

= Banai (goddess) =

Banai (Marathi : बाबाई , sometimes बाबा) , also known as Banu (बाबू , बाबा) and Banu Bai (बाबू बाबा , बाबा बाबा) , is a Hindu goddess and the second wife of Khandoba , a form of the god Shiva worshipped in the Deccan ? predominantly in the Indian states of Maharashtra and Karnataka . Khandoba is portrayed as a king of Jejuri , where his chief temple stands . Some traditions do not give her the status of a legal wife and treat her as a concubine of Khandoba .

While scriptures related to Khandoba do not mention Banai , she is a central subject of folk songs . Banai is considered as a Dhangar , a sheep herding caste , and is sometimes regarded to be of celestial origin . Oral traditions chiefly discuss the tale of her marriage to Khandoba and her conflicts with his first wife Mhalsa . Banai is an antithesis of Mhalsa ; together they complete the god . Banai is generally depicted with Khandoba and often is also accompanied by Mhalsa .

Banai does not enjoy independent worship , but is worshipped as Khandoba 's consort in most of his temples . She is the patron goddess of the Dhangar community and is worshipped as a protector of their herds .

= = Development and symbolism = =

Though Khandoba is a god with five wives , his first two consorts Mhalsa and Banai are the most important . The tale of the King or god with two wives is retold with some variation across India : Murugan and his wives Devasena and Valli ; Venkateswara , Lakshmi and Padmavati being some examples . The motif of Shiva and his wives Parvati and Ganga is told in the Puranas .

The theme of the god marrying a tribal girl like Banai recurs across the Deccan region ; another example being Valli 's marriage to Murugan . Deities across the Deccan (even extending to Kerala and Tamil Nadu) often have two wives ; one wife from a high caste and another from the lower social strata : a lower caste or a tribal . Khandoba 's wives who come from various communities establish cultural linkages of the god to these communities , who worship them as their patron god .

While Banai is considered as a legal wife of Khandoba in Maharashtra (especially with the Dhangars) , the Kurubas of Karnataka regard her as a concubine . While Mhalsa is from the high @-@ caste Lingayat merchant (Vani) community , Banai is described as a Dhangar (shepherd caste) , representing the " outside " and associates Khandoba with non @-@ elite herding castes like Dhangars , Gavli and Kuruba (Gowda) who live in the forest . Some traditions consider Banai as a Gavli (cowherd caste) or Koli (fisherman caste) . In Karnataka , she is called Kurbattyavva and is a Kuruba .

Banai is an antithesis Mhalsa . Mhalsa has a regular ritualistic marriage with Khandoba . Banai , on the other hand , has a love marriage after being captured by the god . Mhalsa is described as pure , ugly , jealous and a good cook ; Banai is impure , erotic , resolute , but does not even know to cook . Mhalsa represents " culture " while Banai " nature " ; together they aid the god @-@ king Khandoba .

The oral legends and texts initiate a process of Sanskritization of the folk deity Khandoba by elevating him to the classical Hindu god Shiva ; his two principal wives Mhalsa and Banai are equated to Parvati and Ganga . Banai does not appear in the Sanskrit Malhari Mahatmya , the main scripture related to Khandoba , however it mentions Ganga arriving from heaven . Banai (Ganga) has a quarrel with Mhalsa (Parvati) , ultimately ending with the message that both are the same . Some Dhangars consider Banai also to be a form of Parvati .

The chief source of legends related to Banai are ovi (pada) or folk songs sung by Vaghyas and Muralis , the male and female bards of Khandoba . They sing at jagrans (a vigil) where the bards sing in praise of Khandoba through the night . The songs talk about the relationship of Khandoba to his consorts and the mutual relationships of the wives . They are centred on Mhalsa and Banai and often narrate about their quarrels . The tale of the marriage of Khandoba and Banai is a central theme in many Dhangar folk songs . The Varkari saint Sheikh Muhammad (1560 @-@ 1650) disparages Khandoba in his Yoga @-@ samgrama and calls him the " mad " god that searches for

Banai due to " sexual passion " , an allusion to the tale of Banai 's marriage , indicating that the tale was well @-@ established by this era .

According to scholar Günther @-@ Dietz Sontheimer , the legend of Banai has close parallels with the story of King Dushyanta and Shakuntala from the Hindu epic Mahabharata . The tale of another folk god Mhaskoba (Bhairava) to gain his wife Balurani or Balai despite obstacles is also similar to Khandoba 's endeavour to win over Banai .

= = Legends = =

Banai does not appear in the Malhari Mahatmya originating from the Brahmin (high @-@ priest caste) tradition , which glorifies Khandoba as Shiva and de @-@ emphasizes his earthly connections . In contrast , Banai occupies the central position in the Dhangar folk narrative and Mhalsa 's marriage to Khandoba is reduced to a passing mention ; Marathas and other settled castes give more importance to Mhalsa .

= = = Early life = = =

Generally , Banai 's birth is not discussed in the folk songs . Few regard her as an avatar of the apsara (celestial nymph) Rambha , while others consider her as one of the seven daughters of Indra , the king of the gods . She is found by a Dhangar in a golden box in the forest , hidden in a termite mound or a pit . Her Dhangar father (sometimes named Yamu) is the chief of shepherds , who owns nine lakh sheep and goats , nine lakh lambs and numerous barren ones . Yamu is said to have prayed for a child and finds Banai in a box . A virgin ewe is said to have fed Banai her milk , as Yamu does not have a wife and does not know how to feed the infant . In another miracle , a three @-@ storeyed house appears at the place of Yamu 's tent for the young Banai to reside , while the rest of the Dhangars live in tents . She grows up as a rich shepherdess and becomes the overseer of twelve Dhangar vadas (pastoral settlements or camps , inhabited by different Dhangar clans) . She cares for her sheep , grazes them and learns how to breed them .

= = = Marriage = = =

Once , Khandoba and Mhalsa play a game of saripat (translated as game of dice or chess) . Khandoba loses everything to Mhalsa in the wager , except his dhoti , his flag , his staff (wand) and his bhandari , the bag of magical bhandara (turmeric powder) . In a dream , he sees Banai and falls in love with her . He goes on a hunt in the forest , gets away from the army and stays with Banai for twelve years . He marries her in non @-@ ritualistic marriage and brings her back to Jejuri . A variant describes how Khandoba arrives in Chandanpur on a hunting expedition and becomes thirsty . A Dhangar directs him to Banai 's vada . Banai offers him water or sends a pot of water , in which Khandoba reads Banai 's name . In another version , the pot with nine jewels is a sign for Khandoba to recognise Banai , the girl he saw in his dream . He falls for her and loses purposefully in saripat with Mhalsa and accepts a twelve @-@ year exile . In this period , he disguises himself as an impoverished , old leper and becomes a man @-@ servant of Banai 's father . Some folk songs have erotic overtones , for example , some songs give erotic descriptions of Banai 's beauty which maddens Khandoba .

Khandoba is described as doing odd jobs under Banai 's orders . Banai first assigns him the task of sweeping the entire vada . He is responsible for cleaning the sheep pens and taking the sheep and lambs for grazing . He completes all tasks by spreading his magical bhandara . The shepherds are astonished how a single old man can handle all the animals . Their vanity is crushed . Banai assigns him the additional responsibility of taking care of five hundred children . She commands if any sheep or lamb is lost or a child cries , she will not give him his food . But Khandoba fulfils the tasks again by spraying his bhandara . She assigns him the job of washing the sheep and lambs . Instead , Khandoba kills all her sheep and lambs to humble the shepherds and Banai . He skins the sheep and separates the meat . A repentant Banai begs his forgiveness ; he agrees to revive her flock on

the condition that Banai marries him . Khandoba revives the sheep by spreading his bhandara and reveals his true form .

The wedding is deemed not in accordance to Hindu rituals . Banai and Khandoba marry in a simple , un @-@ Brahmanical ceremony , where sheep droppings are showered on the couple , instead of rice as in the ritualistic weddings of classical (Brahmanical) Hinduism . The wedding is conducted without a Brahmin officiating priest . Shepherds read the mantras (the responsibility of the Brahmin in a normal wedding) and the bleating of sheep replaces the traditional wedding band . The wedding is sometimes described as a gandharva marriage . Due to the unceremonious nature of the wedding , she is sometimes considered as a rakh (concubine) of Khandoba .

= = = After marriage = = =

In all versions , Khandoba returns to Jejuri with his new wife and faces the wrath of Mhalsa . Many songs tell about the confrontations of Mhalsa and Banai . In some songs , Mhalsa complains about Khandoba 's infatuation with the impure Banai . The cantankerous Mhalsa grumbles how Banai has polluted the house by her uncouth ways and suggests that Banai should be returned to the wilderness again . The songs sing how the vegetarian , high @-@ caste Mhalsa is forced to catch fish and eat in the same plate as the non @-@ vegetarian low @-@ caste Banai . Mhalsa is portrayed blaming Banai for the problems in the palace and talking about her superiority to Banai . Banai retorts by saying that Khandoba came to her , mesmerized by her beauty and became her servant . A frustrated Khandoba leaves the palace on a hunting trip after Mhalsa and Banai quarrel about who will embroider a shawl for him and marries Rambhai . The songs also narrate how ultimately the wives have to remain in harmony and aid each other . For example , a song sings how Mhalsa and Banai come together and celebrate the festival of Diwali with Khandoba at Jejuri .

Rarely , Banai also appears in Khandoba 's chief legend where he slays the demons Mani and Malla . Mhalsa and Banai (or Ganga) futilely help Khandoba in the battle to collect the blood of Mani , every drop of which was creating a new demon . Finally , the dog of Khandoba swallows all the blood . Rarely , Banai is described as seated behind Khandoba on the horse and fighting with a sword or spear , a role generally assigned to Mhalsa .

= = Worship and iconography = =

While traces of Banai / Balai 's association with the folk god Biroba as a " mother " remain , Banai rarely enjoys independent worship in modern times . She is generally worshipped as Khandoba 's consort . While in Karnataka , her temple is outside the village and Mailara (as Khandoba is known in Karnataka) journeys every year to visit it for ten nights from his temple in the village . In Maharashtra , Banai 's temple is inside the village , but outside the chief temple , as in Khandoba 's chief temple at Jejuri . Mhalsa - who is installed in the main temple - is said to resist the arrival of Khandoba 's new wife Banai and thus , Banai does not reside in the chief temple . Frustrated by the constant quarrels between the two wives , Khandoba is said to have divided the hill of Jejuri into two halves : the lower half belongs to Banai , where she has a separate shrine while Mhalsa rules the upper half where she stays with Khandoba in the main temple . It is customary to pay respects to Banai on the way up to the main shrine , before worshipping Khandoba and Mhalsa there . It is said that Khandoba bestowed the honour of first worship on Banai , while sending her off to a separate residence .

Banai is the patron goddess of the Dhangars and the protector goddess of flock and herds . She takes care of the well @-@ being of the community and is worshipped for increasing the herd . Stone votive images of sheep and other cattle are offered to her for plentiful animals . No animal sacrifice or non @-@ vegetarian offerings are presented to Khandoba directly , instead non @-@ vegetarian offerings intended for Khandoba are offered to Banai . Dhangars sacrifice rams in her honour and offer her a naivedya (food offering) of liver , meat and rice , especially on the holy days : Vijayadashami (when warriors traditionally set off on war or on a journey) and the full moon days in the Hindu months of Magha and Chaitra .

Khandoba is often depicted with two identical goddesses accompanying him , representing Mhalsa and Banai . In brass images , Banai is depicted holding a lamb and offering water to Khandoba , while Mhalsa rides with Khandoba on his horse . In metal plaques worshipped by the Dhangars , Banai accompanies Khandoba on his horse and is depicted with sheep .