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## Vithoba of Pandharpur in Dilip Chitre's *Says Tuka*: A Study

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### **Abstract:**

Vithoba of Pandharpur is worshipped in Maharashtra and Karnataka. The *Varkari* Sect has a very glorious tradition in Maharashtra State. The well-known Marathi *Bhakti* poets like Jnandev, Namdeo, Tukaram, Eknath and many others have given the description of Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. Tukaram is the 17<sup>th</sup> century *Bhakti* poet who wrote *abhangas* in Marathi, gave the description of Lord Vithoba and also taught the philosophy of *Varkari* tradition. The *abhang* is a devotional song. The *abhang* has its own meter, stanza structure and rhyme scheme. The *abhang* form was popularized by Tukaram in Marathi literature. Tukaram's love and devotion towards Lord Vithoba is reflected in his *abhang*. Tukaram has minutely given the description of Vithoba. It can create the visual image of Vithoba before the eyes of devotees. Dilip Chitre has translated selected poems of Tukaram into English as *Says Tuka*. The main objective of the present study is to make analysis of the description of Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur as given by renowned bilingual writer and translator Dilip Chitre in *Says Tuka*.

**Keywords:** *Abhang*, *Varkari* Sect, Vithoba, Pandharpur, *Bhakti* tradition.

### **Introduction:**

The *Varkari* Sect in Maharashtra has a very glorious tradition for ages. The Vithoba of Pandharpur is worshipped by the followers of the *Varkari* tradition in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Jnandev, Namdeo, Eknath, Tukaram and other *Bhakti* poets have given the description of Vithoba of Pandharpur in their *abhangas* as well as other devotional songs. It is believed that Lord Vishnu appeared in the form of Vithoba for the sake of His beloved devotee,

Pundalik at Pandharpur in Maharashtra. *Varkaris* i.e. the followers of the *Varkari* tradition believe that for the last 28 ages, Lord Vithoba has been standing on the 'Brick' for His devotees.

Bahinabai Sioorkar (1629-1700), a woman poet-saint and a younger contemporary of Tukaram has used the metaphor of a temple to describe the Varkari tradition of Bhakti. According to Bahinabai, Jnandev laid its foundation, Namdeo built its walls, Eknath gave it a central pillar, and Tukaram became its 'crown' or 'spire'. (Introduction to *Says Tuka*-xlv to xlvi). These four great Bhakti poets and their talented disciples and followers have given description of Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. Tukaram, who is the 'Crown' of *Bhakti* tradition in Maharashtra, has thoroughly described Vithoba in his *abhangas* and other devotional songs. Bilingual writer and translator Dilip Chitre has translated selected poems of Tukaram into English. *Says Tuka* is the translation of selected poems of Tukaram into English by Dilip Chitre. The present study focuses on the description of Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur as given by Dilip Chitre in *Says Tuka*.

### **Objectives:**

The objectives of the present research are as below:

1. To study in detail the description of Lord Vithoba as given by Dilip Chitre in *Says Tuka*.
2. To highlight the relation between God and His devotees with particular reference to the select poems of Tukaram as translated into English by Dilip Chitre.
3. To make a comprehensive statement on the description of Lord Vithoba in Dilip Chitre's *Says Tuka*.

### **Material and Methods:**

1. The review of literature was conducted, and the focus was given on the study of the 'Bhakti Tradition' in Maharashtra with particular reference to Tukaram and other devotional poets.
2. An attempt was made to explore the description of Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur in the *abhangas* of Tukaram.
3. Dilip Chitre's *SaysTuka* was studied thoroughly to analyze critically the description of Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur.

### **Review of Literature:**

The *Bhakti* tradition is part and parcel of the glorious socio-cultural milieu in Maharashtra. The Maharashtra State is the storehouse of spiritual knowledge, wisdom, progressive thoughts and modernity. The *Bhakti* poets in Maharashtra, like Jnandev, Namdeo, Eknath, Tukaram and others, have made an attempt to simplify spiritual knowledge and teachings of the earliest Hindu scriptures in the vernacular language like Marathi. Sanskrit was the language of spiritual knowledge. It is the classical language in India. However, common, ordinary people were not having the access to Sanskrit language. Only the upper-class people like Brahmins had the right to learn Sanskrit. Therefore, the *Bhakti* poets in Maharashtra attempted to make available the knowledge of the Vedas and the philosophy of Hinduism in the vernacular languages like Marathi. They were not allowed to write in Marathi. It was their first linguistic revolt against the so-called scholars in those days. It was their fight against a conservative, orthodox hierarchical structure in Maharashtra. They were not allowed to simplify the knowledge of the Vedas and the Puranas into Marathi for common people as it was the birthright of a few communities only. The *Bhakti* poets in Maharashtra have made the foundation of the philosophy of *Varkari* tradition in Maharashtra. The *Varkari* tradition firmly believes in universal brotherhood, peace, harmony, tolerance, non-violence, love for all and coexistence. The well-known genres of Marathi poetry, like *Abhang*, *Ovi* and *Gawlan* are popularized by the *Bhakti* poets. These are the devotional lyrics, each one having its own meter and stanza pattern. Tukaram's poems cannot be studied without this background.

Dr. Prasad Dagwale's research article entitled 'The Devotional Poetry of Saint Tukaram' explored the autobiographical elements in the poetry of Saint Tukaram. He studied *Says Tuka-I*, in order to find out of autobiographical elements in the poetry of Saint Tukaram. There are so many references to Lord Pandurang in his research article showing the unique bond between the devotee and his God i.e., Saint Tukaram and Lord Pandurang. Sanjiv Kondekar and Savita Deogirkar, in their research article 'The Making of a Revolutionary Poet-Saint: Rereading the Struggles of Tukaram' focused on the life journey of Tukaram from an ordinary man to a great poet. They have given references of different translations of Tukaram's devotional poems into English.

### **Tukaram or Saint Tukaram:**

Tukaram is the 'crown' or 'spire' of the temple of Bhakti tradition in Maharashtra. He was born in 1608 and vanished without a trace in 1650. (Introduction to *Says Tuka*-xix). Tukaram was the second son of his parents, Bolhoba Ambile (or More) and Kanakai. Tukaram wrote devotional lyrics in Marathi. Tukaram is famous for his *abhangas* i.e. devotional lyrics. Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur was their family deity. There are different views regarding the total number of devotional poems by Tukaram. Dilip Chitre writes in his introduction to *Says Tuka*:

According to the Varkari pilgrims' tradition, fourteen accompanists supported Tukaram whenever he sang in public. Manuscripts attributed to some of these are among the chief sources from which the present editions of Tukaram's collected poetry derive. Some scholars believe Tukaram's available work to be in the region of about 8000 poems. This is a subject still open to research. The standard edition of the collected poetry of Tukaram is still the one 'printed and published under the patronage of the Bombay Government by the proprietors of the Indu-Prakash Press' in 1873. This was reprinted with a new critical introduction in 1950 on the occasion of the tri-centennial of Tukaram's departure and has been reprinted at regular intervals ever since by the Government of Maharashtra. This collection contains 4607 poems in a certain numbered sequence. (Introduction to *Says Tuka*-xx).

### **Dilip Chitre:**

Dilip Chitre (1938-2009) was a bilingual poet, fiction writer, translator and critic. He wrote both in Marathi and English. *Ekoon Kavita* is a collection of Marathi poems, *As Is, Where Is* is a collection of English poems, and *Shesha* is the English translation of selected Marathi poems by Dilip Chitre. He was the winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award for his Marathi collection of poems entitled *Ekoon Kavita* and the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize for *Says Tuka* (Translation of Selected Poems of Tukaram) in the year 1994.

### **Study of Select Poems from *Says Tuka*:**

In the poem, 'The Image of Vithoba-I', the beautiful description of Lord Vithoba is given. Tukaram, being the greatest devotee of Lord Vithoba, gives the minute description of Vithoba. It shows Tukaram's love and devotion towards Lord Vithoba. The poem is divided into four stanzas. In the first stanza, Tukaram says-

In an exquisite trance

He stands on the Brick

Arms akimbo

Hands on hips

The image of Lord Vithoba at Pandharpur is extremely beautiful. The adjective 'exquisite' is used by Dilip Chitre to describe the beautiful state of Vithoba. Lord Vithoba stands on the brick. It is the permanent position of Vithoba; and for ages, He is standing in the same position. There is a story about 'the brick' as Vithoba is standing on 'the brick'. Pundalik was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. He was living in Pandharpur. Lord Vishnu was impressed by Pundalik's devotion. Lord Vishnu came down to the earth to meet Pundalik in person. When Vishnu came down to meet Pundalik, he was looking after his old parents. He was utterly engrossed in doing his duty. So, he threw a brick that was lying near him toward Lord Vishnu and politely asked Him to stand on the brick while he was answering his parents' needs. Vithoba is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu has appeared in different forms on the earth for different purposes, viz. to punish the monsters/ evil-doers, to protect the lives of righteous people and to establish the basics of religion. He made His incarnation as Vithoba for the sake of His devotees only. It is believed that Lord Vishnu appeared in the form of Vithoba in order to reduce the effects of Kali Yuga on His devotees, to protect righteousness and to encourage His devotees to be able to fight against the evil power. Lord Vithoba is always there to boost the morale of His devotees in the conflict between 'good' and 'evil'. Varkaris believe that Lord Vithoba has been waiting for His devotees on that brick for ages. His standing position is unique, i.e. arms akimbo and hands on hips. Lord Vithoba has put both His hands on hips. In the *abhangas*, 'The Image of Vithoba-I', Lord Vithoba is described as having no weapons in his hands. He is very much eager to meet his devotees. He does not take any weapon. He is curiously waiting for His devotees. Varkaris make *Vari* (trip to Pandharpur and back) on every *Ekadashi* day. In the Hindu lunar calendar, *Ekadashi* means 'the eleventh' day. The Hindu lunar calendar is divided into two fortnights: the 'bright' or the 'waxing moon' fortnight and the 'dark' or the 'waning moon' fortnight, which are known as *Shukla/ Shuddha* or *Krishna/ Vadya*, respectively. (Notes and Glossary: *Says Tuka*-p.195). The *Vari* tradition is the unique practice of Varkaris in Maharashtra. The *Vari* is the spiritual journey. It is the way to realize 'Him' who is there within us. It is an attempt to realize the inner voice within you and submit yourself to the Supreme Being.

The sweet basil beads are favourite of Lord Vithoba. The basil plant has its medicinal value also. Lord Vithoba has worn the garland of sweet basil beads. It smells sweet and appears to be extremely beautiful. Vithoba wore a yellow silk garment. It is girdled around His loins. Tukaram loves this beautiful image of Lord Vithoba. It is the permanent position of Vithoba, as it is believed that He has been standing in the same position for the ages. Tukaram says—

I love His trance  
His forever stance.

One can find Tukaram's love, devotion and dedication towards Lord Vithoba in his devotional writings. The description of Vithoba is given minutely. Here, one can notice Tukaram's utter faith in Vithoba. These words are the reflection of Tukaram's devotion and love. The crocodile-shaped or fish-shaped earrings gleam at Lord Vithoba's ears. Moreover, the legendary *Kaustubha* stone glows at His throat. The devotees forget their troubles, miseries, and physical and mental agonies after seeing Lord Vithoba. The *Varkaris* in Maharashtra wholeheartedly worship Vithoba of Pandharpur. Their love and devotion towards Vithoba one can find in their eyes. Their eyes capture the beautiful image of Lord Vithoba. Furthermore, its imprint remains permanently in the hearts of the devotees. So, Tukaram describes this experience in a very effective manner—

Says Tuka, for me  
This is absolute bliss  
The loving eyes are mine  
The loved face His.

This is the state of heavenly pleasure. It is the journey from worldly concerns to spiritual regeneration. This is the stage of 'perfect' bliss. In the last stanza of the poem, the phrase 'Says Tuka' appears to be the 'Signature Line', in which the poet mentions his name politely by appealing to the Almighty God. Further, Tukaram says, my eyes are gifted, devoted and loving. He could watch, capture and register the lovely image of Vithoba permanently in his heart through his eyes. So, he describes his eyes as 'loving eyes' and the face of Vithoba as 'loved face'. The solid unique bond between God and His devotee one can find in these lines.

In the opening of the poem, 'The Image of Vithoba-III', Tukaram uses the adjectives 'beautiful, lavish and blue' to describe Lord Vithoba. Further Tukaram says-

Four- armed; graced

By a single garland;  
 A streak of musk  
 On the forehead;  
 Holding a conch-shell, a discus, a mace;  
 Wearing the *Vaijayanti* necklace;  
 Rings gleaming  
 In both the ears.

In this stanza, Vithoba is described having all the characteristic features of Lord Vishnu. In this image, Lord Vithoba is graced with four arms and a single garland. A streak of musk appears extremely beautiful on His forehead. He is holding a conch-shell, a discus and a mace in His hands. He has worn the *Vaijayanti* necklace; and rings gleam in His both ears. The *Vaijayanti* necklace is associated with Lord Vishnu.

Lord Vithoba is addressed as ‘Hari’ also. ‘Hari’ is one of the names of Lord Vishnu. Tukaram describes Vithoba’s image in Pandharpur and his standing position as ‘level-eyed’ and ‘even-footed’. ‘Level-eyed’ means in the standing position, the devotee can look into the eyes of Vithoba. It means, in the sanctum of Vithoba temple in Pandharpur, the devotee can directly make eye contact with the image of Vithoba as the eyes of Lord Vithoba are looking at the devotees. The devotees feel that the eyes of Vithoba are fixed on him/ her. It reflects the relationship between God and his devotees. The kindness of Vithoba falls equally upon His devotees. There is no discrimination on any ground before the eyes of Lord Vithoba. That is why Lord Vithoba is described as ‘Vithai’ or ‘Vithumauli’; the devotees feel and experience the motherly love of Lord Vithoba. It shows Lord Vithoba’s love and compassion towards His devotees.

O Hari—  
 Level-eyed,  
 Even-footed,  
 Symmetrically stanced  
 On the Brick—

Tukaram did not believe in or follow any other phenomenon except Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. According him, everything is deceptive and false. Only Lord Vithoba is the saviour and solace to one and all in this universe. Hari does not break the heart of anybody. Further,

Tukaram says he has nothing to do with any other god, goddesses or deities. Different offers and temptations are there, which can divert the attention. However, such offers cannot distract Tukaram from Lord Vithoba. His eyes rest on Lord Vithoba.

I need not chase  
Any other  
Phenomenon that tricks  
And breaks the heart.  
The status of Brahma,  
Or any other god,  
That you dangle in front  
Of the eyes of seekers  
Is not for me.

The devotee's heart is full of the footprints of the Supreme Being. Tukaram was the greatest devotee of Vithoba. While explaining his relation with Lord Vithoba, Tukaram says, 'My heart is full of Your footprints and You are my path'. Tukaram did not find any interest in worldly concerns. There was no place for anything else in his heart except Lord Vithoba. Vithoba was within him, and Vithoba was his destiny. Tukaram's personal life was not so simple. He experienced all kinds of hardships, humiliation and disasters in his life. These experiences could never decrease his love, and devotion to Lord Vithoba. Nevertheless, it strengthened the bond between Tukaram and his God, Lord Vithoba. It reflects Tukaram's love and firm belief in Vithoba of Pandharpur. Tukaram addresses Pandurang as the mother. Pandurang is another name of Lord Vithoba. As a child, Tukaram rests in the shade of Vithoba. He is ready to wait for his Pandurang.

You are my mother  
I rest in Your shade  
For You I wait  
Pandurang.

**Conclusion:**

To sum up, *Bhatki* tradition in Maharashtra has a glorious tradition. In *Saguna Bhakti* the Supreme Being is worshipped as an incarnation having features like living beings. The devotees can worship the image of God by conducting all kinds of rituals. For example, to bathe the image

of God or Goddess, to feed *Prasad*, to sleep the idol of God, etc. Vithoba of Pandharpur is one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. *Bhakti* poets like Jnandev, Namdeo, Tukaram, Eknath and many others have composed thousands of devotional songs. They rigorously worked hard to simplify the knowledge of the Vedas and the Puranas for the sake of common, ordinary people. The *Varkari* sect in Maharashtra worships Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. In the present research, a few devotional poems of Tukaram are studied. In these poems, the description of Vithoba is given. These devotional poems reflect Tukaram's devotion, love and affinity towards the Almighty God. The readers can visualize and form the image of Lord Vithoba after going through the *Abhangas* of Tukaram. Dilip Chitre has artistically and meticulously maintained the flavor of Tukaram's devotional songs in *Says Tuka*. The relationship between God and his devotees is reflected in these poems from *Says Tuka*. The *Varkari* tradition in Maharashtra is deeply rooted in the devotional songs of *Bhakti* poets. The poems from *Says Tuka* have developed the readers' interest in the medieval Marathi *Bhakti* movement and the proponents of the *Varkari* tradition in Maharashtra like Jnandev, Namdeo, Tukaram, Eknath and many others.

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