

= Vithoba =

Vithoba , also known as Vi ( t ) thal ( a ) and Panduranga , is a Hindu god predominantly worshipped in the Indian states of Maharashtra , Karnataka , Goa , Telangana and Andhra Pradesh . He is generally considered a manifestation of the god Vishnu or his avatar , Krishna . Vithoba is often depicted as a dark young boy , standing arms akimbo on a brick , sometimes accompanied by his main consort Rakhumai .

Vithoba is the focus of the monotheistic , non @-@ Brahmanical Varkari religion of Maharashtra and the Haridasa faith of Karnataka . Vitthal Temple , Pandharpur is his main temple . Vithoba legends revolve around his devotee Pundalik , who is credited with bringing the deity to Pandharpur , and around Vi?hoba 's role as a saviour to the poet @-@ saints of the Varkari faith . The Varkari poet @-@ saints are known for their unique genre of devotional lyric , the abhang , dedicated to Vithoba and composed in Marathi . Other devotional literature dedicated to Vithoba includes the Kannada hymns of the Haridasa and Marathi versions of the generic aarti songs associated with rituals of offering light to the deity . The most important festivals of Vithoba are held on Shayani Ekadashi in the month of Ashadha , and Prabodhini Ekadashi in the month of Kartik .

The historiography of Vithoba and his cult is an area of continuing debate , even regarding his name . Various Indologists have proposed a prehistory for Vithoba worship where he was previously : a hero stone , a pastoral deity , a manifestation of Shiva , a Jain saint , or even all of these at various times for various devotees . Though the origins of both his cult and his main temple are likewise debated , there is clear evidence that they already existed by the 13th century .

= = Etymology and other names = =

Vithoba ( Marathi : ?????? , Vi?hob? ) is known by many names , including : Vitthala , Panduranga , Pandharinath , Hari and Narayan .

There are several theories about the origins and meanings of these names . Varkari tradition suggests that the name Vitthala ( also spelled as Vitthal , Viththal , Vittala and Vithal ; Marathi : ??? ? ?? , Vi??hala ; Kannada : ??? ? ?? and Telugu : ??? ? ?? ; Vi?hala ) is composed of two Sanskrit @-@ Marathi words : vi? , which means ' brick ' ; and thal , which may have originated from the Sanskrit sthala , meaning ' standing ' . Thus , Vitthala would mean ' one standing on a brick ' . William Crooke , orientalist , supported this explanation . The prescribed iconography of Vithoba stipulates that he be shown standing arms @-@ akimbo upon a brick , which is associated with the legend of the devotee Pundalik .

However , the Varkari poet @-@ saint Tukaram proposed a different etymology ? that Vitthala is composed of the words vittha ( ignorance ) and la ( one who accepts ) , thus meaning ' one who accepts innocent people who are devoid of knowledge ' . Historian Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar offers yet another possibility ? that Vitthu ( Vi?hu ) is a Kannada corruption of the name Vishnu adopted in Marathi . The suffixes -la and -ba ( meaning ' father ' in Marathi ) were appended for reverence , producing the names Vitthala and Vithoba . This corruption of Vishnu to Vitthu could have been due to the tendency of Marathi and Kannada people to pronounce the Sanskrit ?? ( / ?n / ) as ??h ( / ??? / ) , attested since the 8th century .

According to research scholar M. S. Mate of the Deccan College , Pundalik ? who is assumed to be a historical figure ? was instrumental in persuading the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana alias Bittidev to build the Pandharpur temple dedicated to Vishnu . The deity was subsequently named as Vitthala , a derivative of Bittidev , by the builder @-@ king . Other variants of the name include Vi?hur?y? ( King Vitthala ) , and Vi?h?? ( Mother Vitthala ) . The people of Gujarat add the suffix -nath ( Lord ) to Vitthala , which yields the name Vitthal @-@ nath . The additional honorific suffix -ji may be added , giving the name Vitthalnathji . This name is generally used in the Pushtimarg sect .

Panduranga ( Marathi : ????????? , Kannada : ????????? , Telugu : ????????? ; all Pa??ura?ga ) , also spelt as Pandurang and Pandaranga , is another popular epithet for Vithoba , which means ' the white god ' in Sanskrit . The Jain author @-@ saint Hemachandra ( 1089 ? 1172 AD ) notes it is also used as an epithet for the god Rudra @-@ Shiva . Even though Vithoba is depicted with dark

complexion , he is called a " white god " . Bhandarkar explains this paradox , proposing that Panduranga may be an epithet for the form of Shiva worshipped in Pandharpur , and whose temple still stands . Later , with the increasing popularity of Vithoba 's cult , this was also transferred to Vithoba . Another theory suggests that Vithoba may initially have been a Shaiva god ( related to Shiva ) , only later identified with Vishnu , thus explaining the usage of Panduranga for Vithoba . Crooke , however , proposed that Panduranga is a Sanskritised form of Pandaraga ( belonging to Pandarga ) , referring to the old name of Pandharpur . Another name , Pandharinath , also refers to Vithoba as the lord of Pandhari ( yet another variant for Pandharpur ) .

Finally , Vithoba is also addressed by the names of Lord Vishnu like Hari and Narayana , in the Vaishnav religions .

= = Origins and development = =

Reconstruction of the historical development of Vithoba worship has been much debated . In particular , several alternative theories have been proposed regarding the earliest stages , as well as the point at which he came to be recognised as a distinct deity . The Pandurangashtakam stotra , a hymn attributed to Adi Shankaracharya of the 8th century , indicates that Vithoba worship might have already existed at an early date .

According to Richard Maxwell Eaton , author of A Social History of the Deccan , Vithoba was first worshipped as a pastoral god as early as the 6th century . Vithoba 's arms @-@ akimbo iconography is similar to Bir Kuar , the cattle @-@ god of the Ahirs of Bihar , who is now also associated with Krishna . Vithoba was probably later assimilated into the Shaiva pantheon and identified with the god Shiva , like most other pastoral gods . This is backed by the facts that the temple at Pandharpur is surrounded by Shaiva temples ( most notably of the devotee Pundalik himself ) , and that Vithoba is crowned with the Linga , symbol of Shiva . However , since the 13th century , the poet @-@ saints like Namdev , Eknath and Tukaram identified Vithoba with Vishnu .

Christian Lee Novetzke of the University of Washington suggests that Vithoba 's worship migrated from Karnataka to the formerly Shaiva city of Pandharpur some time before 1000 CE ; but under the possible influence of a Krishna @-@ worshipping Mahanubhava sect , the town was transformed into a Vaishnava center of pilgrimage . This proposal is consistent with contemporary remnants of Shaiva worship in the town .

The religious historian R.C. Dhere , winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book Sri Vitthal : Ek Mahasamanvaya , opines that Vithoba worship may be even older ? " Vedic or pre @-@ Vedic " , hence pre @-@ dating the worship of Krishna . According to this theory , Vithoba is an amalgam of various local heroes , who gave their lives to save their cattle . He was first worshipped by the Dhangar , the cattle @-@ owning caste of Maharashtra . The rise of the Yadava dynasty , which had cowherd ancestry , could have led to the glorification of Vithoba as Krishna , who is often depicted as a cowherd . This Vaishnavization of Vithoba also led to conversion of the Shaiva Pundarika shrine to the Vaishnava shrine of the devotee Pundalik , who ? according to legend ? brought Vithoba to Pandharpur . There may have been an attempt to assimilate Vithoba into Buddhism ; today , both are viewed as a form of Vishnu in Hinduism .

Despite assimilation in Vaishnavism as Krishna @-@ Vishnu , Vithoba does not inherit the erotic overtones of Krishna , such as his dalliance with the gopis ( milkmaids ) . Vithoba is associated more with " compassion , an infinite love and tenderness for his bhaktas ( devotees ) that can be compared to the love of the mother for her children .. pining for the presence of his devotees the way a cow pines for her far @-@ away calf . "

G. A. Deleury , author of The cult of Vithoba , proposes that the image of Vithoba is a viragal ( hero stone ) , which was later identified with Vishnu in his form as Krishna , and that Pundalik transformed the Puranic , ritualistic puja worship into more idealised bhakti worship ? " interiorized adoration transcending caste distinction and institutional priesthood .. " Indologist Dr. Tilak suggests that Vithoba emerged as " an alternative to the existing pantheon " of brahminical deities ( related to classical , ritualistic Hinduism ) . The emergence of Vithoba was concurrent with the rise of a " new type of lay devotee " , the Varkari . While Vishnu and Shiva were bound in rigid ritualistic worship

and Brahmin ( priestly ) control , Vithoba , " the God of the subaltern , became increasingly human . " Vithoba is often praised as the protector of the poor and needy . Stevenson ( 1843 ) suggests that Vithoba could have been a Jain saint , as the Vithoba images were similar to Jain images .

= = = Pandharpur temple and inscriptions = = =

Scholastic investigation of Vithoba 's history often begins with consideration of the dating of the chief temple at Pandharpur , which is believed to be the earliest Vithoba temple . The oldest part of the temple dates to the Yadava period of the 12th and 13th centuries . Most of the temple is believed to have been built in the 17th century , though addition to the temple has never ceased . The date the temple was first established is unclear to Bhandarkar , but he insists there is clear evidence to suggest it existed by the 13th century . According to S. G. Tulpule , the temple stood as early as 1189 . In fact , a monument dated 1189 records establishment of a small Vithoba shrine at the present location of the temple ; thus , Tulpule concludes , the worship of Vithoba predates 1189 .

A stone inscription dated 1237 , found on an overhead beam of the present Vithoba temple , mentions that the Hoysala king Someshvara donated a village for the expense of the bhoga ( food offering ) for " Vitthala " . An inscription on a copper plate , dated 1249 , records the Yadava king Krishna granting to one of his generals the village Paundrikakshetra ( kshetra of Pundarik ) , on the river Bhimarathi , in the presence of the god Vishnu . Another stone inscription in Pandharpur narrates a sacrifice at Pandurangapura due to which " people and Vitthal along with the gods were gratified " . Thus from the 13th century , the city is known as the city of Panduranga . Inside the temple , a stone inscription records gifts to the temple between 1272 and 1277 from various donors , notably the Yadava king Ramachandra 's minister Hemadri .

Ranade believes that an inscription , found in Alandi and referring to Vitthala and Rakhumai , is the oldest related to Vithoba , and dates it to 1209 . However , the name Pandaranga is found on a Rashtrakuta copper plate inscription , dated 516 . Citing this , Pande infers that Vithoba 's cult was well established by the 6th century .

= = = Central image = = =

The physical characteristics of the central murti ( image ) of Vithoba at Pandharpur , and various textual references to it , have inspired theories relating to Vithoba worship . Sand concludes , from a version of Pundalik 's legend in the Skanda Purana ( see Legend below ) , that two distinct murtis must have existed at Pandharpur ? one each of tirtha and kshetra type . The earlier one was a tirtha murti , an image purposely sited near a holy body of water ( tirtha ) , in this case facing west , on the Bhima riverbed , near the Pundalik shrine . The later murti , according to Sand , was a kshetra murti , located at a place of holy power ( kshetra ) , in this case facing east , on the hill where the current temple has stood since about 1189 . Thus , Sand proposes that the worship of Vithoba may predate the temple itself .

Deleury suggests that although the temple may have been built in the 13th century , given the Hemadpanthi style architecture , the statue of Vithoba is of an earlier style so may have been carved for an earlier , smaller shrine that existed in Pandharpur . The workmanship of the image is earlier than the style of the Yadava ( 1175 ? 1318 ) , the Anhivad Chalukya ( 943 ? 1210 ) and even the Ajmer Chohans ( 685 ? 1193 ) eras . Although no other existing Vishnu temple has iconography like Pandharpur 's Vithoba , Deleury finds similarities between the Pandharpur image and the third @-@ century , arms @-@ akimbo Vishnu images at Udaygiri Caves , Madhya Pradesh but declares that they are from different schools of sculpture .

= = = Pundalik = = =

The devotee Pundalik , thrower of the brick ( see Legend below ) , is a major character in the legends of Vithoba . He is commonly perceived to be a historical figure , connected with the

establishment and propagation of the Vithoba @-@ centric Varkari sect . Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar considers Pundalik to be the founder of the Varkari sect and the one who promulgated the sect in Maratha country . Stevenson ( 1843 ) goes further , suggesting he might have been a Jain or a Buddhist , since Varkari tradition is a combination of Jain and Buddhist morals , and Vithoba is viewed as Vishnu in his form as Buddha . Frazer , Edwards and P.R. Bhandarkar ( 1922 ) all suggest that Pundalik tried to unify Shiva and Vishnu , and that this sect originated in Karnataka . Ranade ( 1933 ) thinks that Pundalik , a Kannada saint , was not only the founder of the Varkari sect but also the first great devotee or first high priest of the Pandharpur temple . Upadhyaya supports the priest theory but declines the Kannada origin theory . According to M. S. Mate , Pundalik was instrumental in coaxing the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana to build the Pandharpur temple to Vishnu , placing him in the early 12th century . Other scholars like Raeside ( 1965 ) , Dhanpalvar ( 1972 ) , and Vaudeville ( 1974 ) have questioned the historicity of Pundalik altogether , and dismissed him as a mythical figure .

= = Identifications = =

Primarily , there are three Hindu deities associated with Vithoba : Vishnu , Krishna and Shiva . Gautama Buddha is also associated with Vithoba , consistent with Hindu deification of the Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu . However , Varkari consider Vithoba to be the svarup ( original ) Vishnu himself , not an Avatar ( manifestation ) of Vishnu like Krishna , despite legends and consorts linking Vithoba to Krishna . However , even the Mahanubhavas , who rose in the 13th century as a Krishna @-@ worshipping sect , not only dismissed the notion that Vithoba is Krishna but also frequently vilified Vithoba .

In some traditions though , Vithoba is also worshipped as a form of Shiva . The Dhangars still consider Vithoba to be a brother of the god Viroba , and view Vithoba as a Shaiva god rather than a Vaishnava one . Underhill proposes that the shrine of Pandharpur is a combined form of Vishnu @-@ Shiva established by the Bhagavata sect that worships Vishnu @-@ Shiva ? the Lord , which is what bhagavata means . However , for the chief priests of the Pandharpur temple ? Brahmins of the Badva family ? " Vi?hob? is neither Vi??u nor ?iva . Vi?hob? is Vi?hob? " ( IAST original ) . Despite this , some priests of the temple point to marks on the Vithoba image 's chest as proof of Vithoba being Vishnu , in his form as Krishna .

Vithoba 's image replaces the traditional representation of Buddha , when depicted as the ninth avatar of Vishnu , in some temple sculptures and Hindu astrological almanacs in Maharashtra . In the 17th century , Maratha artists sculpted an image of Pandharpur 's Vithoba in the Buddha 's place on a panel showing Vishnu 's avatars . This can be found in the Shivneri Caves . Stevenson goes so far as to call devotees of Vithoba ( Vithal @-@ bhaktas ) Buddhist Vaishnavas ( Bauddho @-@ Vaishnavas ) , since they consider Vithoba to be the ninth ? namely Buddha ? avatar of Vishnu . Some of the poet @-@ saints praised Vithoba as a form of Buddha . B. R. Ambedkar , an Indian political leader and Buddhist convert , suggested that the image of Vithoba at Pandharpur was in reality the image of the Buddha .

= = Iconography = =

All Vithoba images are generally modelled on his central image in Pandharpur . The Pandharpur image is a black basalt sculpture that is 3 feet 9 inches ( 1 @.@ 14 m ) tall . Vithoba is depicted as dark young boy . The poet @-@ saints have called him " Para @-@ brahman with a dark complexion " . He wears high , conical headgear or a crown , interpreted as Shiva 's symbol ? the Linga . Thus , according to Zelliott , Vithoba represents Shiva as well as Vishnu . The first Varkari poet @-@ saint , Dnyaneshwar ( 13th century ) , states that Vithoba ( Vishnu ) carries Shiva , who according to Vaishnavism is Vishnu 's first and foremost devotee , on his own head .

Vithoba is shown standing arms @-@ akimbo on the brick thrown by the devotee Pundalik . He wears a necklace of tulsi @-@ beads , embedded with the legendary kaustubha gem , and makara @-@ kundala ( fish @-@ shaped earrings ) that the poet @-@ saint Tukaram relates to the

iconography of Vishnu . Pandharpur 's Vithoba holds a shankha ( conch ) in his left hand and a chakra ( discus ) or lotus flower in his right , all of which are symbols traditionally associated with Vishnu . Some images depict Vithoba 's right hand making a gesture that has been traditionally misunderstood as a blessing ; no gesture of blessing is present in the Pandharpur image . Though usually depicted two @-@ armed , four @-@ armed representations of the deity also exist .

The Pandharpur image , when not clothed by its attendant priest to receive devotees , provides Vithoba with the detailed features distinctive of a male body , visible in full relief . However , close inspection of the stonework reveals the outline of a loincloth , supported by a kambaband ( waist belt ) , traced by thin , light carvings . Other images and pictures depict Vithoba clothed , usually with pitambara ? a yellow dhoti and various gold ornaments ? the manner in which he is attired by the priests in the daily rites .

The Pandharpur image also bears , on the left breast , the mark known as the srivatsalanchhana ? said to be a curl of white hair , usually found on the breast of Vishnu and Krishna images . The image is also dignified with a ring @-@ shaped mark called shriniketana on the right breast , mekhala ( a three @-@ stringed waist @-@ belt ) , a long stick ( kathi ) embedded in the ground between the legs , and double ring and pearl bracelets on the elbows .

= = Consorts = =

Vithoba is usually depicted with his main consort , Rakhumai , on his left side . Rakhumai ( or Rakhamai ) literally means ' mother Rukmini ' . Rukmini is traditionally viewed as the wife of Krishna . Hindus generally consider Krishna to be a form of Vishnu , hence his consort as a form of Lakshmi . Rakhumai is depicted in the arms @-@ akimbo posture , standing on a brick . She has an independent cella in the Pandharpur temple complex . According to Ghurye , Rukmini ? a princess of the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra ? was elevated to the status of the main consort instead of Radha , because of her affiliation with the region . According to Dhargar tradition , Rukhumai is worshipped by the community as Padmavati or Padubai , a protector of the community and cattle in particular . Dhargar folklore explains the reason behind separate shrines for Vithoba and Padubai as the outcome of Vithoba invoking a curse on his consort , and his non @-@ attachment to samsara ( the householder 's life ) . Apart from Rakhumai , two other consorts Satyabhama and Rahi ( derived from Radha ) are worshipped too . All three consorts are regarded as Krishna 's in Hindu mythology .

= = Worship = =

Vithoba is a popular deity in Maharashtra and Karnataka ; devotees also exist in Telangana , Andhra Pradesh , Tamil Nadu , Kerala and Gujarat , but not in the same numbers . Vithoba is worshipped and revered by most Marathis , but he is not popular as a kuldevta ( family deity ) . The main temple of Vithoba , which includes a distinct , additional shrine for his consort Rakhumai , is located at Pandharpur . In this context , Pandharpur is affectionately called " Bhu @-@ Vaikuntha " ( the place of residence of Vishnu on earth ) by devotees . Devotees from across Maharashtra , Karnataka and Telangana , visit Vithoba 's central temple at Pandharpur , since the times of Dnyaneshwar ( 13th century ) .

Two distinct traditions revolve around the worship of Vithoba in Maharashtra : ritual worship inside the temple by the Brahmin priests of the Badva family ; and spiritual worship by the Varkaris . The ritual worship includes five daily rites . First , at about 3 am , is an arati to awaken the god , called k?ka??rat? . Next comes the pañc?m?tap?j? , a puja that includes a bath with five ( pancha ) sweet substances called panchamrita . The image is then dressed to receive morning devotions . The third rite is another puja involving re @-@ dressing and lunch at noon . This is known as madhy?h?ap?j? . Afternoon devotions are followed by a fourth rite for dinner at sunset ? the apar?h?ap?j? . The final rite is ?er?rat? , an arati for putting the god to sleep . In addition to the rites at the main temple in Pandharpur , Haridasa traditions dedicated to Vitthala flourish in Karnataka .

== = Varkari sect == =

The Varkari Panth ( Pilgrim Path ) or Varkari Sampradaya ( Pilgrim Tradition ) is one of the most important Vaishnava sects in India . It is a monotheistic , bhakti sect , focused on the worship of Vithoba and based on traditional Bhagavata dharma . The sect is a " Shaiva @-@ Vaishnava synthesis " and " nominal Vaishnavism , containing a free mix of other religions " . It is believed to have originated in Karnataka and migrated to Maharashtra . This last theory is based on a reference to Vithoba as " Kannada " ( belonging to Karnataka ) in the work of the first of the poet @-@ saints , Dnyaneshwar . However , this word can also be interpreted as " difficult to understand " . Varkaris and scholars who believe Pundalik to have been a historical figure also consider him to be founder of the cult of Vithoba . This is evidenced by the liturgical call ? Pundalikavarada Hari Vitthala ! ? which means " O Hari Vitthala ( Vithoba ) , who has given a boon to Pundalik ! " However , according to Zelliot , the sect was founded by Dnyaneshwar ( also spelled Jnaneshwar ) , who was a Brahmin poet and philosopher and flourished during the period 1275 ? 1296 . Varkaris also give him credit with the saying ? Dnyanadev rachila paya ? which means " Dnyaneshwar laid the foundation stone " .

Namdev ( c . 1270 ? 1350 ) , a Shudra tailor , wrote short Marathi devotional poems in praise of Vithoba called abhangas ( literally ' unbroken ' ) , and used the call @-@ and @-@ response kirtan ( literally ' repeating ' ) form of singing to praise the glory of his Lord . Public performance of this musical devotion led to the spread of the Vithoba faith , which accepted women , Shudras and outcaste " untouchables " , something forbidden in classical brahminical Hinduism . In the times of Muslim rulers , the faith faced stagnation . However , after the decline of the Vijayanagara empire , when wars erupted in the Deccan region , the Muslim rulers had to accept the faiths of Maharashtra in order to gather the support of its people . In this period , Eknath ( c . 1533 ? 99 ) revived the Varkari tradition . With the foundation of the Maratha empire under Shivaji , Tukaram ( c . 1568 ? 1650 ) , a Shudra grocer , further propagated the Vithoba @-@ centric tradition throughout the Maharashtra region .

All these poet @-@ saints , and others like Janabai , the maidservant of Namdev , wrote poetry dedicated to Vithoba . This Marathi poetry advocates pure devotion , referring to Vithoba mostly as a father , or in the case of the female saint Janabai 's poetry , as a mother ( Vithabai ) . Not only women , like Janabai , but also a wide variety of people from different castes and backgrounds wrote abhangas in praise of Vithoba : Visoba Khechara ( who was an orthodox Shaiva and teacher of Namdev ) , Sena the barber , Narhari the goldsmith , Savata the gardener , Gora the potter , Kanhopatra the dancing girl , Chokhamela the " untouchable " Mahar , and even the Muslim Sheikh Muhammad ( 1560 ? 1650 ) . Anyone born Shaiva or Vaishnava who considers Vithoba his maya @-@ baap ( mother @-@ father ) and Pandharpur his mahar ( maternal house of a bride ) is accepted as a Varkari by the sect irrespective of the barriers of caste . Varkaris often practice Vithoba japa ( meditative repetition of a divine name ) , and observe a fast on the ekadashi of each month .

== = Haridasa sect == =

Haridasa means servant ( dasa ) of Vishnu ( Hari ) . According to Haridasa tradition , their sampradaya , also known as Haridasa @-@ kuta , was founded by Achalananda Vitthala ( c . 888 ) . It is a distinct branch within Vaishnavism , centered on Vitthala ( the Haridasa ? Kannada name for Vithoba ) . Where Varkari are normally associated with Maharashtra , Haridasa are normally associated with Karnataka . The scholar Sharma considers Vithoba worship first emerged in Karnataka , only later moving to Maharashtra . He argues this on the basis of the reference by Dnyaneshwar , mentioned in section " Varkari sect " above . Lutgendorf credits the movement to Vyasatirtha ( 1478 ? 1539 ) , the royal guru ( rajguru ) to king Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagara empire . Vitthala enjoyed royal patronage in this era . Krishnadevaraya is also credited with building Vitthala 's temple at the then capital city Vijayanagara ( modern Hampi ) .

Haridasas consider the temple of Pandharpur to be sacred , as well that of Hampi , and worship

Vitthala along with forms of Krishna . Haridasa literature generally deals with praise dedicated to Vitthala and Krishna . Haridasa poets like Vijaya Vitthala , Gopala Vitthala , Jagannatha Vitthala , Venugopala Vitthala and Mohana Vitthala assumed pen @-@ names ending with " Vitthala " , as an act of devotion . The Haridasa poet Purandara Dasa or Purandara Vitthala ( 1484 ? 1564 ) , " father of Carnatic music " , often ended his Kannada language compositions with a salutation to Vitthala .

= = = Pushtimarg sect = = =

The founder of the Hindu sect Pushtimarg ? Vallabhacharya ( 1479 ? 1531 ) is believed to have visited Pandharpur at least twice and was ordered to marry by Vithoba ( called Vitthalnath or Vitthalnathji in the sect ) and have children so that he could be born as Vallabhacharya 's son . Later , Vallabhacharya married . His second son and successor was recognized as a manifestation of Vithoba and named Vitthalnath , also known as Gusainji .

= = = Festivals = = =

The festivals associated with Vithoba primarily correspond to the bi @-@ annual yatras ( pilgrimages ) of the Varkaris . The pilgrims travel to the Pandharpur temple from Alandi and Dehu , towns closely associated with poet @-@ saints Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram respectively . Along the way , they sing abhangas ( devotional songs ) dedicated to Vithoba and repeat his name , carrying the palkhis ( palanquins ) of the poet @-@ saints . Varkaris do not engage in ritual worship but only practice darshan ( visual adoration ) of the deity . The ritual worship by the priests is restricted to five days each around the Ashadha ( June ? July ) and Kartik ( October ? November ) Ekadashis , when a large number of Varkaris participate in the yatras . In smaller numbers , the Varkaris also visit the temple on two other Ekadashis ? in the Hindu months of Magha and Chaitra .

More than 800 @, @ 000 Varkaris travel to Pandharpur for the yatra on Shayani Ekadashi , the 11th day of the waxing moon in the lunar month of Ashadha . Both Shayani Ekadashi and Prabodhini Ekadashi ( in the waxing half of Kartik ) , are associated with the mythology of Vishnu . Hindus believe that Vishnu falls asleep in Ksheersagar ( a cosmic ocean of milk ) , while lying on the back of Shesha @-@ n?ga ( the cosmic serpent ) . His sleep begins on Shayani Ekadashi ( literally the ' sleeping 11th ' ) and he finally awakens from his slumber , four months later , on Prabodhini Ekadashi . The celebrations in Ashadha and Kartik continue until the full @-@ moon in those months , concluding with torchlight processions . Inscriptions dating to the 11th century mention the Ekadashi pilgrimages to Pandharpur . On Shayani Ekadashi and Prabodhini Ekadashi , the chief minister or a minister of Maharashtra state performs ritual components of worship on behalf of the Government of Maharashtra . This form of worship is known as sarkari @-@ mahapuja .

Apart from the four Ekadashis , a fair is held on Dussera night at Pandharpur , when devotees dance on a large slab ( ranga @-@ shila ) before Vithoba , accompanied with torchlight processions . Other observances at the Pandharpur temple include : Ranga @-@ Panchami , when gulal ( red powder ) is sprinkled on the god 's feet ; and Krishna Janmashtami , Krishna 's birthday , when devotees dance and sing in front of Vithoba for nine days . Other sacred days include Wednesdays , Saturdays and all other Ekadashis , all of which are considered holy in Vaishnavism .

= = = Devotional works = = =

Devotional works dedicated to Vithoba can be categorised into the Varkari tradition , the Brahmin tradition and what Raeside calls a " third tradition " , that includes both Varkari and Brahmin elements . The Varkari texts are written in Marathi , the Brahmin texts in Sanskrit , and the " third tradition " are Marathi texts written by Brahmins .

The Varkari texts are : Bhaktalilamrita and Bhaktavijaya by Mahipati , Pundalika @-@ Mahatmya by Bahinabai , and a long abhanga by Namdev . All these texts describe the legend of Pundalik . The Brahmin texts include : two versions of Panduranga @-@ Mahatmya from the Skanda Purana ( consisting of 900 verses ) ; Panduranga @-@ Mahatmya from the Padma Purana ( consisting of 1

@, @ 200 verses ) ; Bhima @-@ Mahatmya , also from the Padma Purana ; and a third devotional work , yet again called Panduranga @-@ Mahatmya , which is found in the Vishnu Purana . The " third tradition " is found in two works : Panduranga @-@ Mahatmya by the Brahmin Sridhara ( consisting of 750 verses ) , and another work of the same name written by Prahlada Maharaj ( consisting of 181 verses ) .

In addition to the above , there are many abhangas , the short Marathi devotional poems of the Varkaris , and many stutis ( songs of praise ) and stotras ( hymns ) , some of them originating from the Haridasa tradition . The best known of these is " Pandurangastaka " or " Pandurangastrotra " , attributed to Adi Shankaracharya , although this attribution is questioned . A text called " Tirthavali @-@ Gatha " , attributed to Namdev or Dnyaneshwar but possibly a collection of writings of many poet @-@ saints , also centers on the propagation of Varkari faith and Vithoba worship . Other devotional works include aratis like " Yuge atthavisa vitevari ubha " by Namdev and " Yei O Vitthala maje mauli re " . These aratis sing of Vithoba , who wears yellow garments ( a characteristic of Vishnu ) and is served by Garuda ( mount of Vishnu ) and Hanuman ( the monkey god , devotee of Rama ? an avatar of Vishnu ) . Finally , the Telugu poet Tenali Ramakrishna ( 16th century ) refers to Vithoba , as Panduranga , in his poem Panduranga @-@ Mahatmyamu : " ( O Parvati ) , accepting the services of Pundarika and Kshetrapala ( Kala @-@ bhairava ) , becoming the wish fulfilling tree by assuming a subtle body for the sake of devotees , fulfilling their wishes , the deity Panduranga resides in that temple . "

= = = Temples = = =

There are many Vithoba temples in Maharashtra , and some in Karnataka , Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh . However , the main centre of worship is Vithoba 's temple in Pandharpur . The temple 's date of establishment is disputed , though it is clear that it was standing at the time of Dnyaneshwar in the 13th century . Along with Vithoba and his consorts ? Rukmini , Satyabhama and Radha ? other Vaishnava deities are worshipped . These include : Venkateshwara , a form of Vishnu ; Mahalakshmi , a form of Vishnu 's consort Lakshmi ; Garuda and Hanuman ( see previous section ) . Shaiva deities are also worshipped , such as : Ganesha , the elephant @-@ headed god of wisdom and beginnings ; Khandoba , a form of Shiva ; and Annapurna , a form of Shiva 's consort Parvati . The samadhis ( memorials ) of saints like Namdev , Chokhamela and Janabai , and of devotees such as Pundalik and Kanhopatra , are in and around the temple . Other significant temples in Maharashtra are located : at Dehu , the birthplace of Tukaram , which attracts visitors at all ekadashis of the year ; at Kole ( Satara district ) , in memory of Ghadge Bova , which has a fair on the fifth day of the bright fortnight ( waxing moon ) in Magha month ; at Kolhapur and Rajapur , which host fairs on Shayani Ekadashi and Prabodini Ekadashi ; Madhe ? a refuge of the Pandharpur image when it was moved to protect from Muslim invaders and finally at the Birla Mandir in Shahad .

Several temples are found in Goa , the well @-@ known ones being the temples at Sanquelim , Sanguem and Gokarna Math . Similarly temple festivals celebrated in Vitthala temples in Margao , Ponda attract a lot a pilgrims . Vitthal is also worshipped as Vitthalnath at the Nathdwara in Rajasthan .

Vithoba was introduced to South India during the Vijayanagara and Maratha rule . In South India he is generally known as Vitthala . The Hampi temple ( mentioned above ) is a World Heritage site and the most important of Vitthala 's temples outside Maharashtra . Constructed in the 15th century , the temple is believed to have housed the central image from Pandharpur , which the Vijayanagara king Krishnadevaraya took " to enhance his own status " or to save the image from plunder by Muslim invaders . It was later returned to Pandharpur by Bhanudas ( 1448 ? 1513 ) , the great @-@ grandfather of poet @-@ saint Eknath . Today , the temple stands without a central image , though between 1516 and 1565 , most important transactions , which would have been carried out previously in the presence of the original state deity Virupaksha ( a form of Shiva ) , were issued in presence of the central image of Vitthala . Three of Madhvacharya 's eight mathas ( monasteries ) in Karnataka ? Shirur , Pejavara and Puttige ? have Vitthala as their presiding deity . A Vitthaleshwara



temple stands at Mulbagal , Karnataka . In Tamil Nadu , Vitthala shrines are found in Srirangam , Vittalapuram near thiruporur and in Tirunelveli district , and Thennangur , Govindapuram near Kumbakonam and sculptures are also found in Kanchi .

= = Legend = =

Legends regarding Vithoba usually focus on his devotee Pundalik or on Vithoba 's role as a savior to the poet @-@ saints of the Varkari faith . As discussed in the devotional works section above , the Pundalik legend appears in the Sanskrit scriptures Skanda Purana and Padma Purana . It is also documented in Marathi texts : Panduranga @-@ Mahatmya by a Brahmin called Sridhara ; another work of the same name written by Prahlada Maharaj ; and also in the abhangas of various poet @-@ saints .

There are three versions of the Pundalik legend , two of which are attested as textual variants of the Skanda Purana ( 1 @.@ 34 ? 67 ) . According to the first , the ascetic Pundarika ( Pundalik ) is described as a devotee of god Vishnu and dedicated to the service of his parents . The god Gopala @-@ Krishna , a form of Vishnu , comes from Govardhana as a cowherd , accompanied by his grazing cows , to meet Pundarika . Krishna is described as in digambar form , wearing makara @-@ kundala , the srivatsa mark ( described above ) , a head @-@ dress of peacock feathers , resting his hands on his waist and keeping his cow @-@ stick between his thighs . Pundarika asks Krishna to remain in this form on the banks of the river Bhima . He believes that Krishna 's presence will make the site a tirtha and a kshetra . The location is identified with modern @-@ day Pandharpur , which is situated on the banks of the Bhima . The description of Krishna resembles the characteristics of the Pandharpur image of Vithoba .

The second version of the legend depicts Vithoba appearing before Pundalik as the five @-@ year @-@ old Bala Krishna ( infant Krishna ) . This version is found in manuscripts of both Puranas , Prahlada Maharaj , and the poet @-@ saints , notably Tukaram . The remaining version of the Pundalik legend appears in Sridhara and as a variant in the Padma Purana . Pundalik , a Brahmin madly in love with his wife , neglected his aged parents as a result . Later , on meeting sage Kukkuta , Pundalik underwent a transformation and devoted his life to the service of his aged parents . Meanwhile , Radha , the milkmaid @-@ lover of Krishna , came to Dwarka , the kingdom of Krishna , and sat on his lap . Radha did not honour Rukmini , the chief queen of Krishna , nor did Krishna hold Radha accountable for the offence . Offended , Rukmini left Krishna and went to the forest of Dandivana near Pandharpur . Saddened by Rukmini 's departure , Krishna searched for his queen and finally found her resting in Dandivana , near Pundalik 's house . After some coaxing , Rukmini was pacified . Then Krishna visited Pundalik and found him serving his parents . Pundalik threw a brick outside for Krishna to rest on . Krishna stood on the brick and waited for Pundalik . After completing his services , Pundalik asked that his Lord , in Vithoba form , remain on the brick with Rukmini , in Rakhumai form , and bless His devotees forever .

Other legends describe Vithoba coming to the rescue of his devotees in the form of a commoner , an outcast Mahar " untouchable " or a Brahmin beggar . Mahipati , in his work Pandurangastrotra , narrates how Vithoba helped female saints like Janabai in their daily chores , such as sweeping the house and pounding the rice . He narrates how Vithoba came to the aid of Sena the barber . The king of Bidar had ordered Sena to be arrested for not coming to the palace despite royal orders . As Sena was engrossed in his prayers to Vithoba , Vithoba went to the palace in the form of Sena to serve the king , and Sena was saved . Another tale deals with a saint , Damaji , the keeper of the royal grain store , who distributed grain to the people in famine . Vithoba came as an outcaste with a bag of gold to pay for the grain . Yet another story narrates how Vithoba resurrected the child of Gora Kumbara ( potter ) , who had been trampled into the clay by Gora while singing the name of Vithoba .