

= Kanhopatra =

Kanhopatra (or Kanhupatra) was a 15th @-@ century Marathi saint @-@ poet , venerated by the Varkari sect of Hinduism .

Little is known about Kanhopatra . According to most traditional accounts , Kanhopatra was a courtesan and dancing @-@ girl . These accounts typically concentrate on her death when she chose to surrender to the Hindu god Vithoba ? the patron god of the Varkaris ? rather than becoming a concubine of the Badshah (king) of Bidar . She died in the central shrine of Vithoba in Pandharpur . She is the only person whose samadhi (mausoleum) is within the precincts of the temple .

Kanhopatra wrote Marathi ovi and abhanga poetry telling of her devotion to Vithoba and her struggle to balance her piety with her profession . In her poetry , she implores Vithoba to be her saviour and release her from the clutches of her profession . About thirty of her abhangas have survived , and continue to be sung today . She is the only female Varkari saint to have attained sainthood based solely on her devotion , without the support of any guru , male Varkari saint , or parampara (tradition or lineage) .

= = Life = =

Kanhopatra 's history is known through stories passed down over centuries , making it hard to separate fact and fiction . Most accounts agree about her birth to Shama the courtesan and her death in the Vithoba temple when the Badshah of Bidar sought her . However , the characters of Sadashiva Malagujar (her alleged father) and Hausa the maid do not appear in all accounts .

= = = Early life = = =

Kanhopatra was a daughter of a rich prostitute and courtesan named Shama or Shyama , who lived in the town of Mangalwedhe , near Pandharpur , the site of Vithoba 's chief temple . Apart from Kanhopatra , Mangalwedhe is also the birthplace of the Varkari saints Chokhamela and Damaji . Shama was uncertain about the identity of Kanhopatra 's father , but suspected that it was the town 's head @-@ man Sadashiva Malagujar . Kanhopatra spent her childhood in the palatial house of her mother , served by several maids , but because of her mother 's profession , Kanhopatra 's social status was demeaningly low .

Kanhopatra was trained in dance and song from early childhood so that she could join her mother 's profession . She became a talented dancer and singer . Her beauty was compared to the apsara (heavenly nymph) Menaka . Shama suggested that Kanhopatra should visit the Badshah (Muslim king) , who will adore her beauty and gift her money and jewelry , but Kanhopatra flatly refused . Traditional tales narrate that Shama wanted Kanhopatra to marry , but Kanhopatra longed to marry a man who was more beautiful than her . Scholar Tara Bhavalkar states that Kanhopatra 's marriage was forbidden , as it was not socially acceptable for a daughter of a courtesan to marry .

Most accounts declare that Kanhopatra was forced into the courtesan 's life , though she detested it , while some say that Kanhopatra firmly declined to become a courtesan . Some authors believe that she may have also worked as a prostitute .

= = = Path to devotion = = =

Sadashiva Malagujar , Kanhopatra 's supposed father , heard of Kanhopatra 's beauty and wished to see her dance , but Kanhopatra refused . Accordingly Sadashiva started to harass Kanhopatra and Shama . Shama tried to convince him that he was the father of Kanhopatra and thus should spare them , but Sadashiva did not believe her . As he continued his harassment , Shama 's wealth slowly depleted . Eventually , Shama apologised to Sadashiva and offered to present Kanhopatra to him . Kanhopatra , however , fled to Pandharpur disguised as a maid , with the help of her aged maid Hausa .

In some legends , Hausa ? described as a Varkari ? is credited for Kanhopatra 's journey to devotion . Other accounts credit the Varkari pilgrims who passed Kanhopatra 's house on their way to the temple of Vithoba in Pandharpur . According to one story , for example , she asked a passing Varkari about Vithoba . The Varkari said that Vithoba is " generous , wise , beautiful and perfect " , his glory is beyond description and his beauty surpasses that of Lakshmi , the goddess of beauty . Kanhopatra further asked if Vithoba would accept her as a devotee . The Varkari assured her that Vithoba would accept her as he accepted the maid Kubja , the sinful king Ajamila and the so @-@ called " untouchable " saint Chokhamela . This assurance strengthened her resolve to go to Pandharpur . In versions of the legend where Sadashiva does not appear , Kanhopatra immediately leaves for Pandharpur ? singing the praises of Vithoba ? with the Varkari pilgrims or coaxes her mother to accompany her to Pandharpur .

When Kanhopatra first saw the Vithoba image of Pandharpur , she sang in an abhanga that her spiritual merit was fulfilled and she was blessed to have seen Vithoba 's feet . She had found the unparalleled beauty she sought in her groom in Vithoba . She " wedded " herself to the god and settled in Pandharpur . She withdrew from society . Kanhopatra moved into a hut in Pandharpur with Hausa and lived an ascetic 's life . She sang and danced at the Vithoba temple , and cleaned it twice a day . She gained the respect of the people , who believed her to be a poor farmer 's daughter maddened by the love of Vithoba . In this period , Kanhopatra composed ovi poems dedicated to Vithoba .

= = = Death = = =

During this same time , however , Sadashiva ? who felt insulted by Kanhopatra 's refusal ? sought the help of the Badshah (king) of Bidar . Hearing tales of Kanhopatra 's beauty , the Badshah ordered her to be his concubine . When she refused , the king sent his men to get her by force . Kanhopatra took refuge in the Vithoba temple . The soldiers of the king besieged the temple and threatened to destroy it if Kanhopatra was not handed over to them . Kanhopatra requested a last meeting with Vithoba before being taken .

By all accounts , Kanhopatra then died at the feet of the Vithoba image , but the circumstances were unclear . According to popular tradition , Kanhopatra merged with the image of Vithoba in a form of marriage ? something that Kanhopatra longed for . Other theories suggest that she killed herself , or that she was killed for her rebelliousness .

Most accounts say that Kanhopatra 's body was laid at feet of Vithoba and then buried near the southern part of the temple , in accordance with her last wishes . In some accounts , the nearby Bhima river (Chandrabhaga) flooded , inundating the temple and killing the army that sought Kanhopatra . The next day , her body was found near a rock . According to all versions of the legend , a tarati tree ? which is worshipped by pilgrims in her remembrance ? arose on the spot where Kanhopatra was buried . Kanhopatra is the only person whose samadhi (mausoleum) is in the precincts of the Vithoba temple .

= = = Dating = = =

Several historians have attempted to establish the dates of Kanhopatra 's life and death . One estimate places her life circa 1428 CE by relating her to a Bahamani king of Bidar who is often associated with the Kanhopatra story ? although in most accounts , that king is never explicitly named . Pawar estimates that she died in 1480 . Others suggest dates of 1448 , 1468 or 1470 , or simply say that she lived in the 15th century ? or in rare instances , the 13th or 16th century . According to Zelliott , she was a contemporary of saint @-@ poets Chokhamela (14th century) and Namadeva (c.1270 @-@ c.1350) .

= = Literary works and teachings = =

Kanhopatra is believed to have composed many abhangas , but most were not in written form : only

thirty of her abhangas or ovis survive today . Twenty @-@ three verses of her poems are included in the anthology of Varkari saints called Sakal sant @-@ gatha . Most of these verses are autobiographical , with an element of pathos . Her style is described as unadorned by poetic devices , easy to understand , and with a simplicity of expression . According to Deshpande , Kanhopatra 's poetry reflects the " awakening of the downtrodden " and the rise of female creative expression , ignited by the sense of gender equality enforced by the Varkari tradition .

Kanhopatra 's abhangas frequently portray her struggle between her profession and her devotion to Vithoba , the patron deity of the Varkaris . She presents herself as a woman deeply devoted to Vithoba , and pleads for him to save her from the unbearable bondage of her profession . Kanhopatra speaks of her humiliation and her banishment from society owing to her profession and social stature . She expresses disgust for the society which adored her as an object of beauty rather than as a human being , and abhorred her for profession . She describes how she has been the object of lustful thoughts . She worries that she was beyond the " scope of God 's love " . In Nako Devaraya Anta Aata ? believed to be the last abhanga of her life ? unable to bear the thought of separation from her Lord , Kanhopatra begs Vithoba to end her misery . In the abhanga Patita tu pavanahe , she acknowledges her Lord as the saviour of the fallen and asks him to save her as well :

Kanhopatra refers to Vithoba by names such as Narayana (a name of Vishnu , who is identified with Vithoba) , Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu , identified with Vithoba) , Sripati (" husband of goddess Sri , " an epithet of Vishnu) and Manmatha (a name of Kamadeva , the god of love , used by Vaishnava saints to describe Vishnu) . She refers to Krishna @-@ Vithoba as the " champion of the low " , and as a mother . Kanhopatra also asserts the importance of repeating the names of God and reveals how chanting His names has helped her . She says that even Death would fear God 's name , which purified the sinner king Ajamila ? who ascended to heaven when he coincidentally called to God at his death bed , the " robber " Valmiki ? who was transformed into a great sage by utterance of God 's name ? and even the prostitute Pingala . Kanhopatra says , she wears the garland of His names . She hoped that her chanting would ultimately lead her to salvation . Kanhopatra also extols the deeds of Dnyaneshwar ? the first great saint of the Varkaris ? and his siblings .

Kanhopatra 's abhangas also show her concern for her body , her sense of vulnerability and her will to " remain untouched in the midst of turbulence " . She compares herself to food being devoured by wild animals ? an expression never used by male saints :

According to Ranade , this abhanga was composed by Kanhopatra when invited by the Bidar king .

Kanhopatra advises against seeking mere sexual pleasure ; she speaks of the evils of sexual attraction , citing mythological characters who suffered the consequences of sexual temptation : the demon @-@ king Ravana , the demon Bhasmasura , the god @-@ king of heaven Indra and the moon @-@ god Chandra .

= = Legacy and remembrance = =

Kanhopatra is formally included in the list of Sants , meaning saints in Marathi in the text Bhaktavijaya . Mahipati (1715 ? 1790) , a traditional biographer of Marathi saints , devotes an entire chapter to her in his Bhaktavijaya extolling her devotion to Vithoba . In his Bhaktalilamrita Mahipati refers to Kanhopatra as one of the saints who sit surrounding Krishna (identified with Vithoba in Maharashtra) . Kanhopatra is cited by the Varkari saint @-@ poets as " an example of the real downtrodden and deserving people persons that are saved by the merciful God " . In one of his abhangas , the Varkari saint and poet Tukaram (1577 ? c.1650) uses the example of Kanhopatra and other famous saints who were low in the social caste hierarchy , to illustrate that caste is irrelevant when compared with devotion and merit . Her death and her surrender to Vithoba is regarded as a " great legacy of self respect combined with spiritualism . " Kanhopatra is considered unique since she is the only prominent woman in Maharashtra who rose to fame without a traditional family backing . She was born in a household where devotion was unthinkable . She is the only woman Varkari saint , who is not associated with any male Varkari saint , who has no guru , nor any

parampara (tradition or lineage) . She is credited to have attained sainthood exclusively on the basis of her intense devotion to Vithoba , a devotion reflected in her abhangas .

Kanhopatra 's life has been recounted in a 1937 Marathi film Kanhopatra written and directed by Bhalji Pendharkar . She was also the subject of the popular 1931 Marathi drama named Sant Kanhopatra , in which Bal Gandharva played the lead . Kanhopatra 's abhangas Aga Vaikunthichya Raya and Patita tu pavanahe ; and Nako Devaraya Anta Aata are used in that drama and in the 1963 Marathi film Sadhi Manase respectively . A 2014 short film Katha Sant Kanhopatra by Sumeet video featured Pallavi Subhash as Kanhopatra .

Kanhopatra 's abhangas are still sung in concerts and on radio , and by Varkaris on their annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur . The tree that rose at her burial spot in the Pandharpur temple is worshipped as her samadhi by devotees even today . A small shrine is also dedicated to her in her home town Mangalvedhe .