana pañcaka gale, nāhija saṃvata ho ॥ ॥

(Lit. Sahadev says to Bhāḍaḷī, listen to me. If it rains in the month of Jyeṣṭha, do not lament. If on the other hand, the Pañcaka²³⁶ is seen in the skies in the month of Śrāvaṇa, then be certain that the ensuing year would be very bad.

paḍavā cale sabādalī, paḥavā calai naroula ॥
sahadeva kahe bhāḍaḷī barakhā gayī kita oḍa ॥ ॥

(Lit. Sahadev says to Bhāḍaḷī, if one sees clouds with the eastern winds, and if there is wind from the west without winds, then, take it from me that there would be no rains.)

235. *Hariyānā Pradeśakā Lokasāhitya*: Dr. Sankaralal Yadav. pp. 445-447.

236. Translator's Note: Pañcaka are five constellations: Dhaniṣṭhā, Śatabhiṣā, Pūrvā Bhādrapadā, Uttarā Bhādrapadā, and Revatī. If they appear together at certain times, it is considered to be highly inauspicious.

In the Hariyānī tongue, Sahadev has also been referred to as Śādī, or Saidā. Bhāḍaḷī has been often referred to as 'Bhājali'.

Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī in Rajasthani language:

In Rajasthani folk religion, there has been some writing on auspicious times (Śakuna) and the possibility of rains (Varśāvijñāna). Three works are thought to be particularly important in this regard: 'Bhaddalīpurāṇa', 'Sahadevapurāṇa' and 'Meghamālā'. In the following 'Dohā' in the Rajasthani language, a Gujar boy says to Sahadeva Jośī, 'those Pandits who have kept hidden common folk knowledge into their books, are nothing more than thieves.'

*loka taṇo unamāna le, liyo granthameṇ melā ||
corī kīdhī pañḍatām suṇa jośī sahadeva ||*²³⁷

The fact that the names of Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī, so well-known in Maharashtra, could be found in the distant states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh is nothing but amazing. However, if one waits a bit further, one's amazement would reach new heights.

*Ḍāṅkulatā Mī Śakūna Sānge:*²³⁸

Marathi 'Bharuḍa'²³⁹ literature has thankfully preserved the literary sketches of several classes of folk artists who were responsible for the creation and maintenance of Marathi folk culture. Over the time, many of these classes have disappeared and many others are in the process of fading away. In this context, it is worthy of a special mention that a few literary sketches of Ḍāṅkulatā are to be seen now and then in hand-written manuscripts such as Bhāruḍas produced by Marathi Saint-Poets. In one of the Bāds²⁴⁰ of Samartha Vagdevatā Mandir, one finds a prophesy about the age of Kali (Kaliyuga) predicted by the Saint-Poet by the name of Dāsa Tukā. He says:

237. Samartha Vagdevatā Mandir, Dhule: Bāḍāṅka 295. The Bhāruḍa by the name of 'Ḍāṅkulatā' was examined by Mr. D. S. Joshi and posted it to me.

238. Translator's Note: (Lit: I belong to the Ḍāṅkulatā class. My profession is to tell your future).

239. Translator's Note: Bhāruḍas are a class of folk songs which are mostly spiritual. Many of the Marathi saint-poets such as Jñāneśvara, Nāmdeva and Eknātha have written Bhāruḍas.

240. Translator's Note: A Bāḍ means a collection.

dāṅkulatā mī śakūna sāṅge, harigurunāma jāgā mā ||
kaṭhīna kāḷa yuga naṣṭa, viṣayaśaṅga tyāgā mā ||
sohambhāveṃ sadgurucaraṇīm sāvadha houni lāgā mā ||
alakṣa avināśī apāra akṣara padavī māgā mā ||
gaibī siddha bolun gelā bahuta nāśa hoila jī ||
asatyācārāśīm satya rāūtukeṃ nasela jī ||
japatapakriyā snanasandhyā karmamārga buḍela jī ||
astri-puruṣa lampāṭa bhārī viṣayaḍohīm paḍatīla jī ||
āja-udyām mhaṇatām, yeka vāyo moṭhā suṭela bā ||
meruparvata giriśikhara amarapadahī udela bā ||
tīna tāḷa cavadā bhuvanem andhakāra paḍela bā ||
sarvahi jāila, śevaṭīm yeka śrigurunāma rāhīla bā ||
kaliyugīm yeka kalaṅkī, jīva aiseṃ koṇhī mhaṇela bā ||
kaliyugīm yeka siddha-sādhū kaḷūni deha dharīla bā ||
kaliyugīm yeka dāsa tukā tyace caraṇīm mohīla bā ||
alakṣa avināśī apāra akṣara padavī gheila bā ||

Out of the six original Bhāruḍa couplets, I have quoted only three (No.s 1, 5 and 6) over here. However, from what one can see in the above verses, it would be amply clear that Ḍāṅkulatā was a professional group of people who specialized in predicting auspicious times for various undertakings by the populace. They were also fortune tellers. In Rāmādāsī Samśodhana, (Part 1, p. 268), the author, the late Śaṅkar-raoji Dev, has written a footnote about Ḍāṅkulatā. He says that Ḍāṅkulatā means those who are fortune-tellers. The Maharashtra Śabdakoṣa lists Ḍāṅkulatā as follows:

Ḍāṅkulatā, also called Ḍākutā, Ḍākotā, Ḍākocā, and Ḍākulatā are a caste of Śūdras. They specialize in fortune-telling and telling your future by reading your right hand (Hasta-Sāmudrika). They also predict auspicious times for people to undertake new tasks. This they do by going around people's places while playing the Ḍamaru drum and begging for alms. It is said that their caste was born out of a Brāhmin man and a cow-herdswoman.

In this connection, the composers of the Maharashtra Śabdakoṣa have also quoted a Hindi saying, 'Ḍāṅkulatā horā batalāve.'²⁴¹ This also proves that Ḍāṅkulatā were a caste of people who were village fortune-tellers.

241. Translator's Note: Lit. Ḍāṅkulatā tells your fortune.

The Ḍākota Brāhmins from Rajasthan:

Although one finds only an occasional mention of the Ḍāṅkulatā fortune-tellers in ancient Marathi literature, one finds them as a caste in Rajasthani society.²⁴² In the Pañcagaṇḍa Brāhmins of Rajasthan, there is a sub-caste of Brāhmins called Ḍākot, who are considered inferior to other Brāhmins. In the region of Mārwaḍ, they have alternative names as well, such as Deśāntarī, Jotagī, Thāvaṭiyā and Śānitariyā. On the other hand, in the North-West of Rajasthan, they are known as Bhaḍḍarī or Bhaḍḍalī. Among the Ḍākot Brāhmins, there are seven sub-castes called Gāṇḍa, Chhiloudiya, Mer, Rival, Goriā, Pavosiā and Joṣī. Ḍākot Brāhmins are worshippers of Saturn. Apart from their business of fortune-telling, they accept all kinds of charity donations given to them for appeasement of the cruel planets, Saturn, Rāhu and Ketū. In the opinion of Sir H. M. Elliot, the Ḍākots are a sub-branch of the Bhaḍḍālas. In the Vārāṇasī region, these people are also known as 'Manarīriyā'. According to Father Schering, these people act as guides in Hindu holy places. Ḍākot Brāhmins allow widows to remarry. However, to do so, the relatives of the diseased husband are paid about Rs. 70 and their permission for the widow to remarry is sought.

Myths about the Origin of Ḍākot Brāhmins:

When one examines the myths prevalent in Rajasthan about the origin of the Ḍākots, one finds a striking similarity between them and the myths about Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī. A myth about the origin of the Ḍākots as recorded by D. Evanston is as follows:

The great king Daśarath once performed a ritual worship of the planets. However, he omitted the planet Saturn from the list. As a result, Saturn was angry. In order to appease him, Daśarath decided to make large donations to Brāhmins. The Brāhmins however thought that if they accepted such a donation, they would incur the wrath of Saturn. They therefore refused the donations. Daśarath then collected all the dirt from his skin and produced a sage by the name of Ḍaṅka, to whom he made the donation. The children produced by the union of Ḍaṅka with a Śūdra woman are the Ḍākota Brāhmins of today.

242. *Rājasthanakī Jātīyo*: Bajarangalal Lohia, 1954, pp. 74-76.

It is quite clear that the above myth has been designed to explain the fact that these Brāhmins accept donations made to appease the planet Saturn.

The second myth that I quote here is more relevant to us in terms of our quest. In Mārvāḍ,²⁴³ the reason given for considering the Ḍākota Brāhmins inferior to others is the belief that they originated from the union of the sage Ḍaṅka and a Bhaṅgiṇa.²⁴⁴ named Bhaḍḍli. Because their ancestor was a Brāhmin, these people consider themselves the same and wear a sacred thread. The Ḍākota Brāhmins themselves believe the following myth about their origin:

When king Parikṣita was bitten by the cobra king Takṣaka, Dhanvantarī, the celestial doctor was summoned by the king's ministers. While Dhanvantarī was on his way, Takṣaka got hold of him, bit him, and killed him as well. Dhanvantarī had told his sons not to burn his body after his death. He told them to cook his body and eat the meat instead. He reasoned that that way, the sons would become great doctors as well.

Having heard of the father's demise, his sons brought his body home and started cooking his body. Lord Viṣṇu, when he heard this, he became highly agitated. He reasoned to himself that if a number of Dhanvantarīs were produced, there would be a break in the normal birth-death cycle of humans. Therefore, he assumed the form of a Brāhmin and went to see Dhanvantarī's sons. He asked them where Dhanvantarī was. The sons replied that their father was dead and according to his wishes, they were about to eat his flesh. Upon this, Viṣṇu, in the guise of a Brāhmin, said to them, 'You are Brāhmins. You should never eat meat and that too, your father's flesh. You should cease eating this and save yourself from a major sin.

Dhanvantarī's daughter Sāvitrī heard what the Brāhmin was saying. She immediately figured out that the Brāhmin was none other than Lord Viṣṇu. She said to her brothers, 'This is not an ordinary Brāhmin; he is Lord Viṣṇu disguised as one. Do not listen to him. If you obey your father's orders, you will be capable enough to conquer death. In

243. Translator's Note: Mārvāḍa is the north-western region of the state of Rajasthan.

244. Translator's Note: A Bhaṅgiṇa (a Bhaṅgi woman) is a member of the lowest class of untouchables. Their job is to clean toilets, sweeping, and handling dead animals.

order to negate what Sāvitrī said, Viṣṇu said to the sons, ‘Your sister has become a ‘Bhaṇḍalī’ (she has lost her senses). Do not listen to her. Throw her out of the house, otherwise she will destroy you.

The sons believed in what Viṣṇu told them. They threw away their father’s flesh that they had previously cooked and also drove their sister out of the house. The flesh that was thrown away was consumed by birds such as Cila, Titar and Crows. As a result, these birds started informing people of auspicious times.

Sāvitrī the sister was now known as Bhaṇḍalī. She went to the forest to practice penance. In the same forest, a sage by the name of Ḍaṅka was performing penance. That year, there were no rains whatsoever. People went to sage Ḍaṅka to ask him when it would rain. He was however unable to answer their question. He asked Bhaṇḍalī if she knew the answer. Bhaṇḍalī was very pleased that the great seer had asked for her opinion. She replied in the affirmative. However, she told him that although she knew the answer, she would only divulge it if the seer promised to marry her. Ḍaṅka accepted her proposition. Upon this, Bhaṇḍalī said that by the time the seer went to the nearby village and returned, there would be enough rainfall to touch the leaves of the branches of forest trees. Her words turned out to be true. Ḍaṅka married her as promised. Ḍaṅka himself was an expert in astrology whereas Bhaṇḍalī specialised in predicting auspicious times (Śakun). Their discussions in the form of questions and answers are known as ‘Bhaṇḍalīpurāṇa’. Their children are the Ḍākot Brāhmins of today.

It would be clear that the Bhaṇḍalī in the above myth is obviously the well-known Bhaḍālī in Maharashtra. The alternative name for the Ḍākot caste, Bhaḍḍālī, is also closely connected with Bhaḍālī. It may come as a surprise to the readers that the same pair, Ḍaṅka and Bhaḍālī, the folk astrologers, exist in Bengal under the names Ḍāka and Bhaḍḍālī.

Marathi Sarodā is the same as Rajasthani Ḍākot:

There is evidence to believe that the folk astrologers in Maharashtra called ‘Sarode’ (singular: Sarodā) are the same as the Ḍākots of Rajasthan. In his

well-known work on the castes of Bombay, Kalelkar notes that the Ḍākots came to lower Maharashtra from Varhāḍa,²⁴⁵ and their alternative name is ‘Ḍākojī’.²⁴⁶ Ḍākojī seems to be a corrupt form of Ḍākot. Eknātha has composed a Bhāruḍa on the Sarode where one can easily see that the Ḍākot and Sarode are one and the same people. Eknātha’s Sarodā says:

ātām sāṅgatoṃ eka śakuna barā ||
kāhīm maja saravadyāsa dāna karā || ||
dāna dyāvayacī soya dharā ||
cauryānyashī lakṣa pherā cukela kīm ji rājāṃno || ||
vāsaneceṃ kāle ciraguṭa ||
mīpaṇācī bandhoni moṭa || ||
viṣayavāsanecī soḍoni gāṃṭha ||
dāna śreṣṭha karā kī ji rājāṃno ||
ākāśācī gheuni vāṭī ||
triguṇa-tela bharūni tāṭī || ||
dāna karitām uṭhāuṭhī ||
vokhaṭī pīḍā ṭalela kīm ji rājāṃno || ||

These few lines amply demonstrate that functions such as fortune-telling, performing religious rituals, and accepting donations to appease various planets,²⁴⁷ were ascribed to the Ḍākota Brāhmins. The alternative name of ‘Ḍākojī’ for the Marathi Sarodā, and the description of Sarodā in Eknātha’s Bhāruḍa should leave us in no doubt that the Marathi Sarode and Rajasthani Dakots are one and the same. However, there is really no need to depend upon conjectures to prove this point. Eknātha, at the end of the Bhāruḍa quoted above, has used the name ‘Ḍākulatā’ for ‘Sarodā’ as can be seen in the two couplets below.

ḍākulatā jhālā cālatām ||
parantu na ye bolāvitām || ||
nirmaḷapadīm vāstavytā ||
jhālā ḍākulatā ki ji rājāṃno || ||

245. Translator’s Note: Also known as Amarāvati, Varhāḍa is a part of Western India. Varhāḍa and Nagpur together form the ancient Vidrarbha.

246. *Mumbai Ilākhyātila Jātī*: G. M. Kalelkar. pp. 290-291.

247. Translator’s Note: It is customary in Hindu folk religion to donate oil, black cloth and black coloured items to appease planets, especially Saturn. Not all Brāhmins will accept such donation (Dāna), the Ḍākoṭa Brāhmins are one of those who would.

There should now be no doubt whatsoever, that Sarodā, Ḍākulatā and Ḍākot are one and the same. The Sarodā, who roamed around the villages in Maharashtra and told people their fortunes, is in fact a member of a particular caste from Rajasthan. It would come as a great surprise to the scholars of Marathi folk culture that this particular caste is present in Rajasthan in large numbers.

We have already seen that the sayings which are popular in Rajasthan under the name of 'Ḍaṅka-Bhaḍḍalī Conversations', are known collectively as 'Bhaḍḍalī-Purāṇa'.²⁴⁸ All of them deal with forecasting rains etc., for the purpose of agriculture. I quote below some of these for the sake of the reader. All of them contain the wording, 'Ḍaṅka kahai he bhaḍḍalī' (Lit. Ḍaṅka says, hay bhaḍḍalī).

*parbhāte meha ḍambarā, sounje silā bāva ॥
ḍaṅka kahai he bhaḍḍalī, kālā taṇā subhāva ॥ ॥*

(Lit. Ḍaṅka says, hay bhaḍḍalī! If the clouds start running across the skies in the morning, and if in the evening the cool wind blows, then understand that famine would result).

*sāvana pahalī pañcamī, jhīnī chhānta paḍai ॥
ḍaṅka kahai he bhaḍḍalī, saphalau rūkha phalai ॥ ॥*

(Lit: Ḍaṅka says, hay bhaḍḍalī! If on the fifth day of the second half of the month of Śrāvaṇa, even if it rains a few drops, then the rains would be good that year and there would be ample fruit).

*poha sabimbhala pekhaje caita niramala canda ॥
ḍaṅka kahai he bhaḍḍalī, maṇa hūtā ana manda ॥ ॥*

(Lit: Ḍaṅka says, hay bhaḍḍalī! If one sees dark clouds in the month of Pauśa, and one keeps seeing a beautiful moon in the month of Caitra, then the grains would be cheaper than one rupee per maṇa).²⁴⁹

248. In Rajasthan, Bhaḍḍalī Purāṇa exists both in prose and poetry. The entire corpus of the prose, Bhaḍḍalī Purāṇa, along with an introduction, has been published by Śivasimha Choyal in the July 1958 issue of 'Marubhārati'. (Issue No.2, Year 6, pp. 40-45). The Poṭhī Mr. Choyal quotes is dated Samvat 1787 (Caitra Śuddha tṛtīyā).

249. Translator's Note: A Maṇa is a unit of weight in India which is between 11 to 37 kilograms, depending on the locality in India.

bhādarave jaga relasī, je chhaṭa anurādhā hoyā ||
ḍaṅka kahai he bhaḍḍaḷī, cinta karauna koyā || ||

(Lit: Ḍaṅka says hay bhaḍḍaḷī!, if the constellation Anurādhā reins on the sixth day of the second half of the month of Bhādrapada, then there would be ample rain, do not at all worry!).

citrā dīpaka cetave, swāte gobaradhanna ||
ḍaṅka kahai he bhaḍḍaḷī, athaga nīpaje anna || ||

(Lit: Ḍaṅka says hay bhaḍḍaḷī! If the festival of Diwālī occurs during the reign of the Citrā constellation, and if the constellation Swātī reigns during the festival of Govardhanapūjā, then the grain will grow-a-plenty).

Based on the above verses its resemblance with Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī's verses, is explicit.

The Bhāḍaḷīvākya in Gujrat:

Similar aphorisms exist on Bhāḍaḷī's name alone in the state of Gujarat. According to some Gujaratis, Bhāḍaḷī was a Kuṇbī woman. Others say that she was the daughter of a 'Hudaḍa' astrologer from Mārvaḍ and her father had taught her astrology.²⁵⁰ Bhāḍaḷī's aphorisms are known in Gujarat as, 'Bhāḍaḷīvākya'. A historian of the Gujarati language, Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in describing the format of these aphorisms, writes that these aphorisms primarily contain conjectures about the possibility of rains and are based mainly on observations of nature and climate over a number of years. These aphorisms are so matter of fact and crisp that they resemble Hindu Dharmasūtras. I quote below three such aphorisms along with their meanings quoted by Jhaveri.²⁵¹

śrāvaṇa pahela pāṇca dīna, meha na māṇḍe āḷa ||
piyu padhāro māḷave, hame jaśu mosāḷa ||

(Lit' Wife says to the husband, 'if it does not start raining five days before the month of Śrāvaṇa starts, you should go to Mālva for your work and I will go to

²⁵⁰. Lokasāhityācī Rūparekhā: Durga Bhagvat, p. 289.

²⁵¹. Milestones in Gujrati literature: K. M. Zhaveri. pp. 267-269.

my parental home. (That way we will both avoid the famine).

pūrab tāṇe kācabī jo āthamate sūr ||
bhaḍalī vāyaka em bhaṇe dudhe jamāḍuṃ kūr || ||

(Lit. Bhaḍalī says that if at the time of the sunset, one sees a rainbow in the east, I will feed everyone rice and milk. (which means there would be good crop in that year).

śanī āditāṃ maṅgaḷā jo podhe jadūrāya ||
cāka cadhāve medanī pṛthvī parale thāya || ||

(Lit: If the yogic sleep (yoganidrā) of the almighty falls on a Saturday, Sunday or Tuesday (which means that if the Ekādaśī [Eleventh day] in the month of Āṣāḍha falls on any of the above days), there would be so much of rain that the earth would be drowned in water).

According to Mr. Jhaveri, all of the above conjectures are based on a thorough and careful observation of the climate over a long period. Hence, they turn out to be usually very accurate. The farmers of Kāṭhiavād take the work ‘Bhaḍalīvākya’ as the last word in prophesy. Their farming calendar is based upon that.

Another researcher and historian of Gujarati literature, Professor Majumdar, believes that the work Bhaḍalīvākya could not have been produced any later than the fifteenth century of the Vikram Saṃvat.²⁵² He is of the firm belief that because these aphorisms have been passed on orally, modern elements may have been added to them. However, their deeper study has convinced him of their antiquity.

The Ḍāka and Bhallarī in Bengali:

A pair very similar to Ḍaṅka and Bhaḍḍarī is to be found in Bengal and in fact all over Eastern India. There they are called Ḍāka and Bhallarī. In my opinion, the name Ḍaṅka is most probably a Sanskritization of the word Ḍaka in Rajasthan. Kanahyalal Sahal has shown that the Rajasthani word ‘Ḍākot’ has arrived from the following philological transformation from the word, ‘Ḍāka-putra’.²⁵³

252. *Lokasāhityācī Rūparekhā*: Durga Bhagvat, p.289.

253. *Ājakal*, August 1961. P. 31.

Ḍākaputra → Ḍākautta → Ḍākauta → Ḍākot

It is most interesting to note that the myths about the origin of the Ḍākas that have been circulating in Bengal and in Eastern India are very similar to those circulating about Sahadeva and Bhāḍaḷī in Maharashtra. According to Bengali belief, Ḍāka was a child of a Brāhmin father and a milkmaid mother. However, from some of his aphorisms, it appears that he chose to not to call himself a Brāhmin²⁵⁴ but a 'gvalo (goala)' instead.²⁵⁵

The main myth about Ḍāka in Bengali is as follows:

Ḍāka's father was a Brāhmin and his mother was a milkmaid. One day, this Brāhmin had gone away far from his home town when, on a particularly day on an auspicious moment, he felt that if at that moment he had intercourse with a woman, a brilliant genius will be born. At that time, he came across a milkmaid. He told her about his thought and sought intercourse with her. The milkmaid agreed. The Brāhmin also put another condition on her. It was that if a son was born out of this union, he would have to live with his father. The milkmaid agreed to that as well. This is how Ḍāka was born. When he was five years old, the Brāhmin returned and sought to take him away as per the agreement. When the father and the son were travelling, they came across fields of wheat and mustard. Ḍāka said to his father that in one of the fields, the mustard had crossed the field and was growing with the wheat. He then asked his father who should be the owner of the wheat which was growing in the mustard crop. The father replied that because the wheat was growing in a mustard field, its true owner would have to be the farmer who cultivated the mustard. Upon this, Ḍāka immediately said, 'then my father, why are you taking me away from my mother? If the owner of the seed cannot claim the right of the crop in someone else's field, then how can you can claim to have more of a right on me than my mother? The Brāhmin was amazed to hear this logic from the little boy. He said to him, 'Son! You should stay with your mother. You are a lot smarter than I am, and there is little that I can teach you'.

254. *Bangalā Sahityakā Saṅkṣipta Itihas*: Dr Satyendra, p.74.

255. Translator's Note: In Bengali language, a milkman is called 'Goala', very similar to the word 'Gavaḷī' in Marathi.

We have already seen that the Ḍākulatā caste, the subject of Marathi Saint-Poet's Bhārūḍa literature, originated from a Brāhmin father and milk-maid mother. With substantial evidence, we have also noted that the Ḍākulatā caste has its origin in the state of Rajasthan where they are called Ḍākot. One can therefore emphatically say that the Ḍākulatā in Maharashtra, Ḍaṅka and their descendants Ḍākot, and the Ḍāka in Bengal are all the same people.

The Structure of 'Ḍāka-Vacanāvalī':

No definitive information is available about Ḍāka's place of birth, his parents or his time. In a work in two volumes called, '*Ḍāka-Vacanāvalī*',²⁵⁶ there is ample information available about astrology. This goes to show that Ḍāka had excellent knowledge of astrology. Because of the fact that the aphorisms within these two volumes have been collected and published mostly from Darbhāṅgā district,²⁵⁷ most of them show a strong influence of the Maithili tongue. On the other hand, the Ḍāka aphorisms included in Grierson's 'Bihar Peasant Life', have been written mostly in Hindi and in Bhojpurī.

In many of his aphorisms, Ḍāka seems to address a 'Bhallarī'. It may well be that his wife was named 'Bhallarī' or 'Bhaḍurī'. In '*Ḍāka-Vacanāvalī*', one occasionally comes across the name 'Bhaḍḍarī' as well. Also, there are some aphorisms addressed to 'Ḍākinī' as well. Thus:

tītara paṅkha meghā uḍe oh bidhavā musakāya ||
kahe ḍāka sunu ḍākinī ū barase ī jāy ||

(Lit: If one sees clouds in the shape of the 'tītara' bird and if at that time one also sees a widow laughing, then Ḍāka says, listen. The cloud will certainly produce rain and that widow will sleep with another man).

sāvana suklā sattamī, bādara bijurī hoyā ||
kari kheti piyā, bhavanameṇ ho nicinta raha jāyā ||

(Lit: My beloved! If one sees clouds on the seventh day of the waxing moon in the first half of the month of Śrāvaṇa, then just relax and lie in bed. Crops will definitely grow. No need to worry about them).

256. '*Ḍāka-Vacanāvalī*', Author and Publisher: Kapileśvara Śarmā, Śubhankarapura, Darbhāṅgā, 1942 C.E.

257. Translator's Note: Darbhāṅgā is one of the districts of Bihār State in India

The above aphorisms are rich in Bhojpuri Hindi. However, there are several Ḍāk aphorisms available which show a strong influence of the ancient Bengali tongue. According to Bengali researchers, those aphorisms, known as 'Ḍākatantra' date back to the tenth century and they have been strongly influenced by Buddhist thought. Several Bengali Pandits have sought to understand the meaning of the term, 'Ḍāka'.

In elaborating upon these, Dr. Aśutoṣa Bhaṭṭācārya says:

The word Ḍāka is never found in any Vedic language, nor is it found in any ancient Sanskrit works in poetics. That is precisely why one wonders if the word actually originated in Sanskrit. In the Tibetan language, a word that resonates with prajñā or jñāna is the word 'Gdag'. That is why I think the word may have come from the Tibetan language.²⁵⁸

This etymology of the word Ḍāka by Dr. Bhaṭṭācārya seems to be supported by the mention of Ḍākinīs in some of the aphorisms. The word Ḍākinī means a Buddhist tantric Yoginī. It is therefore said that the word Ḍāka must belong to Buddhist tantric tradition. The following aphorisms support this view.

bhāla dravya jakhana pāva || kāli kāre tūliyā nā thoba || ||
dadhi dughdha kariyā bhoga || oṣadha diyā khaṇḍāba roga || ||
bale ḍāka eī saṃsāra || āpane majhale kiserā āra || ||

(Lit: Oh Kālī! If I come across any delectable food, why should I not taste it? I will eat yoghurt and drink lots of milk and consume medicines to keep myself healthy. Ḍāka says, 'this world is there for me only as long as I am alive. Once a person dies, who is going to care for him?').

je dei bhātaśālā pānīśālā || se nā jāy jamer purī || ||

(Lit: Those who offer free food and water to people, do not go Yama's abode).

In analysing the efforts of some scholars to find the influence of Buddhism in these aphorisms, Dr. Satyendra is of the opinion that there is nothing in these verses that can be painted as Buddhist. He adds that sayings such as 'eat,

²⁵⁸ Dr. Satyendra, *op. cit.*, p.74.

drink and be merry' and 'open free food and water donation for the needy' are well within the ambit of Hindu thought.²⁵⁹

All that this means is that the efforts by the Bengali Pandits to situate Ḍāka within the Buddhist tantric fold and thereby implying his Bengali origin are far-fetched. They have come about as a result of their pride for their State. It is however true that Ḍāka is a pan-Indian representative of folk-astrology and to that extent, he is the Bengali representative of the same. Available evidence suggests that Ḍāka's origin is much closer to the Ḍākots of Rajasthan and the Ḍāṅkulata of Maharashtra, rather than the land of Tibet.

Ghāgh and Bhaḍḍarī in the Hindi speaking area of India:

Just like the Ḍākots of Rajasthan who call themselves descendants of Ḍaṅka and Bhaḍḍarī, there is a caste called Bhaḍḍarī alias Bhaḍariyā in the areas of Vraja, Gorakhpur and Sultanpur. These people call themselves descendants of Bhaḍḍarī. Those in Vraja²⁶⁰ act as Mahābrāhmins²⁶¹ and astrologers. The Bhaḍariyā around Gorakhpur forecast people's fortune on the basis of the aphorisms of Bhaḍḍarī. In these areas, Bhaḍḍarī is considered to be a man, not a woman, which we have seen earlier. The same myth that we saw previously in relation to Sahadeva and Ḍāka also hold true here for Bhaḍḍarī and his associate Ghāgh.²⁶² The difference here is that Ghāgh's father was not just an unknown Brāhmin astrologer, but Varāhamihira, the most famous of them. Also, the female he cohabited with was not a milkmaid but a shepherdess.²⁶³

259. Dr. Satynedra, *op. cit.*, pp. 75,76.

260. Translator's Note: The Vraja is a part of central Uttar Pradesh.

261. Translator's Note: The Mahābrāhmins is a Brāhmin caste in North India. Traditionally they perform funerary rites and are also astrologers.

262. Translator's Note: There seems to be some confusion here regarding Bhaḍḍarī and Ghāgh. It is difficult to say if the confusion belongs to the original story or in the mind of Śrī Dhere when he reported this myth. Initially, Śrī Dhere says that Bhaḍḍarī's father was an astrologer. Ghāgh's father is reported to be the astrologer extraordinaire, Varāhamihira. Therefore, these two individuals and their fathers are different. Bhaḍḍarī's mother is reported to be a milkmaid in one paragraph and a servant in a king's enclave in another paragraph. There is no mention of Ghāgh's mother or Varāhamihira for that matter anywhere.

263. *Ghāgh aur Bhaḍḍarī*: Pandit Rāmanareśa Tripāthy. Introduction, p.18.

There is a myth about the birth of Bhaṭṭari which is as follows:

His mother was a milkmaid while the father was an astrologer. While the father had gone to another place on business, he suddenly realised that on a soon to occur day and at a particular time, if a woman conceives after an intercourse with him, the resultant son would be a great astrologer with the knowledge of the past, present and the future. However, on that day, his wife was not with him. He therefore proceeded to go back to his hometown. However, the auspicious time arrived before he could reach home. He knew that it was impossible to reach his wife in time and was thus very worried. At this juncture, he noticed a shepherdess and told her about this auspicious time. The shepherdess accepted his proposition and cohabited with him. This union resulted in her getting a son, whom she named Bhaṭṭar. Bhaṭṭar's mother used to work in the women's enclave of a king. When Bhaṭṭar was five, the queen got a son. The king was ecstatic. Well-known astrologers were summoned to foretell the newly born child's future. All of them unanimously predicted that the child, when it reaches adulthood, will be a horrible criminal and as a result, would put his parents in grave trouble. It was therefore advisable not to keep the child alive. After serious thought, it was decided to take the new-born child out of the capital and leave him there in the hope that foxes and other wild animals would eat him up. King's servants did just that. In the meantime, maids in the palace started cleaning the maternity area. One of the maids noticed something written on one of the walls. When she read it, it said that, 'this child is going to be most fortunate. He will have no enemy in the world'. This produced a lot of turmoil and the news eventually reached the king. After a lot of investigation, it was discovered that the writing belonged to Bhaṭṭar. When asked about it, Bhaṭṭar admitted that it was he who had written those lines. The king was cross with him and said, 'why did you write that? It is untrue because the child is already dead'. There upon Bhaṭṭar exclaimed, 'Impossible! The killer of that child is yet to be born!'. The king then said, 'if the child is dead, what punishment should be meted out to you?' Bhaṭṭar replied with confidence, 'if the child is dead, I am prepared to accept the severest of punishment'.

King's servants then went to the place where the child had been left in the wilderness. To their amazement, they saw that a ferocious cobra had coved the child's head to ward off sun. Some bees had made a honeycomb on the head of the cobra, and drops of honey were trickling down into the mouth of the child. The child was happily playing. Because of the shade given by the head of the cobra, it was protected from sun and rain. When the king heard of this, he was flabbergasted. He arrived at the place with his entourage and worshipped the cobra, who then disappeared. The king ceremoniously brought his son in the palace. From then on, Bhaḍḍar became famous all over the country and got a special place in the king's court. The king rebuked all of the astrologers who had foretold the wrong future and ordered that they be hanged. Bhaḍḍar however stopped the king doing so and told him that the astrologers were not to blame. The exact time of birth provided to them by the king's servants was wrong and hence the problem with future-telling. The king was satisfied by Bhaḍḍar's argument and the court-astrologers were thus saved from a certain death.

Some time passed. Bhaḍḍar's astrologer father now came to take away Bhaḍḍar as per the agreement between his mother and himself. Even though she was reluctant to give the child away, the father insisted on taking Bhaḍḍar away. He carried Bhaḍḍar on his shoulders and walked away. On their way, they saw a farmer who was sowing some seed. Because of the wind, the seed kept flying away into the next-door farmer's field. On witnessing this, Bhaḍḍar asked the farmer, 'the seed that is flying into your neighbour's field, will eventually grow. When it results into crop, will you collect it or will it belong to your neighbour? Upon this, the farmer said that whosoever owned the field would own the crop. Having heard this, Bhaḍḍar jumped to the ground from his father's shoulders and said to him, 'if the crop resulting from the seed that flew into another farmer's field belongs to that farmer, then my mother has the right to own me and not you, my father!' Having said this, Bhaḍḍar ran away and went to his mother. The poor father who was speechless and disappointed, walked alone towards his home.²⁶⁴

264. *Ghāgh aur bhaḍḍarīkī kahāvatē*: Ed. Devanārayaṇa Dvivedī. Introduction, pp. 1-3.

As one can see, this myth is very similar to the Bengali myth which we have seen earlier. It seems to me that Bhaḍḍarī has been wrongly called a male. This is because, in the aphorisms attributed to Ghāgh, one often sees the line, 'ghagh kahai, suna bhaḍḍarī'.

Bhaḍḍarī's North Indian companion, Ghāgh:

We have already noted that in the Hariyānī dialect of Hindi, Sahadev is normally associated with Bhaḍḍarī. However, in the Hindi speaking region, one often comes across the duo, Bhaḍḍarī and Ghāgh. In the villages of Uttar Pradesh and Bihār, the aphorisms of Ghāgh and Bhaḍḍarī are common. There are of course, minor differences within the region as such. The well-known folk-researcher Rāmanareśa Triāpathī thinks that Ghāgh was a historical figure. He has written that Ghāgh used to live in Caudharī Sarāy, one of the suburbs of Kanoj. Even to this day, his descendants live there. They call themselves 'Dubey'. During the reign of Humāyūn, Ghāgh stayed originally somewhere on the north of the river Ganga. He became popular when he was appointed to king Humāyūn's court. Later, he was appointed to Akbar's court as well. Akbar was especially fond of him and donated land to establish a village. Ghāgh did so and named the village, 'Akbarābād Caudharī Sarāya'. The village is called 'Sarāya Ghāgh' in Government records even to this date.

The village of Sarāya Ghāgh is only a mile away from the town of Kanoj on the south. It is three miles away from Kanoj station on the west. The entire village seems to be quite old. Digging only a few inches of soil produces layers of old bricks underneath. Ghāgh was highly respected in Akbar's court. He had given Ghāgh several towns as Ināma²⁶⁵ and had also given him the title, 'Caudharī'.²⁶⁶ Ghāgh's descendants have also adopted this title. Hence the alternative name 'Caudharī Sarāya'. Ghāgh had two sons, Markaṇḍeya Dube and Dhīradhara Dube. Around twenty-five of the descendants of these two sons are residents of Sarāya Ghāgh to this date.²⁶⁷

Tripāthy's accounts described above have however not been accepted by everyone.

265. Translator's Note: Ināma is a gift of land or the revenue generated from that land.

266. Translator's Note: The word Caudharī comes from the Sanskrit word, 'Cautardhārā', meaning, a 'holder of four'. This title was given by Muslim rulers to their noblemen who had accomplished valorous tasks.

267. Paṇḍit Rāmanareśa Triāpathī, *op cit.* Introduction, p. 18.

In my opinion, if one examines the true meaning of Ghāgh's aphorisms and also notices the name Bhaḍḍarī associated with these aphorisms, one comes to the conclusion that Ghāgh is the alternative name in the Hindi speaking population of India for the same individual who is called Sahadev in Maharashtra and Hariyānā, Ḍaṅka in Rajasthan and Ḍāka in Eastern India. This is also evident from the fact that myths associated with Ghāgh are very close to the ones we have seen about Sahadev, Ḍaṅka and Ḍāka.

The Aphorisms of Ghāgh and Bhaḍḍarī:

Quite a few scholars of Hindi language have published collections of the aphorisms of Ghāgh and Bhaḍḍarī with their meanings. In my opinion, the one produced by Pandit Rāmanareśa Tripathy with the title, 'Ghāgh aur Bhaḍḍarī' is perhaps the best one. Tripathy has also included these aphorisms in the third volume of the Collection of Hindi Folk Literature. Another excellent collection with the title, 'Ghāgh aur Bhaḍḍarikī Kahāvatē' has been edited by Devanārāyaṇ Dvivedi. For the interest of the Marathī readers, I have quoted below some of the aphorisms from Tripathy's work mentioned above.

*ulaṭā bādala jo caḍe ॥ vidhavā khaḍī nahāya ॥
ghāgh kahaiṃ suna Bhaḍḍarī ॥ vaha barase baha jāy ॥ ॥*

(Lit: Ghāgh says, Oh Bhaḍḍarī ! Listen to me. If, along with the wind from the east, come the clouds from west, and if a widow takes a shower upstanding, then it will most definitely rain and the widow will run away with a stranger.)

As one can see, the Ḍāka aphorism, 'tītara paṅkha meghā uḍe' is somewhat similar to the Ghāgh one described above.

*uttara camakai bijlī, pūraba bahai ju bāva ॥
ghāgh kahaiṃ bhaḍḍarse, baradhā bhītara lava ॥ ॥*

(Lit: Ghāgh says to Bhaḍḍarī that if there is lightning in the North and winds start blowing from the East, then bring the oxen under shelter, because it will rain heavily.)

Once again, the aphorism quoted a while ago in the Marathi collection in Hariyānī tongue under the heading, 'Sahadev Bhāḍaḷī' is very similar to

the one above. The only difference is that the one above replaces 'Sahadev Bhāḍaḷī' by 'Ghāgh Bhaḍḍarī'.

tītara baranī bādarī, vidhavā kājara rekh ||
ve barasaiṃ ve ghara karaiṃ kahaiṃ Bhaḍḍarī dekh || ||

(Lit: If one sees clouds in the shape of the bird Titara in the skies, and if one sees mascara in the eyes of a widow, then, Bhaḍḍarī, you will soon notice that the clouds will produce rain and the widow will have an affair with someone).

This aphorism is also remarkably similar to the one by Ḍaka, '*tītara paṅkha meghā uḍe*'.

The Local Manifestations of Indian Folk Astrology:

From our discussion so far, it would be amply clear that of the two folk-astrologers known in Maharashtra as Sahadev and Bhāḍaḷī, the latter is known in Gujarat as Bhaḍaḷī, in Rajasthan as Bhaḍaḷī or Bhaḍḍaḷī, in Uttara Pradesh and Bihar as Bhaḍḍarī and in Eastern India as Bhaḍḍaḷī. Except for South India, they are famous in most parts of India. Bhaḍaḷī's partner is known as Sahadev in Maharashtra, Ḍaṅka in Rajasthan, Ḍaka in Eastern India and Ghāgh in North India. In spite of having such different names, the myths associated with them are the same. Along with the similarity in their names, the aphorisms attributed to them are also very similar. This indicates to us that this duo, although they carried different names in different parts of India, were the same. They made folk astrology famous over a thousand years ago.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that, based on their daily observations, the common people in India formulated some firm conjectures about weather patterns. They used this information in agriculture. It is well-known that India depends heavily on agriculture and that the latter depends heavily on rain fall. It was therefore of paramount importance for the Indian farmer to know about the possibility of rain fall. In his discussion about land revenue (Sītādhyakṣa), Kauṭilya has included several conjectures regarding weather patterns. In his work Bṛhatsaṃhitā, Varāhamihira has quoted former experts in predicting climate, Garga, Parāśara, Kāśyapa and Vātsyā and with the help of their expertise, has put forward his own hypotheses about the possibility of rainfall. Varāhamihira says:

*tallakṣaṇāni munibhīryāni nibaddhāni tāni dṛṣṭvedam ॥
kriyate garga-parāśara-kāśyapa-vātsyādi-racitāni ॥ ॥*

(Lit: I have written this work after carefully studying the predictions about the signs of the possibility of rainfall as discussed by sages such as Garga, Parāśara, Kāśyapa and Vātsya).

Pandit Ramanaresh Tripathy has reproduced the verses from the Bṛhatsaṃhitā about the possibility of rainfall, in his introduction (pp. 2-4) to the book, 'Grāmasaṃhita (Vol.3). Further, he has quoted Parāśara's verses from the Vācaspatikośa in his introduction (pp. 3-5) to the work, 'Ghāgh aur Bhaḍḍarī'. Recently, Mr. Manilal Ataldas Vyas, who is a resident of Byavar,²⁶⁸ has, in his work called 'Bhāratakā Vāyusāstra', collected valuable ancient wisdom about the science of prediction of rainfall. Sāhitya-Vacaspatī Pandit Madhusudanaji Oza, in his book called, 'Kādambinī' has also done the same. Mr. Kanhaiyalal Sahal says that surprisingly, several verses contained in these two works have a striking similarity with the aphorisms of Bhāḍaḷī. In one of his articles, he has quoted the following two verses and correspondingly similar aphorisms of Bhāḍaḷī. Viz.

*ekādaśyaṃ tu śuklāyāṃ dvādaśaṃ vāpi kārṭike ॥
abhrachhannaṃ yadi nabhastadāśādhe tiṣṭvarṣati ॥ ॥*
(Kādambinī p.19)

*kātika suda ekādaśī bādala bijalī joya ॥
to asādhamen bhaḍḍarī, varṣā cokhī hoy ॥ ॥*
(Rajasthani Vacana)

māghaśukle tu saptamyāṃ vṛṣṭyāśādhethivarṣati ॥ 96 ॥
(Kādambinī p.34)

*māh sattamī ūjalī bādala meha karanta ॥
to āsāḍhām bhaḍḍalī, meha ghaṇo barasanta ॥ ॥*
(Rajasthani Vacana)

In commenting on this similarity, Mr. Sahal writes:²⁶⁹

'It is possible to quote many such examples. On the basis of these, one can unequivocally say that the verses about the possibility of rainfall in Ra-

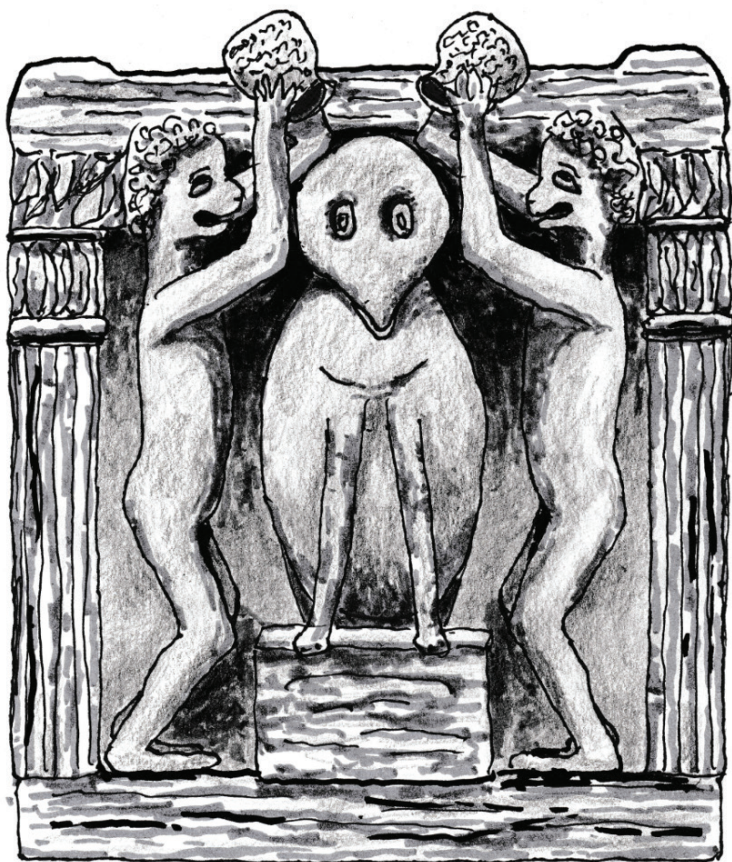
²⁶⁸. Translator's Note: Byavar is an important city in Central Rajasthan.

²⁶⁹. Translator's Note: Dr. Dhare has quoted this in Hindi. The translation is mine.

jasthan, Bihar and Saṃyukta Prānta have come into local languages from ancient Sanskrit sources. It is equally possible that ancient experiences about rainfall have been put into Sanskrit verse at some stage.²⁷⁰

Sahal's observations are to the point. The only things that are yet unclear is why did the public mind credit the wisdom of age-old observations to Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī. Also, one does not know if Sahadeva-Bhāḍaḷī did ever exist and if so, what time? It is difficult at this stage to answer these questions satisfactorily. We have already seen that castes such as Ḍākot and Bhaḍariyā who claim their ancestry to Sahadev and Bhāḍaḷī, still exist to this day in areas such as Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh and the North-West of India. It is therefore possible that Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī's original abode may have been in one of these provinces. From our current knowledge, it is possible to say that Sahadev-Bhāḍaḷī probably existed somewhere around the eleventh or the twelfth century CE.

270. *Ājakaḷ*, August 1961, p.31



Worship of Śakunī

Chapter Nine

The Worship of Bālagrahās

Whenever I hear news about the discoveries of ancient archaeological finds, my mind is instantly filled with an irresistible warmth and curiosity. I start feeling that I am now about to hear news of a hitherto unknown ancient and mysterious stream of life, the thought processes of the people who belonged to that stream, their beliefs and their cultural make-up. Unfortunately, however, this curiosity gives way to a total sense of disappointment most of the time. This is because such discoveries are mired into artefacts which are nothing but inanimate objects which cannot speak for themselves. Their inability to express themselves totally destroys my curiosity about them.

Thankfully, this state does not last long. My disappointed mind develops a fresh surge of enthusiasm and I start re-examining such artefacts with a new vision and vigour. The answers which I seek are often found in our everlasting and continuous tradition.

Archaeology and 'thatness' of Folk Life:

The visible form of this tradition is not only seen in village life on a regular basis, but it also manifests itself in the literature of yesteryear. I call this the principle of 'thatness' of folk life. Archaeology notices and studies the old, now-extinct streams of human life. However, the folk mind sees the ever-present 'thatness' of human endeavour. Archaeology can never hide the material aspect of ancient artefacts. However, the folk mind on the other hand, once it is touched by such artefacts, discards their physical attributes and opens up vistas impossible to be seen by physical archaeology. That is why I seriously believe that archaeology must always form a strong bond with folk 'thatness'.

When I read the extensive writing of the great scholar Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal, I always notice the extreme importance of a strong bond between archaeology and folk religion. Throughout his literary life, Aggrawal followed the dictum by Maharṣi Vyāsa that

pratyakṣadarśi lokānām sarvadarśi bhavennaraḥ ||

(Lit: One who observes people at first hand, becomes knowledgeable in everything).

By following this mantra for his entire life, Aggrawal made people aware of the all-encompassing scope of knowledge. In relation to some of the items discovered this year²⁷¹ during the excavations in Maharashtra, I once again discovered the inordinate importance of the 'thatness of folk life'. In order to understand the importance of ancient artefacts for studying the life of our ancestors, I feel that one must resort to the essence of folk culture. With this in mind, I am following in the footsteps of Vasudevasharanji and putting forward my thoughts about these excavations.

The Excavated Images from Ināmgaṇ:

One of my close friends, Ramchandra Lambodar Bhide, is a very keen researcher. In October 1967, he discovered some hillocks on the banks of the river Ghodanadi (Taluka Śirur, Dist. Pune). These hillocks were full of ancient artefacts. The news of this find went to the well-known archaeologist from Deccan College, Dr. H. D. Sankaliya who inspected the hillocks personally. Thus began the excavation of these sights on behalf of the Deccan College, Pune in the winter of 1968. The most surprising aspect of these hills was that they had not been inhabited after the

stone and copper ages with subsequent layers as it usually happens. Thus, a hundred thousand years old stone age implements and weapons, and petrified bones of elephants and oxen were found at this site. Another surprise thing was the discovery of a three and half thousand-year-old complete and self-sustaining village, inhabited by farm-based people which was buried underneath. Several artifacts belonging to these proto-farmers of the village which display many aspects of the daily life of these farmers

271. Translator's Note: Dr. Dhare is referring to the year 1968 when archaeologists found a treasure trove of ancient artefacts in a place called Inamgaon near Pune in Maharashtra.

have been found by archaeologists. Among this varied collection, the most important are the clay-images of goddess.

In carefully examining one of the homes at this excavation site, Drs. Zainuddin Ansari and Madhukar Dhavaḷikar found a deliberately made ditch within. On carefully excavation of this ditch, they found an earthen box. On top of this box lay a female figurine. Right next to her was an earthen ox. One would therefore think that this ox would have been next to the female figure and then fell off during excavation. Around they also found a circular ditch. The earthen box is egg-shaped. Its measurements were: length 12 centimetres, Width, 5 centimetres, and the height 6 centimetres. The lid of the box is very well made. Both of its sides are taller than the box itself and they project inwardly. As a result, when closed, the lid fits very tightly (see figures 4 and 5).

On opening the box, they found the image of a female inside. There was a major difference between the female figure on top of the box and the one above the box. The female on top of the box had no head. It was also felt that she was particularly made that way. This is because the rest of the measurements between the two figurines were similar. In the making of the two figurines, apart from elevated and large breasts, there was nothing special in the two figurines. The hands and mouth were rather small.²⁷²

Dr. Sankaliya's Conclusions:

I have quoted above the words in which Dr. Sankaliya described the earthen images. In view of the shape and size of the two images and also the articles surrounding them, Dr. Sankaliya thinks that both of these images are those of a young lady. He also thinks that they were worshipped daily in the form of goddesses. His main supportive argument for this assumption is the fact that they found a semicircular object above the box. This was not an ordinary object. It must have been made for a female figurine to stand against it to support her in a standing position. This leads one to the conclusion that the place where this box was found must have been the room where the shrine of the gods (Devaghara) was located in the household. Even to this date, thousands of households in India are constructed to keep the house of gods next

²⁷². Dr. H. D. Sankaliya's article in the Kesari of 16 of May, 1971. Title: Maharashtra's Adimātā. Translator: Prabhakar Kulkarni.

to the kitchen. This is because most of the households are simply unable to construct a separate room for the shrine of the gods. For the sacredness and safety, an area next to the kitchen is very convenient and that is why most Indians use this area and also some boxes to store materials for the worship. It seems that exactly the same kind of thinking must have led to the households at Ināmgāv.²⁷³

Not used as Images for the Daily Worship:

These images and other associated artefacts are now placed in the archaeology museum of Deccan College and I have inspected all of them. The very first thing one notices about them is the fact that they are all made out of unfired clay. That is why it was difficult for the archaeologists to take them out without breaking them. They started breaking up as soon as one touched them. The archaeologists had to design special glues to keep them intact and thus take them out in one piece. One does not have to be a specialist potter to know that clay images which are for daily use cannot be made out of unfired clay. Also, in the excavation at Ināmgāv, a large number of clay pots and other artefacts, which are made out of fired clay, have been found. In fact, Dr. Sankaliya himself said that all of these pots were extremely well fired.²⁷⁴ Given this background, I find it difficult to concur with Dr. Sankaliya's conclusions that images made of unfired clay were used in daily worship at Ināmgāv.

It is well-known that one uses images made out of unfired clay only for specific religious ritual performances. One makes an image of the deity concerned for this purpose only, worships it and then farewells it by immersion into water. The image of Nāgobā-the snake at Nāgapañcamī, the image of Gokūla on Gokūlāṣṭamī, the image of Gaṇeśa for Gaṇeśacaturthī and the images of oxen on the festival of Poḷā are typical examples of such images. Once one finishes the particular worship ritual, one immerses such temporary images in water to say goodbye to them. Only those images that are worshipped on a daily basis are made out of permanent mediums.

I am sure Dr. Sankaliya is well aware of the differences between unfired and well-fired clay images and the different uses they are put to. In relation

273. Sankaliya, *Op. Cit.*

274. *Tāmrpāṣāṇayugīna Maharashtra-Ināmgāv Utkhanana* (1968-69). Dr. H.D. Sanklia, Dr. Zainuddin Ansari, and Dr. Madhukar Dhavalikar. Deccan College, Pune. (Abridged Introductory Report on the first session of the Excavations at Ināmgāv), pp. 5-6.

to the male images found at Ināmgāv, Dr. Sankaliya has said that ‘these types of male images have never been found anywhere else.’ Also, they are made out of unfired clay and hence they would have been used only on special occasions. Even to this date, Marathi villagers make images of Gaṇeśa out of wheat flour for special occasions. Such images bear remarkable resemblance to the male images found in excavations. One therefore wonders how this tradition has lasted for over three thousand years.²⁷⁵

To reiterate then, Dr. Sankaliya is perfectly right when he says that images made out of unfired clay are used only on special occasions for specific needs. It therefore follows that the female images at Ināmgāv would have been used only for specific purposes on special occasions.

The Iconography of Ināmgāv Images:

A few questions now arise out of our discussion so far. Firstly, which particular goddesses do these images represent? Secondly, within the regime of their worship, what particular occasion or worship requirement led to their being moulded in this fashion? One normally identifies images by examining the details of their iconography. However, unfired earthen images, and those too made for a specific worship just a few days before the ceremony, have, unfortunately, no specific identifiers or characteristics. These images are very simply made. One takes a lump of wet clay in the hand, presses it gently to make a longish shape, pulls two strands from one end to make the feet, similarly, pulls two strands from the other end to make the two hands, and finally presses the middle of that side to make a circle to represent the face. That is all, the image is now made. If the image happens to represent a goddess, then one simply attaches two small lumps under the face to represent the breasts. No other apparel is required, and no other ornaments are required. The images at Ināmgāv have been made using the above formula. There is no finesse in their bodily aspect. There is however one thing that one cannot fail noticing about these images. Their breasts are too long and do not look natural. Also, one of the images has no head at all. The one who is completely made, has a hole in her stomach. A similar hole appears in the back of the ox. The reason for this is obvious. If one sticks a stick into the ox’s back and then attaches the other end of the stick to the hole in the image’s stomach, the ox becomes

275. *Ibid.* p.7.

the carrier of the image. One also needs to think about the reason for the box-container and the semi-circular edges of the receptacle.

As we saw before, both of these images have very long breasts (Lambapayodharā). Also, one of them has no head (Viśirā) and the other one sits on her vehicle, an ox (Vṛṣavāhanā). We have to learn more about them through these peculiar characteristics.

The Universal Worship of Mother-Goddesses:

In my opinion, these images are those of the divine mother. During the excavations at Ināmgāv, many other images and artefacts were found which have shed light on the devotional beliefs and understanding of the people belonging to the Copper and Stone ages. Among them are the images in fired clay of mother-goddesses. In describing them in detail, Dr. Sankaliya says:

they are not symmetrically proportioned. There has been no attempt to show the various features of the face. The things one notices are the angular head, short and thick hands and feet and the breasts. Similar kind of images have been found at Nuzī at Iraq. This suggests that that these people may have had contact with the people in Western Asia.²⁷⁶

When one looks at the reports about the findings of goddess images in excavations all over the world, it becomes clear that the worship of the mother-goddess was spread universally.

The Antiquity of Mother-Goddesses:

Humans imagined godhood firstly in the female form. They also saw it in her motherhood and worshipped it. The woman who creates new life and the earth who does the same, have both been the subject of human curiosity, awe and respect. The celebration of the new-born in the life of both of these two females has been lauded by humans in the same language, using the

²⁷⁶. *Ibid*, p.7.

same metaphors. Both of them have been described as,²⁷⁷ *ṛtumatī*, *puṣpavatī* and *phalavatī*. Terms used in agriculture such as *kṣetra*, *lāṅgala*, and *bīja*, etc. are also the terms used to describe the generative aspect both of the Mother Earth and the human female. Because of their ability to procreate new life, both the mother earth and the human female became objects of worship by humans. For the past twenty thousand years, humans have been worshipping the mother in the form of a goddess.

One must however remember that the reason for this worship is two-fold. The impulse for this worship is both devotion and fear. Motherhood is both protective and devouring. It is auspicious as well as horrific. This is how the early humans thought of motherhood. That is why he instituted complex worship rituals and procedures to appease the devouring aspect of the female, made offerings of *bali* and instituted *vratas* which included severely punishing the body through self-sacrifice.

People who know tell us that a lioness consumes almost all of her litter after delivery. Apart from a lucky couple, the rest of them become her food. It is a cruelty of fate that the moment a cub is born, it is welcomed by its very mother by offering it certain death. The closest possible relation that is designed to protect, becomes the messenger of death instead. Death is thus inevitable at the very birth. Humans seem to have accepted this horrendous and gory truth. With a terrified mind, they have chosen to worship it.

There are innumerable such Mother Goddesses who are the subjects of human awe, dread and, at the same time, devotion. They have presented themselves as miraculous, yet dangerous, benign, yet hostile and malignant and devourers, yet protectors. The regimen of their propitiation is complex and demanding and is reflected in the intricate and inaccessible nature of the devotee's worship. It is in this rather inaccessible and personal form of worship that the seeds of human thought and endeavour were sown. This

277. Translator's Note: All three of these words are homonyms, i.e. carry two meanings: When a woman gets her monthly periods, she is then ready for the male seed. This is when she is called *ṛtumatī*, one who has got her period. For Mother-Earth, change of seasons is thought to be equivalent to her getting her 'periods.' Spring is the season when she is thought to conceive and produce flowers, fruit etc. *puṣpavatī* literally means one who has flowered. This is of course the next stage to getting ready to conceive. In a human female, *puṣpavatī* is someone who has produced a child. For Mother Earth, she is the one who has produced flowers. *Phalavatī* is someone who has conceived and produced an offspring in a human female. For mother Earth, she is the one who has now produced the fruit, and progeny in human development.

eventually led to the complexities that one sees in the approaches to worship today.

The Broader Conclusions of Archaeology:

In the artefacts that have been found in excavations all over the world, there have been a large number of Mother Goddess images. Unfortunately, archaeology can tell us little about their history, biography or character. Archaeological conclusions, by their very nature, are essentially broad and are connected mainly with the age of the find and the connection with the place they were found. In this regard, Dr. Sankaliya's comments about the excavations at Ināmḡāva are typical of the way archaeologists think. He says:

Humans had realised the importance of the female form over twenty thousand years ago. Female figures such as these (found at Ināmḡāv) carved out of ivory, bone and soft stone have been found by archaeologists all over Europe. It appears that they travelled from Europe to Cyprus, Crete, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, eventually reaching India.²⁷⁸

These kinds of conclusions do little to satisfy the curiosity and thirst for knowledge of the intelligent reader. The populace's belief in the supernatural essentially engulfs all aspects of human endeavour. For most people, it touches a chord within. It holds an important and inspirational position in a person's entire life. For the tribals, such beliefs hold the utmost importance. That is why, when such a belief assumes the physical form of a god or goddess, it becomes but natural for the devotee to develop a highly specialized regime for the appeasement of the deity concerned. He also develops a keen desire to understand the intricacies and the nuances within the worship process. A successful interaction between the devotee and an expert is only possible if a meaningful dialogue develops between them. That is when something out of the ordinary is exchanged between the two of them. That is when the imparted knowledge is meaningfully imbibed by the seeker.

²⁷⁸. Kesari Newspaper, 16th of May, 1971.

Lambapayodharā and Viśirā:

Within the Indian mythological tradition, one comes across Mother Goddesses with names and associated myths such as Mātā, Mātṛukā, Yoginī and Jātahāriṇī etc. It is my sincere belief that only through knowing and understanding the essence of these mythological tales that one would be able to appreciate the mystery and inner nature of these goddesses. It will also inform us of their biography and the mode of their worship. Through this lens, we would then be able to understand the devotees who worship these deities.

Comprehensive lists of Mātṛkās are found in Indian literature in several places such as The Mahābhārata, Matsyapurāṇa, Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa and the Devibhāgavata. They are also found in minor Purāṇas such as the Adbhutarāmāyaṇa, various lexicons, mantra-tantra hymns, and works on iconography and stone inscriptions. In the current context, we need to examine three of these Mātṛkās: Lambapayodharā, Viśirā and Govāhanā. To this end, I believe that the list of the Mātṛkā names in the Śalyaparva of the Mahābhārata would be useful. The event is the anointing of Skanda. On this occasion, Vaiśampāyana is introducing the Mātṛkās who are followers of Kumāra (Skanda). He says:

yaśāsvinīnām mātṛṇām śṛṇu nāmāni bhārata ||
yābhīryāptāstrayo lokāḥ kalyāṇībhisca bhāgaśaḥ || ||
 (Mahābhārata, Śalyaparva, 46.2)

(Lit: Oh King! Listen to the names of those auspicious Mātṛkās who have occupied parts of the three worlds).

With this introduction, Vaiśampāyana has put together the names of the Mātṛdevatās. These names reflect the outer form as well as the innate nature of these goddesses. Some of their features are strange limbs, unusual complexion, and strange sound and unusual attire. All of these have been described by Vaiśampāyana as follows:

śakravāryopamā yuddhe, dīptā vanhisamāstathā ||
śatrūṇām vighahe nityaṃ bhayadāstā bhavantyuta || ||
kāmarūpadharāścaiva jave vāyusamāstathā ||
acintyabalavīryāśca tathācintyaparākramāḥ || ||
ṛkṣhacatvaravāsīnyāścatusyathaniketanāḥ ||

guhāśmaśānavāsinyaḥ śailaprastravaṇālayāḥ ॥
nānābharaṇadhārīṇyo nānāmālyāmbārāstathā ॥
nānāvicitraveṣāsca nānābhāṣāstathaiva ca ॥

(The Mahābhārata, Śalyaparva. 46.40-43)

(Lit. The Mātṛkās are as valorous as Indra on the battlefield, lustrous like fire, fearsome towards the enemies, having the ability to change their form at will, as fast as wind, full of extraordinary strength, capable of showing incredible heroism and bravery, residing under large trees and in caves, cremation grounds, mountains and streams, able to talk in many languages and wearing a variety of different attires).

The names of these Mātṛkās themselves are worth a detailed study. For our purpose, we need to examine the following three names.

amoghā caiva kauravya tathā lambapayodharā ॥

(Mahābhārata, Śalyaparva. 46.21)

lambodaryo lambakarṇāstathā lambapayodharā ॥

(Mahābhārata, Śalyaparva. 46.35)

naukarṇī mukhakarṇī ca viśirā manthinī tathā ॥

(Mahābhārata, Śalyaparva. 46.29)

It is here that we come across the two Mātṛkās, *Lambapayodharā* (one with long breasts) and *Viśirā* (one without a head).

Govāhanā alias Vṛṣavāhanā:

We will now embark on the search for Govāhanā alias Vṛṣavāhanā in the female images found at Ināmgāv. As soon as one thinks of a Vṛṣa vehicle for a goddess, one thinks of Māheśvarī of the Saptamātṛkās. The Śloka says:

brāhmī māheśvarī caiva kaumārī vaiṣṇvī tathā ॥
vārāhī ca tathendrāṇī cāmuṇḍā saptamātaraḥ ॥

These, according to the Śloka above, are the seven mother goddesses. One finds them in Vedic literature as well. However, the above names and the corresponding biographies and iconographies seem to be a later phenomenon.

One finds many alternative names for the seven mothers. However, the ones above seem to have been so named by assuming them to be the consorts of seven gods, starting with Brahmā. Naturally, Māheśvarī, being the wife of Śiva, carries all of his distinguishing features. Śiva's vehicle is an ox and so it is of her too. However, the Ināmgāv goddess that we have come across is over three and half thousand years old. Naturally, she is older than Māheśvarī. That is why one needs to look for her in the form of another goddess with the ox as her vehicle.

This goddess with a cow or an ox as her vehicles is found elsewhere in the Mahābhārata. The scene is from the *Skandopākhyana* of the *Vanaparva*. It describes goddesses who are dangerous for children. They occupy the maternity home for twelve days, are highly dangerous for children up to the age of sixteen and love eating meat and honey.

It is particularly worth remembering the description of Śakunī :

gavāṃ mātā tu yā prājñaihi kathyate surabhīrṇṛpa ||
śakunīstāmathāruhya saha bhuñkte śīśūn bhuvi ||

(Mahābhārata, Vanaparva, 230.33)

(Lit: Oh, King! The wise people call the mother of all cows, 'Surabhi'. Śakunī rides her and eats the young children in this world.

It will be clear from this description that a cow is the vehicle of the mother goddess, Śakunī.

The Deities of the Bālagraha Category:

It is worth remembering specifically that the Matr̥devatās that we have come across, although for a very short time, namely, Lambapayodharā, Viśirā and Govāhanā are the goddesses of the pantheon of Skanda and they are dangerous to young children. Such deities are called *Bālagrahas*. Although this category of deities involves both male and female deities, it has a predominance of the females, i.e. The Mothers. Skanda, the representative of the male deities is considered to be the son of all of these female goddesses. That is why he declares:

mātarō hi bhavatyo me bhavatīnāmahaṃ sutaḥ ||

(Mahābhārata, Vanaparva, 230.15)

(Lit: You are all my mothers and I am your son).

Skanda, the valorous son, is the only one who can control their cruelty. No one else is capable of doing so. The child devouring form of motherhood in the guise of these mothers has become the object of worship by humans. There has been a firm belief ever since ancient times that an accidental death of child is caused by these goddesses. This superstition was also responsible for the creation of highly elaborate and complex worship procedures for the appeasement of these dreadful deities. Out of the hundreds of rituals developed specifically for these dreadful mothers and their sons, many of the well-known and benign deities emerged. The story of the development and evolution of these primordial mothers brings into light the rich tapestry of the world of Indian deities.

The influence of Bālagrahas still persists in Indian thoughts today. The importance of appeasing these deities during natal rituals (Jātakarma) has been stressed by the early scriptures such as the Gṛhyasūtras to the more recent essays in great detail. The Kaumārabhr̥tyatantra of Āyurveda lists a large number of secondary problems and diseases produced by these godlings. Major works on Āyurveda such as Kāśyapasamhitā, Suśrutasaṃhitā, Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha, Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya and Kumāratantra are all replete with discussion about the Bālagrahas. Even to this day, one worships Śaṣṭhī (Saṭwāī) on the sixth day of the birth of a child. Also, one draws a picture of Jīvantikā (Jivti) on a Friday in the month of Śrāvaṇa and worships her.

Although a serious and detailed study of the Bālagrahas in relation to their place in the overall study of Indian gods and goddesses is highly important, in our present discussion, it is enough to record such importance.²⁷⁹

The Images of Bālagrahas in Unfired Clay:

We have noted above that the excavated images from Ināmgāv are those of the mothers who are dangerous for children and who belong to the Bālagraha category. This has been proven by their identity with the mothers, Lambapayodharā, Viśirā and Vṛṣavāhanā. We now need to consider the medium of unfired clay.

279. Translator's Note: Dr. Dhare comments here that he has recently published a separate volume on the importance of the *Bālagrahas* as deities.

The ritual of the appeasement of the Bālagrahas (Bālagrahasāntī) involves making images of them in unfired clay or in wheat flour. They are then worshipped with specific items of the pūjā ritual. The food they like, known as 'baḷi', is left at the corner of an intersection of the main streets. In the Kumāratantra composed by Rāvaṇa, rituals to appease the twelve female Bālagrahas who possess the children from day one of the birth to the twelfth day of birth have been prescribed.²⁸⁰ These twelve goddesses are: Nandanā, Sunandā, Pūtanā, Mukhamuṇḍikā, Kaṭapūtanā, Śakunikā, Śuṣkarevatī, Āryakā, Sūtikā, Niṛtā, Pilipichhikā and Kāmukā. Out of these, for the appeasement (Śāntividhī) of four of these Matṛkās, namely, Nandanā, Pūtanā, Mukhamuṇḍikā and Sūtikā, it has been recommended that

naddubhayataṭamruttikāṃ gṛhītvā puttalikāṃ kṛtvā .. balirdeyaḥ,

(Lit. Soil from both banks of a river should be taken, and an image of the Matṛkā concerned should be made and offered as a sacrifice.)²⁸¹

For the appeasement of Kaṭapūtanā, it is suggested that her image should be made by taking the soil under the potter's wheel. On the other hand, for the appeasement of Niṛtā, the soil used should be from the bank of a sea. Such formulaic descriptions from the Kumāratantra for the appeasement of the Bālagrahas inform us that for the ritual of Śāntī, images of the particular Grahas were made out of unfired clay. After the elaborate worship procedure, these images were then dispersed in water.

Long-breasted Pūtanā:

The Kumāratantra has included Pūtanā as a goddess dangerous for young children and has advised people to make an idol of her in unfired clay and worship her. Pūtanā is perhaps the most important goddess in the *Bālagrahas*. She is, in fact, so powerful that it is considered adequate to conduct only her worship, for appeasing any *Bālagraha*. Thus, one invokes any *Bālagraha* simply by invoking her and doing a prāṇapratīṣṭhā²⁸² of that *Graha* through

280. *Kumāratantram*: Lakṣmī-Vyankateśvara Press Prakāśana, Mumbai, Śaka 1875, pp. 1-13.

281. Sanskrit: nadyubhayataṭamṛttikāṃ gṛhītvā, puttalikāṃ kṛtvā....balirdeyāḥ ||

282. Translator's Note: The Prāṇapratīṣṭhā ritual is performed in order to bring life into a freshly made image of a god. It involves uttering bijamantras (seed mantras) and worshipping prāṇaśakti, the energy which gives life.

her.²⁸³ This ritual of Śānti for any graha through her agency has been described in an unpublished work²⁸⁴ in Marathi as follows:

One should bring soil from both banks of a river. One then makes a doll with two arms and long breasts. This image is then placed in a cupel²⁸⁵ (round broken earthenware piece) and worshipped. Red sandalwood paste, red flowers and Bel leaves²⁸⁶ are offered. Guggu-
ḷa,²⁸⁷ incense is offered through a sheep horn and a sweat is then offered. Finally, cooked rice covered with Kumkum powder are offered as Baḷi. Worship of the Baḷi is performed by chanting the following mantra:

Om, Rāvaṇāya han han munca munca trāsaya trāsaya svāhā ॥

Having chanted this mantra, the worshipped doll is then waved in front of the child in the southern direction and placed four Ghatikās before sunset on the side road in the village square.

The detail that is most important for us in this ritual is the fact that an image of Pūtanā with long breasts and two arms was made by collecting the raw earth from both the banks of the river.

Pūtanā: Kaṃsās Maidservant:

We have learned Pūtanā's biography from a scene in the story of Kṛṣṇa as it appears in the 10th Skandha of the Bhāgavata. In the biography of Kṛṣṇa in the Harivaṃśa, Pūtanā has been described as Śakunī, which means a female bird

283. Translator's Note: The Saṅkalpa (a resolution) performed for this ritual says: bālasya śarīrasthitasarvagraha śānthyatham sarvagrahabalim brāhmaṇadvārā vā kariṣye svayam vā kariṣye ॥ The items to be offered are then offered by saying, 'sarvagrahādhipataye hum faṭ svāhā'.

284. Bhāratiya Itihās Samśodhana Maṇḍal, Poṭhīśālā, Poṭhī, No. 22,513. (Pūtanāvidhiḥ), Pune.

285. Known in Sanskrit as 'Khāpar'.

286. Translator's Note: Bel (Aegle marmelos) known in Sanskrit as 'Bilva' is a sacred plant, known commonly as wood apple. Its leaves are offered to gods and goddesses, in particular, to the deities of the Śaivite pantheon.

287. Translator's Note: Gugguḷa, Indian myrrah, is a yellowish fragrant gum resin produced by the Gugguḷa tree (Commiphora wightii and Commiphora mukul). It is used as an incense.

with feathers. She has also been described as a servant of Kaṃsā when it says:

dhātṛī kaṃsasya bhojasya pūtaneti pariśrtā ||

(Harivaṃśa, Viṣṇuparva 6.22)

Dhātṛī means a maidservant who has been employed to breastfeed a baby in place of the real mother. This maidservant of Kaṃsa was wanting to kill the baby Kṛṣṇa by feeding him with the poison in her breasts. A Dhātṛī's worthiness and capability obviously depends upon her healthy and full breasts and the nourishing milk they provide. In Ayurvedic literature, careful examination of such a Dhātṛī has been urged. The Bālagrahas possess Dhātṛīs similar to the way they possess children. Then through this Dhātṛī they harm little children. Pūtanā is one such Bālagraha who takes over a Dhātṛī and through her kills a child. The Kāśyapasaṃhitā has given details of whichever Bālagrahas affect the milk of the Dhātṛī, as follows:

śakunī kaṭutiktake || ||

skandaṣṭīgrahau jneyau vyāpanne sānnipātike ||

*pūtanā swadukaṭuke śāṣāḥ saṃśṛṣṭadoṣajāḥ ||*²⁸⁸

(Lit: If the flavour of the milk becomes bitter, one should assume that the Dhātṛī has been possessed by the graha 'Śakunī'. If it seems that the milk has a mixture of a few different unpleasant flavours, then one has to assume that two Bālagrahas, Skanda and Ṣaṣṭhī have possessed the Dhātṛī. If on the other hand, the milk at the same time tastes sweet as well as bitter, then it is Pūtanā who has afflicted the Dhātṛī).

The affliction by the Bālagraha Pūtanā happens through the breast milk of the Dhātṛī, and that is why her breasts are specifically shown to be long and pronounced. This also explains to us as to why she has been mentioned as the maidservant of Kaṃsa and why she is attempting to kill Kṛṣṇa by feeding him her breast milk. The Mahābhārata's description of Śakunī as one with long breasts and one whose vehicle is a cow is now easily seen. One can also see why the Harivaṃśa considers Śakunī and Pūtanā as one and the same. Having examined all of these facts, one can very easily deduce that the earthen image with long breasts and the cow as the vehicle must therefore be none other than Pūtanā.

²⁸⁸. *Kāśyapasaṃhitā*: Ed. Pandit Hemarajasharma, Shree Satyapal, Varanasi, 1953, p. 6.

Viśirā Mukhamaṇḍikā:

We have already noted that one of the images discovered during the excavations at Ināmgāv was a goddess without a head. We have also seen that one of the names of the Maṭṭkas mentioned in the Śālyaparva of the Mahābharāta is 'Viśirā'. Although this name is only a descriptor, we have, as a result of it, been able to discover details of the class of goddesses that this excavated goddess at Ināmgāv belongs to. We were able to name the long-breasted goddess with a cow as her vehicle as Pūtanā, in the same way, we are able to call this headless goddess Mukhamaṇḍikā.

Mukhamaṇḍikā is one of the goddesses who can be easily incorporated into the main *Bālagrahas*. She is known to fall the neck of the victim.²⁸⁹ It is because of her harm to the victim's neck, that her image has been made without a head. The way Pūtanā is portrayed to be long-breasted as a result of her feeding poison through her breast-milk, Mukhamaṇḍikā is the one who separates the victim's neck from the rest of the body. It is but natural to come to this conclusion.

A Ditch is not a House of Gods:

Having seen that the images made out of unfired clay are not normally the images used in the daily worship regime of a household, one can confidently say that the ditch into which these images were found at Ināmgāv is itself not something that can be claimed as a House of Gods (*Devhārā* in Marathi). Obviously, that ditch was meant for some other ritual procedure. We already know that although the appeasement procedure (Śāntī ritual) for the *Bālagrahas* is done at home, their immersion (Visarjan) is always done in the village square and not in a ditch at home. However, we also know that the images of concern to us are identical in every respect with two of the *Bālagrahas* that we know. Therefore, one needs to assume that the ditch in the corner of the house is somehow connected with the worship of the *Bālagrahas*.

In the not-too-distant past, there used to be a convention that after the baby and her mother were bathed, the water used was not allowed to flow out of the house for ten days. It is quite possible that this convention

²⁸⁹. *grīvām nāmayati iti*

is still followed in some households.²⁹⁰ The meaning of this convention is quite clear. It was meant to make sure that the waters which had touched the mother and the child should have no contact with the harmful incantations of the enemies and the evil eye of the *Bālagrahas*. In order to observe this, a ditch used to be dug in one corner of the delivery room or in a corner of the house. The water collected after the bath was poured into this ditch with the hope that it would be absorbed into the soil.

The worship of the *Bālagrahas* and the specific rituals performed for their appeasement is important mainly for the first twelve days after the birth and that is why I think that the ditch must have been there in order to absorb the water collected after bathing the mother and the new-born child. After twelve days, when the ditch was filled back with soil, the images of the *Bālagrahas* would have been buried after a specific ritual was performed. I have no doubt that the images found during the excavation at Ināmgāv would have been such goddess images.

Archaeologists have found other evidence as well to prove a continuum of worship of the *Bālagrahas*, who strongly influenced humans for over three and half thousand years, was very much in vogue in ancient India.

Images of Śakunī with wings:

There are countless examples in literature which prove the existence of the worship of the *Bālagrahas*. There is also no dearth of such examples from archaeology either. Several images dating back from the Śuṅga period to the Kuṣāṇa period have been found and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that some of these images are those of the *Bālagrahas*. For instance, some of the earthen images from this period are those of females with wings. Dr. Vasudevasharan Aggrawal is of the opinion that the images with wings are those of Goddess Śaṣṭhī. In this connection, he says:

Earthen image of the goddess who has been called, '*pakṣaṣaṣṭhī*' in the '*Kāśyapasaṃhitā*' have been found in archaeological excavations. These images date from the Śuṅga period to the Kuṣāṇa period. In India, it is rare to find earthenware toys in the form of winged images. They are not seen in stone images either. The exception is of some

290. Translator's Note: Dr. Dhare's Comment: The information about this tradition was given to me by Mrs. Kashitai Chandrakant Kulkarni.

toys with images of winged cupid holding a bow and arrow. Thus, toys with a winged female seem to be only those of goddess Śaṣṭhī. It is possible that the influence of the Greek gods Cupid and Aphrodite may have been responsible for creation of winged images in India.

One would have to concur with Aggrawal about the identification of the winged female as Śaṣṭhī. However, I find it difficult to accept that the wings of Śaṣṭhī came as a result of the influence of Greek Gods. One has to look at the early history of Śaṣṭhī before making such a statement. Until the end of Kuśāṇa period, Śaṣṭhī had risen in great prominence among the *Bālagrahas*. It is obvious from many of her mentions in the *Kāśyapasaṃhitā*, that Śaṣṭhī, with the alternate name Revatī, had assimilated many other female *Bālagrahas* into herself. Obviously, some characteristics of the female *Bālagrahas* she absorbed would have been part of her new appearance. I feel that Śaṣṭhī's wings are two such elements of a female *Bālagraha* absorbed by her. This winged female who possesses children is Śakunī, who is a female eagle. Indian folk mind imagined godlings who are dangerous to little children in many shapes, forms and demeanour. Śakunī is one of these dangerous forms. In the *Kṛṣṇacarita* of the *Harivaṃśa*, Pūtanā has been described in her form specifically as Śakunī:

kasyacitvatha kālasya śakunī veṣadhārīṇī ||
dhātrī kaṃsasya bhojasya pūtaneti pariśrutā ||
pūtanā nāma śakunī ghorā prāṇibhayaṅkarī ||
ājagāmardha vai pakshau krodhādvīdhunvatī ||
tatoṣṭdharātrasamaye pūtanā pradṛśyata ||
vyāgrambharinirghoṣaṃ vyāharantī punaḥ punaḥ ||
nililye śakaṭākṣe sā prastravotpīḍavārṣiṇī ||
dadau stanam ca kṛṣṇāya tasmīn supte jane nīṣiḥ ||

(*Harivaṃśa*, *Viṣṇuparva*, 6.22.25)

(Lit: After a while, Pūtanā, who was most dangerous to living beings, and who had taken up the disguise of a female bird, came in the middle of the night, flapping her wings in a gesture of anger. She was heard making very loud utterance like that of a tiger. Because her breasts were overflowing with milk, she had pain in the breasts. While everyone else was asleep, she gave Kṛṣṇa her breast overflowing with milk).

The composer of the *Harivaṃśa* has named her *Śakunī*, which means that she is a bird (*Pakṣiṇī*). He also suggests that she is a female. This means that for the composer of the *Harivaṃśa*, *Pūtanā* is a female bird. She is half female, half bird. We can now easily surmise that the images that have been available from the Śunga-Kuṣāṇa period and have been identified by experts such as Vasudevasharan Aggrawal as those of *Pakṣaśaṣṭhī*, are derived from *Pūtanā*, the half woman-half bird.

One needs to carefully examine the reference to *Pakṣaśaṣṭhī* in the *Kāśyapasaṃhitā*, which is as follows:

tasmācca sūtikāśaṣṭīm pakṣaśaṣṭhīm ca pūjayet ||
uddiśya ṣaṇmukhīm śaṣṭīm tathā lokeṣu nandati ||

I find this verse somewhat ambiguous. Aggrawal sees three forms of *Śaṣṭī* here: 'Sūtikāśaṣṭī', *Pakṣaśaṣṭhī* and *Ṣaṇmukhīśaṣṭī*. To me however, the name 'sūtikāśaṣṭī' is meant not to convey her form but a reason for conducting her worship. Composers of the *Kāśyapasaṃhitā* have in fact listed both *Sūtikāśaṣṭī* and *Pakṣaśaṣṭhī* as dates for conducting special worships. They say that on the day of *Sūtikāśaṣṭī* (sixth day after the birth of the baby) and on the day of *Pakṣaśaṣṭhī* (on the 6th day of each fortnight in a month), Goddess *Ṣaṇmukhī* should be worshipped. This keeps her contented. In order to remove the ambiguity in the original verse, the composers have used 'Sūtikāśaṣṭhyām' (the locative case of *Sūtikāśaṣṭī*) and *pakṣaśaṣṭhyām* (the locative case of *Pakṣaśaṣṭhī*) in place of *sūtikāśaṣṭīm* and *pakṣaśaṣṭīm* (both accusative cases).

The meaning as suggested by the composers of the *Kāśyapasaṃhitā* make sense. If we accept this meaning, then it will be incorrect to call images of the winged goddesses from the Śunga-Kuṣāṇa period, '*Pakṣaśaṣṭhī*'. We will have to say that those images are those of *Śakunī*. In view of the importance of *Śakunī* in the league of the Indian *Bālagrahas*, I find it difficult to connect the Indian winged goddess images with Greek Aphrodite. For a researcher of the calibre of Pandit Vasudevasharan Aggrawal, this identification of *Śakunī* would have been easily acceptable. I feel that it simply escaped his attention.

It was the close connection of this winged goddess with the excavated images at Ināmgāv that made me start all of this discussion. A tiny flame, lit as a result of the outcome of this discussion, will guide us in our quest. Without it, the secrets of the dark cavern of archaeology will remain in the dark forever. Without it, the thinking patterns, logic and beliefs of the mummified ancient humans would never be understood.

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Plate 1.

Maṇibhadra Yakṣa – Mathura Museum, 1st–2nd century BCE.

Photo Courtesy: American Institute of Indian Studies, Delhi.



Plate 2.

Pūtana's Demise – Harihar Mandir No. 1, Osia, Dist. Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

Photo Courtesy: American Institute of Indian Studies, Delhi.



Plate 3.

Viśirā and the Bull – 1500 BCE.

Photo Courtesy: Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune.



Plate 4.

Lambapayodharā and the Earthen Box – 1500 BCE.

Photo Courtesy: Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune.



Plate 5.

Rājamaṭha (3 Photos) – 17th century CE.

Photo Courtesy: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai.

Dr. Jayant Bhalchandra Bapat

Jayant Bapat comes from Wai, Maharashtra (Bombay) State in India and migrated to Australia in 1965. He holds doctorate degrees both in Organic Chemistry and in Hinduism. Dr. Bapat retired as a Senior Lecturer in Organic Chemistry from Monash University, Melbourne, in 1998. Since then, has been an 'Adjunct Research Fellow' at Monash University. His current research interests are Indology, Hinduism, Goddess Cults and Tantrism, Jainism, Koli fisher community of Mumbai and Sociology of Religion.

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Dr. Bapat started working as a Hindu community priest in 1978 and has since performed over 150 official weddings and 1300 rituals.

For his work in education and for the Indian community, Dr. Bapat was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2011.

