



## SOCIAL CONVERGENCE DONE BY WARKARI SECT IN MAHARASHTRA

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### INTRODUCTION :

In 13 Century Europe is Considered to be the beginning of the awakening period and 16 th century the proliferation period. But earlier this work started in Maharashtra especially in the Warkari Sect.



### Warkari Sampraday

Pandharpur is the Important place in the Social and cultural life of Maharashtra. Pandharpur is the religious heart of Maharashtra. (1) Pandharpur is mother of all saints and infinite pilgrim is famous as the peak of Krishna Bhakti. Pandhri's Vitthal is the goddess of this sect and this sampraday is filled with Sagun and Nirgun Devotion. (2) Ashadhi , Kartiki, Maghi, Chaitri and every month and 15 day Ekadashi is significant in this sect.

The Varkari Sect works for the emancipation of the society by imbibing good life values in the disturbed society and trying to create sustainable happiness and contentment . A man never falls a prey to any allurements if there is deep devotion for Vitthal , a good way of life , good company of saints and virtues people, definite and outstanding philosophy and a good tradition . (3)

Once a Varkari ( pilgrim ) puts on the Tulsi rosary he or she discards ( gives up ) alcohol and non - vegetarian food. He embraces virtuous conduct. What is not possible by strict laws and enforcements is possible due to the teachings of saints. A Varkari never goes for violence, vulgarity, cruelty . The Western culture does not affect the Varkari's way of life. To put it in a nutshell, the Varkari sect's philosophy is so rich and superior that it does not exist anywhere in the world. It is an everlasting way of human welfare.

The Varkari sect has taken the initiative to free the society from the strong clutches of caste system and bring about a cultural awakening , renaissance in Maharashtra. There is no discrimination made on the basis of sex, caste, creed, religion or age. It started the process of social circulation ( Abhisarran ) and the process is still continued collective nature. People did not come there in masses, like they do day. Dnyaneshwar opened the doors of devotion to all the people belonging to different casts and community and saint Tukaram put a dome on top of it.

### FEATURES OF WARKARI SECT

Warkari sect has quite a few features. By following the conduct, proper thinking and principles one can overcome the time. Doing a wari regularly by wearing a garland of holy basil is one of the features of this sect. Rama Krishna Hari is the mantra of this sect. Rama means who is happy in his heart, Krishna means the one who attracts and Hari means the one who becomes one with God, i. e. with Vitthal. (4) In this sect it is important to purify one self. Rituals and other confusing ideas are not there. While doing mundane affairs of

daily life do charity and other good work and lead a good life full of virtue is the essence of this sect. The Mantra has no constraints of place, time, caste, clan and money. A garland of holy Basil around the neck, Bukka and Gopichandantilak on the forehead and a flag on the shoulder are the signs of the warkaris.(8) Vitthal likes the garland of holy Basil. This is to be taken from a senior warkari. This ritual is very simple. While giving the garland the Guru gives his disciple this oath: 1. Speak truth. 2. All other women are like mothers. 3. Do Pandharpurwari. 4. Ekadashi fast. 5. Simple vegetarian diet. 6. Always reciting the Mantra. 7. Reading of Haripath and Dnyaneshwari. 8. (6) All the sorrows and happiness in life, everyday duties should be done properly and sincerely by changing the name of Vitthal all the time. Dnyaneshwari, Eknathi Bhagwat and Abhangagatha of Tukaram are the religious books of this sect.(7)

### TRADITION OF SAINTS

The tradition of Pandurang is quite large. Right from shri Dnyaneshwar-Namdev to Tukoba-Niloba.(8) A reputation of promoting the warkari sect goes to Pundalik. 1. A period from Pundalik to Dnyaneshwar 2. A Period from Dnyandev to Namdev 3. A Period from Bhanudas to Eknath 4. A period of Tukaram and 5. A period after Tukaram. This is the tradition of saints. To this tradition also belong the women saints like Muktabai, Janabai, Nirmala, Kanhopatra etc.

### PALKI CEREMONY ----

Palki of various devotees of Vitthal and of all the saints came to Pandharpur for the AshadiYatra( pilgrimage ) . The ceremony on Jyesta Vadya Ashtami is worth seeing. Varkari's from all the parts of Maharashtra gather here. Palanquins of vavarious saints from all over the country come together and proceed towards Pandharpur .(9) In the procession ( Dindi ) Varkaris sings bhajan, deliver kirtans ( religious narrations ) and give a discourse for social awareness ( probodhan ) . (10) Thousands of processions walk towards Pandharpur. Their customary cultural activities on the way are pre - decided . All these processions walk towards Pandharpur chanting Vitthal's name. (11) Besides there are some other processions following their own traditions. In the modern times there are some processions that work for social and spiritual awareness by focusing on social problems like Superstitions , Addictions , Uncleanliness etc.

To make the people aware of the need of cleanliness and toilets, health and hygiene Maharashtra Government's Gram Vikas department hires artists to awaken the people through various art forms . The National social Service Scheme of Maharashtra provide guidance in a novel way on modern technology. Issues like sustainable energy resources, conservation of natural resources, need of afforestation and tree plantation etc. Are discussed in speeches and street plays Maharashtra Government's Pune City Medical service Committee enlighten the people with information of various diseases . The SwachataDoot procession preaches on the importance of cleanliness and the toilets . The presence and the participation of women is more in all this. There are processions that prove importance of girl child in the society .

Saint VinobaBhave had visited Pandharpur in 1858.(12) since then his followers take out the SarvodayaDindi ( procession ) for promoting humanity , compassion, anti - addiction. BhakareMaharaj's procession from Madhya Pradesh preaches on anti - addiction and people addicted to drugs , alcohol etc. are brought there to de -addict them . (13) The BalbheemMaharajDindi, Hangewadi( Srigonda ) are unique for the Hindi - Muslim unity .(14) thus these processions strive for social awareness beside spiritualism .

Pandharpur is a religious place where there is a co-ordination of saints like Dyneshwar, Tukaram ,Sawata Mali, Gora Kumbhar, Namdev, ChokhaMela, Janabai, Narhari Sonar, Niloba, etc. Some were from different castes but their teachings were the same. People / devotees from all the stratas of society irrespective of religion, caste , creed , language, sex, age come together . there is equality here . The disintegrated divided society becomes one here . Women were free from kitchen and children ( the four walls ) and participate in the procession, carrying Tulsi plant ( Besil plant ) on their head , Preserving the culture they attain salvation .(15)

### SOCIAL AWARENESS THROUGH LITERATURE ,BHAJANS, KIRTANS, AND PRAVACHANS

The contribution of Varkari Sect's in Social Awareness is valuable . Devotees use to walk to Pandharpur even before Saint Dnyaneshwardid . But Saint Dnyaneshwar brought about equality by giving the right of devotion to all. By giving the Varkari sect a philosophical basis saints like Tukaram ,SenaMaharaj , Sawata Mali, Eknath , Gora Kumbhar, ChokhaMela brought about social awakening by striking a blow against hypocrisy . They showed the way to devotion by commenting on outdated , corrupt social customs and Abhangas, Gaulans ( verses in praise of lord Krishna , Radha and rest of the sakhis , a kind of folk songs ) . Saint Namdev popularized VarkhariSampardaya in Punjab (16) and saint Eknath commented on social condition in his bharuds (17) and taught how to lead a simple and chaste life.

The writings of female varkhari of the varkhari sects is a mirror of their life. These women fought against the contemporary society to establish their existence. In the middle ages the clutches of caste system were strong. These women freed to break themselves free.

“Saint Muktabai’sabhangas Tati UghandaDyneswars .....” (19) explains the social condition of women liberation from evil and harassing particles is possible only if they are exposed or brought into light. Her personal opinion is applicable to the society as well. Social Awareness is must for liberation . Saint Janabai who was illiterate and ill- treated throw light on her straight forwarded, her frankness, her rebellious nature. What she did very challenging in those times. The society awakening was done by all the saints then is of great significance and of a very high level. They enlightened the society to see and know their religion. Simple , innocent, honest and pure devotion without the pomp and show of rituals is what their way of life taught. Saint Soyara and Saint Nirmala who come from the untouchable society spoke of the injustice done to their community through their abhangas. They were supported by their families to achieve salvation through VitthalBhati or devotion .

### SOCIAL AWARENESS BROUGHT BY THE VARKARI SECTS

1. The impact of the awareness brought about by the Varkari sects on Maharashtra’s social and religious life is seen even today .
2. The Varkari sect protected and preserved their culture even during foreign rule.
3. They popularized Folk Songs, Abhangas, Owis, Virhini .Rupaks among the common people.
4. The contribution and participation of female saints is valuable and significant in the social, religious and cultural life.
5. The female saints believed that Bhakti ( Devotion ) is more important then Mukti ( freedom and salvation ) . They preached the simple way of devotion - chanting God’s ( Vitthal’s ) name. They did not go for rituals and vocal scholarships.
6. The female saints participated in the Alandi - PandharpurPalakhi ceremony and discarded the bindings of the kitchen and kids. Thus women liberation movement was born here .Liberation does not mean, ‘Typical Indian Culture’ .
7. All saints sang bhajans, kirtans, and delivered discourse for creating social awareness. They organized and mobilized people. Thus they are social reformers who opposed superstitions, rituals caste discrimination etc. They taught spiritualism and morality- Marathi language flourished and reached to a glorious heights with their abhangas ,owies , gaulans, Bharuds and other folk forms.
8. They taught that love and faith are more important than the rituals, festivals, yatras, fasting and knowledge. They brought a control of Bahudevatawad( belief in many Gods ) . Equal rights to devotion brought about a revolution in the life of common people. Their way of life, their thoughts and views their moral preachings and their efforts to enrich individuals and social life has played a very significant role and brought about a great change in the social life of Maharashtrians .
9. Varkhari sects has brought about social gathering and intermixing .
10. Varkhari sects has mobilized people to a great extent .

We see that today there is invasion of western culture in almost all the spheres of life. There is severe cut-throat competition. There is commercialization of education, religion, art and literature and aesthetics. Corruption, poverty, injustice, violence, lack of peace and other discontent and chaos is seen everywhere. At such difficult times the life and philosophy, the way of life of the saints of Varkhari sects is inspiring and guiding force. The credit of man going for spirituality is to be given to the Varkharisects. Those who expressed will definitely have to be courageous and revolutionary in the current situation.

#### FOOT NOTES

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4. Ibid; page 416
5. Pandharpurche Sanskrutik Vaibhav ; Dr. Jayshree Rananavre ; Aksharlene Prakashan . Solapur; Page 43
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10. Vitthal Ek Mahasamnvy ; R.C. Dhere; Shrividya Prakashan Pune ; 1983; Page 92
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12. Dindya Gavogavchya ; Ad; Baburav Hirde; Snehvardhan Prakashan Pune ; 2012; Page 95
13. Palkhi Sohla ; Sadashiv Neurgavkar; Shrisant Vangmayupasak Mandal ; Pandharpur; 1972; Page 241
14. Alandite Pandharpur; Yashvant Sardesai; Anmtrang Prakashan ; Mumbai; 1954; Page 51
15. Sant Kaviani Kavyitri ; Suhasinilrlekar; Parimal Prakashan ; Auragabad; Page 73
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17. Pach Bhakti sampraday ; R.R. Gosavi; Pratima Prakashan ; Pune ; 1974; Page 62

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