

## VARKARI PHADS IN PANDHARPUR AND THEIR TRADITION CONTRIBUTION

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**Abstract** - The traditional work of the phads is increasing day by day due to the tradition of the chiefs of phads and it helped in building the Varkari groups together.

**Keywords**- phads, Varkari, Dindi, Kirtanas, Bhajans

### Introduction

Pandharpur is the seat of the ancestors of Varkari tradition. (Varkari-a man that performs a periodical pilgrimage to sacred places). From the rise of the Varkari tradition, St. Namdev, St. Dnyaneshwar. St. Tukaram Maharaj and others propagated the varkari tradition through devotion, writings and behaviour. In varkari tradition, there was the tradition of the Saint's like-Namdev, Dnyaneshwar, Bhanudas, Eknath, Tukaram and Nilobaray. This tradition of saints was broken after the St. Nilobaray. After the tradition of saints' tradition of varkari tradition, it was propagated and still propagating not only throughout Maharashtra, but also through the length and breadth of the country. The contribution of traditional Phads and Devotee's cell in Pandharpur is noteworthy. The Phads in Pandharpur, by following the tradition of varkari panth, try to reach to the common people.

In varkari tradition, the two Ekadashis (the eleventh day of waxing and the dark fortnight of eleventh day of waxing) in every month are supposed very important. There are two ekadashis-1) the eleventh day of waxing and 2) the dark fortnight of eleventh day of waxing). The main deity of the eleventh day of waxing is God Pandurang and the dark fortnight of the eleventh day of waxing is of Varkari saints. So there is a big pilgrimage at the time of pure holy day of eleventh day of waxing. Apart from this, lakhs of devotee from Maharashtra and outsider Maharashtra gather at Pandharpur for Ashadhi, Kartiki, Maghi and Chaitri Ekadashis. The number of devotees arriving from different places is increasing day by day.

### What is 'Phad'

"The Varkari chief & the collective group of his colleagues including disciples is called as 'Phad'.<sup>1</sup> The varkaris who arrive at Pandharpur on the occasion of every vari (annual period on pilgrimage to any sacred place) at pure holy day of eleventh day of waxing,

participate in the Kirtanas, (Reciting the names of deity), Pradakshinas (circumambulation it the statue of god/the temple of god ), Dindi (The procession comprehensively of an idol) and khirapat (sweet meats served out to the audience at the conclusion) from the tenth lunar day, the eleventh day of waxing and the twelfth day of the half month. The pilgrims who perform kirtanas at Dashmi, pradakshina Dindi at Ekadashi and Khirapat at dwadashi are called as 'Phadkaris'.

Every varkari's phad is fixed. The varkari becomes the follower of the phad by obtaining a garland (Tulsi Maal) and fellowship and becomes the disciple.

The Varkari has to listen to the kirtans, Bhajans compulsorily. The controlling of the Phad is in the hands of the chief/ head of the phad. He and his disciples, followers perform kirtanas and surmons. At the phads there is a forbearance of sleep at night. There are Dindi groups of different people from different places. These people perform the forbearance of sleep at night along with the Tals, pakwaj and veena and also the forbearance of sleep for Hari Today the Vakari tradition has done a great propagation of Varkari tradition through traditional Varies, Bhajans, kirtanas and tradition of Dindis.<sup>2</sup>

### The particular features of 'Phad'

The traditional work of the phads is increasing day by day due to the tradition of the chiefs of phads and it helped in building the Varkari groups together. Some of the particular features of these phads are as follows:-

Every phad has a chief for running the tradition of the phad. Whether it comes through heredity or followship the activities of the phads are controlled by their guidance. The age old varkaris in the phads help the chief in traditional work of the phad.

The activities of the phads are determined for three days Shuddha Dashmi, Ekadashi and Dwadashi. In these 3 days the varkaris perform Kirtanas, Bhajans, Jagars, Pradakshina, Dindi and Kala (The mingle of genially).

The activities of the Phads at Vari take place only in Pandharpur. The chief of the phad or the assigned follower performs Kirtan, Bhajan. The structure of the traditional activities is noteworthy. In front of the performers, there is audience, the varkaris at the two sides of the performers along with taal. The Varkaris having Mrudung, Pakhwaj stand to the right and left of the performers.

The walking procession for an idol (Payi Dindya) reaches to Pandharpur and other places. The chief/ heads of the Phad are personally involved in this Payi Dindi.

In the Chandrabhaga river basin, the places of phads are fixed to perform Kirtanas, Bhajans, and services.

A Varkari accepts the fellowship of the phad from the chief. This varkari has to attend compulsorily one of the varies of the Ashadhi/Kartiki/Maghi and Chaitri. At the time of Vari, he takes participation in the activities of the phad.

The chief of the phad gives instructions to the followers about traditional activities. Varkaris follow the instructions given by the chief. Through the activities of the phad there is give & take of the different thoughts.

There is an annual planning of the traditional works to be done from the phad. No change is made in the planning. Planning and discipline in activities is one of the particular features of the phad.

We find Varkari services and devout or pious outside the Pandharpur also. But we don't see the tradition of phad in them. The Varkaris of the phad go the pilgrimage places like Alandi, Dehu, Paithan, Tryambakeshwar and perform the traditional activities. Some of the phads have-Devotee's cells at these places and the activities are performed by these branches of the phads.

No invitation is given to the Varkaris who accept the fellowship of the phad, instead, the Varkari himself takes active participation. There is no special honor /respect to anyone.

### Initiation of Phads

There are various phads in Pandharpur. But the tradition of these phads

"Shimpiyacha Por | ek nama bhala ||  
Tene satat phad jagvilara||"<sup>3</sup>

Is running from the unbroken poetry written by St. Tukaram and St. Namdev. So St. Namdev is called the pioneer phadkari. After Namdev for some time this tradition of phads is not seen. But after that phads were given independent identity by Mallappa Vaskar, Shri Vasudev Maharaj Dehukar. According to St. Namdev's promise, the tradition of phads was initiated at Shuddha Dashmi, Ekadashi and Dwadashi by Shri Vasudev Maharaj Dehukar from the Ashadhi Vari to Kartiki vari. All the religious and traditional activities are performed in these phads because there is full of water in river Chandrabhaga and rain also. Other different traditional activities are performed in the Chandrabhaga river basin. According to the ages, there are some changes made in the traditional activities of the phads. The phads of Vaskar and Dehukar have not accepted the modern

technology. The activities are performed as per the old traditions.

In the study of the phads, there is a great importance to the tradition of the phads. There are two traditions of the phads.

### Tradition of Heredity/race

#### Tradition of knowledge

The tradition which is run after the chief of the head by any person in the family / by his son is called the tradition of heredity/race. And the follower who accepts the fellowship from his guru and this disciple runs the tradition of the phads is called as-Tradition of knowledge.

### The main 'Phads' in Pandharpur

#### St. Namdev Maharaj Phad (Namdas)

St. Namdev is the pioneer Phadkari. He destroyed the discrimination among the people and brought them together under the flag of Bhagwat religion. Namdev started Kirtana and through it he started creating devout feeling for god. St. Namdev was born in Pandharpur before 750 yrs. St. Namdev propagated the Bhagwat religion with the contemporary saints like Dnyanadev, Gora Kumbhar, Savta Mali, Chokha Mela etc. At the beginning of 13<sup>th</sup> century, there was a large invasion of Islam religion. People were compulsorily made Islam. At this time, without any means of transportation, St. Namdev- "Nachu Kirtanache Rangi, Dnyandeep Lau Jagi" with this principle, wondered through different places of the country performing Kirtanas, praying the god and he created social equality to bring the scattered society under the flag of Bhagwat religion.<sup>4</sup> The tradition of this phad is run by the race of St. Namdev. The 16<sup>th</sup> race of St. Namdev i.e. Tulsidas Buwa is the chief of the Namdev phad and performs the traditional activities.

#### Mallappa Vaskar Phad

This phad is known as the tradition of knowledge from St. Tukaram and it has a great importance. Shri. Mallappa Vaskar established this phad. Haibat Baba and Vaskar have a great contribution is starting independently the Palakhi Ceremony of St. Dnyaneshwar. This palakhi ceremony was started by accepting the different roles by different people like. The Veena belongs to Araphakar, Gathering people and performing Bhajans belong to Vaskar and the horses, tents for palakhi belong to Sarkar Shitole. So there is a great respect and importance to Vaskar phad in Dnyanoba palakhi ceremony. In this ceremony the Vaskar Dindi moves in the forefront.<sup>5</sup> Today there are two branches of Vaskar phad i.e. 1) Appasaheb Vaskar phad 2) Tatyasaheb Vaskar phad. These phads propagate the Varkari tradition through Parayana, Nam saptah.

#### Dehukar Maharaj Phad

This phad has a great respect and importance due to the heredity obtained from saint Tukaram and running ideally the traditions. This phad is specially known for the

traditional rituals and ideals following ideally. St. Tukaram followed the tradition and propagated 'Bhakit.' After him, Shri. Guru Vasudev Maharaj brought the society together through bhajans, kirtans, and during 1682 Dehukar phad was established.<sup>6</sup> Vasudev Maharaj started monthly varis' phad at Pandharpur. He started this phad by performing kirtans, Dindi, pradakshin at Dashmi and Ekadshi and Khirapt at Dwadashi. The special feature of this phad is that this phad travels to different places without any means of transportation and performs traditional activities. There are four branches of this phad and performing traditional activities. They are

- a) Dnyaneshwar Mauli Dehukar Phad
- b) Bapusaheb Dehukar Phad
- c) Nivrutti/ Babasaheb Maharaj Dehukar Phad
- d) Shri Guru Vitthal Maharaj Dehukar Phad

### **Thakurbuwa's Phad**

This phad is one of the important and oldest phad in varkari tradition. A large group of devotees in Marathwada belong to this phad. The main feature of this phad is that not only men but also women like Girijamay, Laxmimay, Yamunamaay, Janakimaay have made a great contribution to raise the 'Parmarth' and 'Harinam'. So there is the participation of women along with men in the Dindi and the traditional rituals of this phad. This phad was established by Lohhaji Buwa.<sup>7</sup> The tradition of this phad is run through heredity and now a days the two branches of this phad -Thakurbuwa Daithankar and Thakurbuwa Lohagaonkar run the tradition of this phad. The tradition literature is the base of this phad. To create interest among people about the sacred book with cotton imbued, the main branch of this phad at Paithan, an aggregate of seven days (Saptah) is organized in the Marathi month 'Shravana.' In this lakhs of people interestingly do the reading of the holy book. At the end of the week supposing the books as God, all the books are put like in a bundle, the a robe, a garment of male's worn is put to this bundle and putting the mask over it and binding 'Pheta' to it, Vithoba is made and he is worshiped, given arati. Through this new activity the knowledge of spirituality is spread too far and wide places.

### **Shri Guru Babasaheb Ajarekar Phad**

This phad is known for its feature of democracy and fame sought not only in Maharashtra but also in other states of country. It was established in 1832 by Babasaheb Ajarekar. The Chief of the phad is selected through democratic way. There is a need of recommendation of an aged Varkari for the fellow who wants to take Vari at phad and fellowship of the phad. This fellow has to perform Vari without discontinuation, do the Ekadashis. Onion and non-veg, smoking, drinking are prohibited.<sup>8</sup> In this phad the 'sacred book' is the base. This 'sacred books' is established in a specific manner. The establishment of 'Pothis' is supposed the base of service and belief. Dnyaneshwari is necessary at the Pothis. Bhagwat, Tukaram Gatha is also included in the pothis, and other religious books are included. But

these books are of the traditional saints. There is a tradition of going to Pandharpur without any means of transportation from the place of the establishment of pothis. Now-a-days the sub branches of this phad-Rambhau Kondkar Ajarekar and Pandharinath Chavare Ambekar are doing the traditional work.

### **Belapurkar Maharaj Phad**

In the propagation of varakari tradition, Dindis play a vital role. The main founder of this Belapurkar phad is Shri Shahubadada Hirave. The tradition of this phad is run through heredity. Bhanudas Maharaj, Bhagwat Maharaj has done a great deed in tradition work. In Pandharpur so many 'Palakhis' arrive for Ashadhi Ekadashi. There was a controversy about the first place of palakhi. It was that whether St. Dnyaneshwar palakhi will be at the first place or St. Nivruttinatha's palakhi. So to avoid this controversy Bhagwat Buwa discussed with the senior most people and determined the numbers to the palakhis permanently. The palakhis enter Pandharpur as per the numbers given.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the above mentioned important phads, there are other phads in Pandharpur like Gangu kaka Shirwalkar, Gurujibuwa Rashinkar, Dada Maharaj Satarkar, Sadguru Mankoji Bodhale Maharaj, Karadkar, Bankatswami, Guru Kedari Maharaj Ukhalikar, Balaji Maharaj Jalgonkar, St. Nilobaray, Shri Guru Shankar Swami Shiurkar, St. Kabir Maharaj Shivanikar etc. Due to the traditional propagation of these phads, the varkari tradition is being propagated on a large scale.

### **Contribution of the Phads in Pandharpur in traditional propagation**

The tradition of phads in Pandharpur is very old and it is being run since St. Namdev. In medieval period the traditional saints propagated Varkari tradition. After Tukoba, the phads raised and spread the Varkari tradition. These phads brought social equality and showed an ideal lifestyle to Indian society. So now-a-days there is no invitation, no expectations for facilities. The Varkari assemble by forgetting the discrimination of caste, race, and creed. They perform different activities. They take Khirapat. We will see the convention of the devotees at the time of varies. During the Vari there is the only name pronounced by every devotee i.e. Vitthal and his name's meditation. The Varkaris forget all the sorrows and engaged in devout feeling. After returning from the Vari, they perform their routine duties at home.

Phads have not only propagated tradition but also developed languages and literature, many Varkaris speak-English, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada and Telgu and the discussion on the phads is also done through different languages. The publication of 'Dnyaneshwari' in Kannada and Hindi is the best example of it. The heads of the phads have given great attention towards the publication of Saints' literature.

Through the tradition of phads we also notice that though there was the tradition of Mula, Nath, Chaitanya, Datta and Shaiv, in coming ages the people turned towards Varkari tradition and keeping apart their original tradition,

they propagated Varkari tradition. The effect was that, the other traditions in Hindu religion could not prove effective. But the Varkari tradition reached to the grass root level of Indian society & is increasing day by day.

Some of the heads of phads participated in Indian freedom movement and they made people aware that along with spirituality, freedom is also important and made people to take active participation in Indian freedom movement. After freedom also, whenever there was an emergency, or any natural calamity, these Varkari phads prepared themselves to help the nation.

The heads of the phads have brought awareness among the people about the social problems, propensity/habit, superstitions etc. through Bhajans, Kirtans and pravachanas. They gave importance to good health and morality. Now a days the heads of the phads do not offer 'Maal' (garland) to the Varkaris who are non-veg, drinkess, and have an unveil propensity. So in creating the scientific attitude among the people these phads have been proved better than the government officials and oraganisation (Antidrug movement, Anti superstition movement), we notice a nod of examples in which to bring a change in the behavior of unveil propensity persons and bad conduct persons, it is said that the person must be offered 'Maal.' From this we can say that what the law does not do is done by these phads.

In the traditional activities of phads women also participate But there is only the exception ie Thakurbuwas phad. Other phads have restricted women to participate in kirtanas pravachanas. So we don't find an eminent women kirtankar in Maharashtra. Now some lady kirtankars are coming in the forefront. These phads should give equal opportunity to women. Every phads has its specific features. Still we see that there is a democratic approach to express one's opinions, views and thoughts.

St. Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram criticized the unveil practices in the society to develop scientific attitude for the upliftment of Indian society. The phads have followed the same policy for showing proper path to individuals and

stated the importance of duties for individual development. If we see some activities of the phads, we notice that according to need, they had propagated Varkari tradition keeping the reformation approach. The effect of this is that even well-educated persons are also attracted towards this tradition.

Today 10 lakh people assemble in Pandharpur for Ashadhi vari, 4 lakhs for Kartiki, Chaitri and Maghi vari. Not only through Maharashtra but also from other states people assemble, gather together. In this scientific age also and this credit goes to the phads in Pandharpur. Due to the activities of phads, it is not only propagated in India but in abroad also.

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