



WORK OF THE PROGRESSIVE IDEOLOGY OF THE MONASTERIES AND CHIEF MONKS BELONGING TO SAIN GADGE MAHARAJ CULT OF PANDHARPUR

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Abstract- It will not be a matter of exaggeration if Pandharpur is called as the town of monasteries. There is a majority of monasteries and temples belonging to the Bhagwat sect. At the Centre of the town is located the temple of Lord Vitthal and the surrounding area is occupied by monasteries, religious centers, asylums and sectarian houses of the Waarkari sect. All these are the places where the activities of the Bhagwat sect are held.

According to the definition found on one of the inscriptions discovered in and around the temple of Lord Vitthal the word "Laandadue," meaning either a temple or a monastery, is supposed to be the basis of the term monastery. It got reconstructed before the 10th century A.D. Ramdevray Yadav was the king who ruled Maharashtra. The word "math" meaning monastery is also found in the literature of the Mahanubhav cult. It can be concluded that the concept of monastery got originated before Saint Dnyandev and Saint Namdev's period. However, the development of these monasteries took place after the 17th century.

Keywords- monasteries, religious centers, asylums, sectarian houses, Bhagwat sect, 17th century

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Definition of Monastery

According to the definition given in the Amarkosh, a math or monastery is a residing place for a saint, sadhu or disciple. Generally speaking a monastery is the place where a celibate, sadhu, mendicant either male or female live². Sanskrit language relates the world monastery to the word meaning 'the act of residing'. According to Encyclopedia Britannica ' a monastery is the home of a religious community. The word is commonly used only of houses of men, but in what follows houses of women religious, widely though not properly known as convents, will also be considered.³

The word monastery is said to have originated from the Greek word 'monothain' The meaning of the word is to get isolated from the world around or to live in isolation. The concept of monastery is quite old in the western world. The last stage of human existence makes him get separated from all the earthly responsibilities

it also makes him give up physical pleasure and meditate upon God. It was believed by the western people that this course of life would help the person acquire the real meaning in life. In the Indian context, however, the concept of monastery has been associated with both spiritual and earthly meanings and duties. One of the major functions of monasteries in India is to teach religion as well as secularity. The monasteries also hand the cultural assets from one generation to another. The very organization of monasteries is located in the human inclination towards religious practices, mysticism and self-denial⁴.

Structure of Monasteries in Pandharpur

Pandharpur is the chief centre for the waarkari sect. There are held regular get-together of the people belonging to this sect. In order to provide the regular visitors to Pandharpur with accommo-

dation, the idea of monasteries must have been originated. Beside the monasteries there are thousands of religious centres, sectarian houses and asylums in the town of Pandharpur.⁵ There are held religious activities like singing, (Bhajan) melodramatic presentations, (Keertan) meditations etc on every tenth, eleventh and twelfth days of the Hindu calendar. The entire programmed is aimed at propagating the philosophy of the Waarkari sect.

The majority of the monasteries in Pandharpur belong to the waarkari sect; however, for the sake of convenience the monasteries are divided into the following four sections:

1. The traditional monasteries set up after the names of the Waarkari Saints.
2. The monasteries belonging to the Temple Trustees.
3. The monasteries of progressive ideology or of Saint Gadge Maharaj.
4. The miscellaneous monasteries.

Monasteries of Progressive Ideology or belonging to the Philosophy of Saint Gadge Maharaj

Saint Gadge Maharaj is known to all the Indians as one of the progressive minded saints of the 20th century Maharashtra. He is said to have championed the cause of transforming the superstitious waarkari monasteries into progressive minded religious centers. The progressive minded saints belonging to the medieval period related devotion to belief and duty. But, due to the interference of the orthodox and superstitious success successors of these saints, there came into existence a domination of blind faith, magic, rites and rituals, etc, which polluted the Waarkari sect. Against this context, Saint Gadge Maharaj came up with his philosophy attaching importance to individual health, cleanliness, honesty towards duty. He believed 'Work to be worship'. He proclaimed 'Gopala, Gopala, Devakinandan Gopala' and consequently gave a new direction to the society. As a result, the followers of Gadge Maharaj tread the right path of belief and devotion.

Gadge Maharaj asserted that God can't be pleased by sacrificing animals or spending hours together in rites and rituals. The best way of seeking God's grace is only through 'active devotion'. i.e. good deeds. Gadge Maharaj gives ten principles realizing his humanitarian religion as follows: 1) Food for the hungry 2) Water for the thirsty 3) Clothes for the needy. 4) Education to the poor 5) Wages for the unemployed 6) Medical attention to patients 7) Shelter for the needy 8) Assurance of life for animals. 9) Marriages of the poor youngsters & 10) Encouragement for the hopeless.⁶ with a view to promote his philosophy, Gadge Maharaj constructed boarding houses instead of monasteries. These boarding houses were really schools which inculcated the humanitarian philosophy. Gadge Maharaj never insisted upon erecting temples of gods or saints. He built boarding houses, especially in the vicinity of holy centers, for the needy and poor people. He opened in Pandharpur Chokhamela Boarding House in 1917, Maratha Boarding House in 1927, an Asylum for the blind and the handicapped in 1921 and the Parit Boarding House in 1925⁷. Shri Sant Gadge Baba Mission, Mumbai-4, a registered society, has been set up in order to realize the management of these institutes and propagate the philosophy of the saint with a progressive mindset. The Mission looks after the development of various educational institutes, the hostels and publication of Saint Literature.

Gadge Baba used to claim that 'he has no disciples, as he has no

mentors'. As a result, he didn't declare his successor. Nevertheless, there have been so many self-styled Babas' disciples, who have contributed to carrying on his message of humanitarianism. There are established several monasteries of these modern saints in Pandharpur. The chief monks of these monasteries have been greatly contributing to the progressive reformation of the society.

Work of the Chief Monks

Shri Sant Gayabai Manamadkar Monastery, Sant Kaikadi Maharaj Monastery, Shri Sant Tenpure Maharaj Charodham Monastery, Sant Namanand Maharaj Monastery, Bhimdas Maharaj Karande Monastery, Lakshman Chandu Padadune Maharaj Monastery, Sant Meerabai Suryawamshi Belgaonkar Monastery, Sant Mirabai Shirkar Monastery, Sant Ruplal Maharaj Monastery are the chief monks of the monasteries of Saint Gadge Maharaj Cult.

Saint Gayabai began her social work in his capacity of the disciple of Gadge Maharaj from the year 1932. The present chief monk-Dada Maharaj Manmadkar has been carrying on the work of Saint Gadge Maharaj by virtue of serving the blind, the handicapped, the lepers and the discarded people⁸. The Kaikadi Maharaj Math, Which is appreciated by one and all for its global integrity, is located in the Dale gully. The acting chief monk of this hermitage Rajaram Jadhav alias Kaikadi Maharaj has been involved in the propagation of the philosophy of the Waarkari sect through a scientific point-of-view⁹. The Tanpure Maharaj Math off the station road is famous for its progressive social activities. The monastery caters food to the blind, the handicapped, the lepers and the orphans. This was the place where Sane Guruji held the fast for the Dalit entry into the temple of Lord Vitthal in the year 1947¹⁰. This monastery has been a centre for holding social, cultural and religious activities. A number of renowned persons have visited this monastery for different occasions. The chief monk of Bhimdas Maharaj Karande, in keeping with the message of Saint Gadge Maharaj, began an important work of eradicating the practice of killing animals on the religious fair of the local Goddess in Gondhlewadi, taluka Jat¹¹. The Chief monk of Lakshmandas Padadune Maharaj is believed to have worked as a manager of Gadge Maharaj Religious Centre; which means he has been working on the motivation sought through his participation in the work of Saint Gadge Baba¹². Marabai Shirka, a spinster, woke up the people to the importance of freedom in the Bhagwat sect by conducting rallies which gave out the slogans of independence, equality and brotherhood¹³. The disciples of Mirabai, at present, carry on the tradition of her work through the monastery.

Conclusion

A majority of the chief monks of these monasteries are highly qualified and who have propagated the philosophy of the Waarkari sect through a scientific attitude. The visitors to the monasteries are from Marathi, Kannad, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi language families. As a result, the spiritual exchange among these devotees gives rise to a healthy linguistic harmony. By means of these monasteries, thousands of women have participated in the work of social awakening and shifted themselves from a regressive life-style to a progressive one. Pandharpur can be called the only holy centre and a taluka where, in spite of lack of industrialization, the prices of the land have gone up due to the spread of the monasteries only.

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