

## The Viṭhobā Faith of Mahārāṣṭra: The Viṭhobā Temple of Paṇḍharpūr and Its Mythological Structure

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### *The Bhakti Movement in Hinduism and the Viṭhobā Faith of Mahārāṣṭra*<sup>1</sup>

The Hinduism of India was formed between the sixth century B.C. and the sixth century A.D., when Aryan Brahmanism based on Vedic texts incorporated non-Aryan indigenous elements. Hinduism was established after the seventh century A.D. through its resurgence in response to non-Brahmanistic traditions such as Buddhism. It has continuously incorporated different and new cultural elements while transfiguring itself up to the present day.

A powerful factor in this formation and establishment of Hinduism, and a major religious movement characteristic especially of medieval Hinduism, is the *bhakti* movement (a religious movement in which it is believed that salvation comes through the grace of and faith in the supreme God). This *bhakti* movement originated in the *Bhagavad Gītā* of the first century B.C., flourishing especially from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the ninth century A.D. among the religious poets of Tamil, such as Ālvārs, in southern India. This *bhakti* movement spread throughout India through its incorporation into the tradition of Brahmanism, and later developed in three ways.

First, the *bhakti* movement which had originated in the non-Aryan culture of Tamil was incorporated into Brahmanism. Originally *bhakti* was a strong emotional love for the supreme God, and this was reinterpreted to

<sup>1</sup> In connection with this research, I am very grateful to Mr. V. L. Manjul, a librarian of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, who guided me to the Viṭhobā temple and always gave his best to help me with whatever was required.

harmonize with the intellectualism and contemplative tradition of Brahmanism. Rāmānuja (1017–1137) and Madhva (1197–1276) are representative of this stage. Rāmānuja, for example, interpreted *bhakti* to be synonymous with *vedanā* (knowledge) and *upāsana* (meditation) (see Karmarkar 1959, pp. 17–18). Second, the intellectualism and contemplative tradition of Brahmanism were swallowed up by *bhakti* so that intellectualism and contemplative elements were swept away, and *bhakti* regained its original emotional character. The further development of *bhakti* contains two aspects: a) the dissemination of *bhakti* through the Sanskrit language, which has provided verbal support for Brahmanism,<sup>2</sup> and b) the wide dissemination and permeation of *bhakti* among the lower castes through the medium of various local dialects which arose one after the other after the ninth or tenth century A.D. Nimbārka (14th century) and Vallabha (1473–1531) are representative of the former. The *bhakti* movement of Mahārāṣṭra which developed in western India through the medium of the Marāṭhī language is representative of the latter. This movement, which developed around the Viṭhobā faith, is the subject of this article.

#### *The Development of Viṭhobā Faith in Mahārāṣṭra*

Viṭhobā faith consists of putting one's faith in the single God Viṭhobā (or Viṭhala), identified with Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, and seeking salvation through the grace of this God. This faith is especially popular in the Mahārāṣṭra area where Marāṭhī is the major language.

This Viṭhobā faith originated in the Karṇāṭaka region, and was introduced into Paṇḍharpūr in Mahārāṣṭra by a sage named Puṇḍalīka, but the dates for this introduction are unknown. A monument dated 1189, however, records that a small Viṭhobā shrine was established that year for the first time on the site of the present Viṭhobā temple in Paṇḍharpūr. It is safe to say that this faith is not much older than this date. Another monument records that a Viṭhobā temple was erected on this same site between 1273–1277. The Viṭhobā faith must have spread in Paṇḍharpūr and surrounding areas by this date (Tulpule 1979, pp. 328–329).

Later the Viṭhobā faith was theoretically incorporated into the *bhakti* movement and disseminated widely by Jñāneśvara (1271 or 1275–1296) and Nāmadeva (1270–1350).<sup>3</sup> Jñāneśvara is the author of *Jñāneśvarī*, a

<sup>2</sup> Sanskrit, as a religious and sacred language, has protected the privileges of the Brahmin, and can thus be said to have provided support for Brahmanism which calls for the preeminent position of the Brahmin.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars date Nāmadeva at around 1425, but I follow the dating of Ranade 1982, pp. 185–187, and Tulpule 1979, pp. 334–338.

commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā* in Marāṭhī, in which he claimed that Viṭhobā is the God who appears in the *Bhagavad Gītā* as the supreme God Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. He theoretically placed Viṭhobā faith within the mainstream of the *bhakti* movement since the times of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and laid the foundation for the *bhakti* movement to develop as Viṭhobā faith in Mahārāṣṭra through the medium of the Marāṭhī language. Nāmadeva was from the *sūdra* (slave) caste, and thus did not have the knowledge of a person like Jñāneśvara, but instead wrote hymns of praise (*abhaṅga*) to Viṭhobā in simple Marāṭhī. He taught that all can be saved equally, without regard to caste, through devotion (*bhakti*) to Viṭhobā. He also used a singing style called *samkīrtana* in which the name of God is praised through melody. This led to a wide acceptance of Viṭhobā faith, including not only women and *sūdra* who were forbidden by Brahmanism to study the Vedas, but also among the outcaste (untouchable) people (Sardar 1969, pp. 134–141).

Later, however, under the government of the Muslim rulers, Viṭhobā faith and the *bhakti* movement in Mahārāṣṭra were not able to maintain strong roots among the people of Mahārāṣṭra. This decline continued for many years, but in about two hundred years, with the destruction of the Vijayanagar Kingdom of Karṇāṭaka, battles broke out between the Muslim rulers of the Deccan region. The Muslim rulers sought the support of the landowners of Mahārāṣṭra, and thus the people of Mahārāṣṭra (the Marāṭhā) gained the opportunity for social advancement. The Marāṭhī language, and the Marāṭhā culture based on the Marāṭhī language, experienced a resurgence. In such a social climate, Ekanātha (1533–1599) revived the *bhakti* movement through use of the Marāṭhī language (Sardar 1969, pp. 81–83). He was a brilliant Brahmin scholar who wrote a commentary in Marāṭhī on the eleventh chapter of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (on *bhakti* towards Viṣṇu), the *Rukminīsaṃvāda* (dialogue with Rukmiṇī, Viṭhobā's consort, in Marāṭhī), and edited and published the *Jñāneśvari* which had been scattered and lost. He thus revived Viṭhobā faith and the Marāṭhī language *bhakti* movement. This revival, along with the formation of the Marāṭhā union under King Śivājī and their war against the Mogul Empire, heightened the Mahārāṣṭra people's awareness of their identity. Under these conditions Tukārāma (1598–1649) disseminated the Viṭhobā faith in Mahārāṣṭra using the Marāṭhī language. He was from the *sūdra* (*kunābī*) caste and did not have the education of a person like Ekanātha, but like Nāmadeva he sang *abhaṅga* praising the God Viṭhobā in Marāṭhī, spreading the word that all can be saved equally through devotion (*bhakti*) to Viṭhobā, and using melodious *samkīrtana* to praise God's name. Thus once again the Viṭhobā faith spread over a wide area in the Mahārāṣṭra region.

Viṭhobā faith and the *bhakti* movement in Mahārāṣṭra reached its peak at this time.

Later, the encounter with modernism under English colonization and into Indian independence led to the gradual decline of Viṭhobā faith and the *bhakti* movement in Mahārāṣṭra. However, even today there are many people who support and sustain this religious movement.

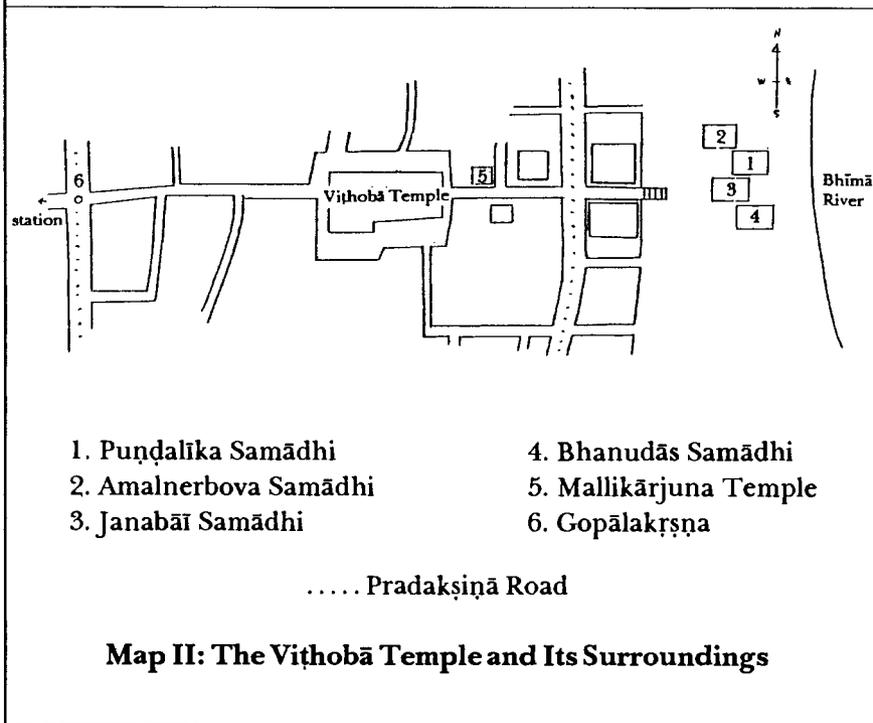
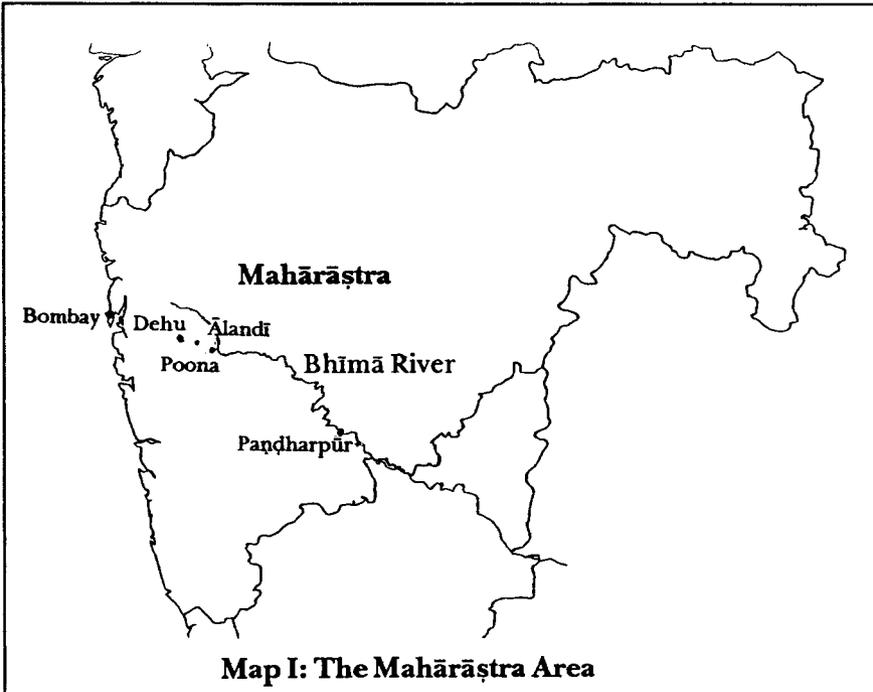
### *The Vārkarī Sect and the Pilgrimage Site of Paṇḍharpūr*

The Vārkarī sect is a group of people who believe in Viṭhobā, venerate the sacred text *Jñāneśvarī*, and sing the Marāṭhī *abhaṅga* by Nāmadeva, Tukārāma, and so forth, which teach of *bhakti*. Other characteristics of this religious sect are: 1) belief in salvation through reliance on the grace of the supreme God Viṭhobā (*bhāgavata pantha*); 2) formation of groups of the faithful centered around major and minor sages such as Jñāneśvara (*santasajjanācī māṇḍī*); 3) going on a pilgrimage at least twice a year, accompanied by these sages, to Paṇḍharpūr (*vārkarī*); and 4) wearing a rosary made of *tulasī* wood<sup>4</sup> which acts as a sign that the wearer is a vegetarian (*mālkarī*) (Deleury 1960, pp. 1-3).

The most important religious activity for members of the Vārkarī sect, of the many characteristics listed above, is the act which gives the sect its name, i.e. the biannual pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpūr. In this pilgrimage, pilgrims reach Paṇḍharpūr on the eleventh day (*ekādaśī*) of the bright fortnight of the lunar months of Āṣāḍha (June-July) and Kārtika (October-November). Originally believers would participate in the pilgrimage in the company of various sages. However, now that the various sages have passed away, representatives of the sages called *pādukā* ("footprints of a sage") lead the procession with a palanquin (*pālkhī*). Many groups of the faithful still participate in these pilgrimages, centered around sages of the past such as Jñāneśvara, Nāmadeva, Ekanātha, and Tukārāma, or brothers and sisters of Jñāneśvara such as Nivṛtti, Sopāna, and Muktabāi. The places where the pilgrimage flourishes the most are Ālandī, where Jñāneśvara passed away, and Dehu, the birthplace of Tukārāma (see Map I).

The goal of the pilgrimage Paṇḍharpūr, the most holy site for the Vārkarī sect, is on the riverside of the Bhīmā River, a tributary of the Kṛṣṇā River. There are many temples in this area, large and small, but the predominant temple is the Viṭhobā temple, the headquarters of this sect. The pilgrims who come to worship at this Viṭhobā temple first do ablutions in

<sup>4</sup> *Tulasī* wood is related to faith in Viṣṇu, since it is believed that it is a tree into which a maiden who loved Viṣṇu transformed herself.



the Bhīmā River, visit the temples along the river bed, and then circumambulate various sacred spots once in a clockwise direction, on the road which goes around the temple (called the Pradakṣiṇā road). They then worship at the Mallikārjuna temple (enshrining Śivaliṅga) on the right side of the road leading from the Bhīmā River to the Viṭhobā temple, and then enter the temple (see Map II).

### *The Structure of the Viṭhobā Temple of Paṇḍharpūr*

#### (1) The organization of temple management.

The Viṭhobā temple is supported and administered by a committee consisting of Deśastha Brahmin *baḍavā*.<sup>5</sup> All of the contributions, offerings, and monetary donations become their possessions and are administered by them. The events and rituals of this temple are also directed by these people, but the actual performance of the rituals is conducted by priests other than the *baḍavā*. There are seven types of priests: *pujārī* (who performs the rituals), *benārī* (who chants the Sanskrit *mantra*), *paricāraka* (who assists the *pujārī*), *haridāsa* (who chants Marāṭhī hymns), *dīngre* (who holds a mirror in front of the God and lays down a carpet called *paulghaḍī* between the altar and the God's sleeping quarters), *divate* (who holds torches), and *dānge* (who holds a mace) (Deleury 1960, pp. 64–65).

#### (2) Daily and Annual Events at the Temple

The rituals performed by the above-mentioned priests include both daily ceremonies and annual events. The daily ceremonies include *kākaḍārati* (for awakening the God, beginning at 3 A.M.), *pañcāmṛtapūjā* (for bathing the God with five kinds of sweet goods [milk, curds, ghee, honey, and sugar], and dressing the God; performed immediately after *kākaḍārati*), *madhyāhṇapūjā* (for redressing the God and providing dinner, given at noon), *aparāhṇapūjā* (for the God's supper, performed at sundown), and *sejāratī* (for putting the God to sleep, performed after 10 P.M.). The daily ceremonies consist of these five ceremonies (Deleury 1960, p. 65ff.).

The annual events, on the other hand, take place during the times of pilgrimage: during the 11th through 15th (day of the full moon) of the month of Āṣāḍha, and the 11th through the 15th of the month of Kārttika. Usually the pilgrims, after the performance of *pañcāmṛtapūjā*, are allowed to encounter Viṭhobā until the time of *sejāratī*, except during *madhyāhṇapūjā*. During the pilgrimage season, however, only *pañcāmṛtapūjā* is per-

<sup>5</sup> Deśastha Brahmin is one of the twelve sub-castes of Mahārāṣṭra Brahmin, and *baḍavā* (owners of the Viṭhobā temple at Paṇḍharpūr) belong to this sub-caste.

formed. As a result, the god does not retire to his sleeping quarters and one can meet with Viṭhobā at any time of day or night. At the end of this period, a *prakṣālapūjā* ceremony (for washing the God) is performed to refresh Viṭhobā. Other annual observances include the *raṅgapañcamī*<sup>6</sup> day during which red powder (*gulal*) is sprinkled on the feet of the god, the *gokulāṣṭamī* festival<sup>7</sup> which is celebrated with dancing and singing in front of the god for nine days (Deleury 1960, pp. 71–72).

### (3) The Structure of the Temple

To clarify the structure of the temple and its meaning, I would like to consider the area surrounding the Viṭhobā temple in four parts: (a) the area from the Bhīmā River to the front of the temple, (b) the basic structure of the inner temple, (c) the twofold structure of the inner temple, and (d) the back part of the temple. I visited the Viṭhobā temple on 9–10 February 1985, and was unable to witness the pilgrimage season, so I will examine the structure of the temple in the order in which the daily pilgrims approach it.

#### (a) From the Bhīmā River to the front of the temple

As I have mentioned above, the pilgrims to the Viṭhobā temple first perform ablutions in the Bhīmā River, and then visit the shrines and temples along the river side built at sites where past sages have “entered *samādhi*” (passed away). The most popular of these sites is the temple Puṇḍalīka Samādhi (Map II-1), where the holy one Puṇḍalīka (who introduced faith in Viṭhobā to Paṇḍharpūr) entered *samādhi*. Next the pilgrims circumambulate various sacred spots clockwise on the Pradaḥṣiṇā road, which surrounds the temple. Then they worship at the Mallikārjuna temple (Map II-5; enshrines Śivaliṅga) on the right side of the road leading from the Bhīmā River to the Viṭhobā temple, finally reaching the front of the temple.

At the front gate of the temple is a small shrine (Chokhāmela Samādhi,

<sup>6</sup> *Raṅgapañcamī* refers to a period “from the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the Magha month (January–February), or Vasata day, till the fifth day of the dark fortnight of the Phalaguna month (February–March).” See Deleury 1960, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> This festival is also called *kṛṣṇāṣṭamī*. It celebrates the protection of the infant Kṛṣṇa from King Kaṁsa by his foster father Nanda. Turmeric balls are thrown to children, and the adult participants chase away evil influences by sprinkling each other with butter, curds, and milk. It is a kind of harvest festival (Gonda 1969, p. 233). This festival is celebrated for nine days around the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the lunar month of Śrāvaṇa (July–August) at the Viṭhobā temple.

Map III-1) on the site where Chokhāmela, the disciple of Nāmadeva and an “untouchable” (*mahār* caste),<sup>8</sup> entered *samādhi*. Just inside the front gate, on the first step, is a bust of the famous Nāmadeva himself, a member of the *sūdra* caste (Map III-2). It is said that he entered *samādhi* on this site. The pilgrims pay their respects to these two figures, and then climb the stairs into the inner temple.

(b) The basic structure of the inner temple

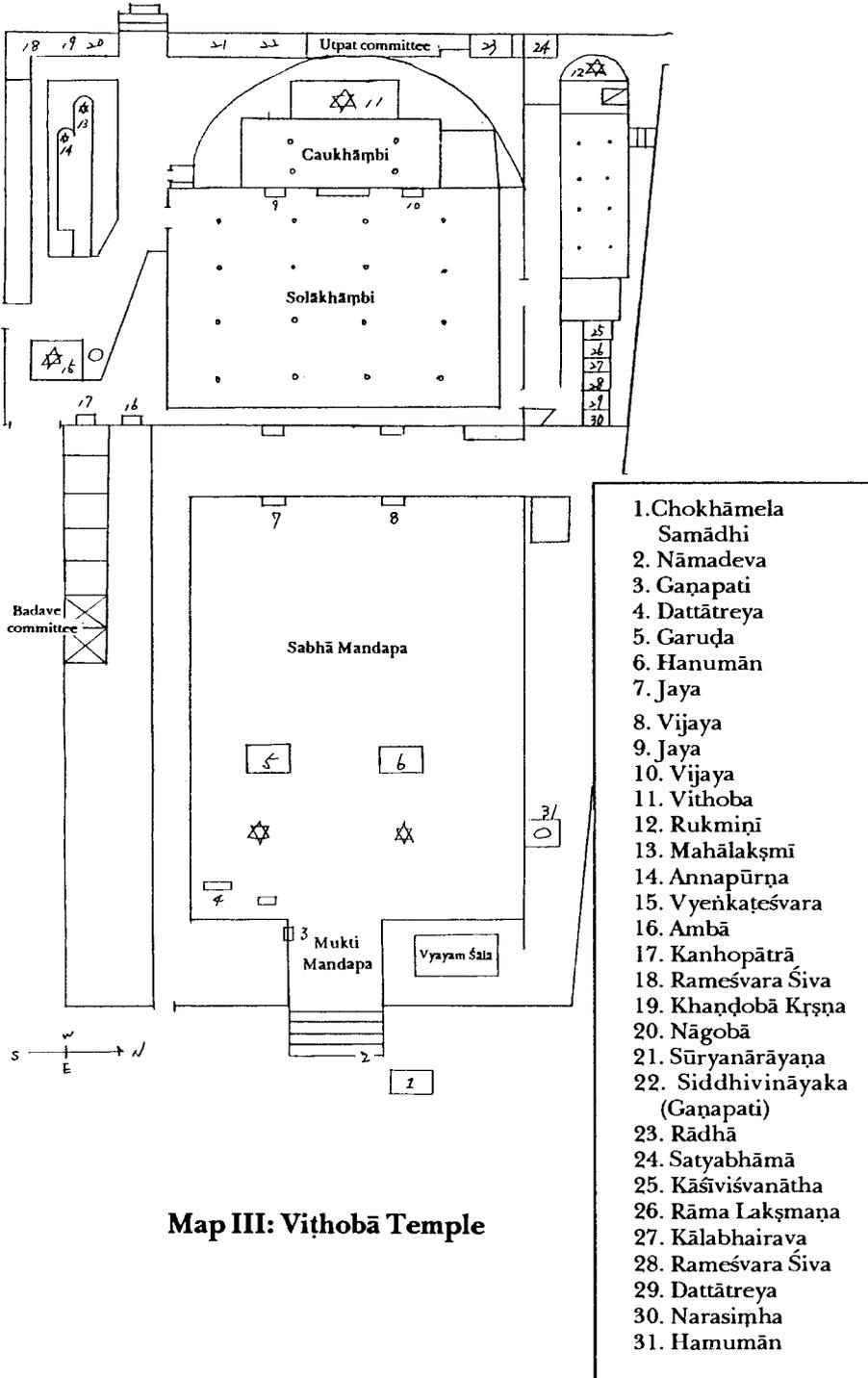
Upon entering the temple, one sees that it is divided into six large areas. At the top of stairs there is (1) a small hall (Mukti Mandapa). Beyond this hall is (2) a large hall (Sabhā Mandapa [assembly hall]). Beyond this larger hall and up some more stairs is (3) a medium-sized hall with sixteen pillars (Solākhāmbi). Beyond this hall is (4) a small hall with four pillars (Caukhāmbi). To the side of this hall is Viṭhobā’s sleeping quarters, and beyond it is a small room in which Viṭhobā is enshrined. To the right of the Caukhāmbi is (5) a medium-sized room which enshrines Rukmiṇī, Viṭhobā’s consort. To the left is (6) a small room which enshrines Mahālakṣmī and Annapūrṇa and another small room which enshrines Veṅkaṭeśvara (see Map III).

The flow of the pilgrims contains some variation, but the basic order is as follows. First they worship Siddhivināyaka (Gaṇapati, the son of Śiva; Map III-3) at Mukti Mandapa. Next at Sabhā Mandapa, after worshipping the sage Dattātreyā (a three-faced deity combining Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva; Map III-4), the holy Garuḍa bird (which Viṣṇu rides; Map III-5), the monkey Hanumān (which helped Rāma, an incarnation of Viṣṇu; Map III-6), they enter Solākhāmbi, the entrance of which is guarded by Jaya (Map III-7) and Vijaya (Map III-8). In Solākhāmbi they prostrate themselves on the floor in the direction of Viṭhobā. Then they enter Caukhāmbi, which is also guarded at the entrance by Jaya (Map III-9) and Vijaya (Map III-10). They proceed to face the image of Viṭhobā (Map III-11), located in the deepest recess and highest location of the temple, and bow at its feet and receive the blessing of the priests. Then they worship various deities such as Rukmiṇī (an incarnation of Lakṣmī, the wife of Viṭhobā; Map III-12),<sup>9</sup> Mahālakṣmī (a form of Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu’s consort; Map III-13), Annapūrṇa (a form of Durgā, Śiva’s consort; Map III-14),<sup>10</sup> and Veṅkaṭeśvara (a form of Viṣṇu originating in Tirupati of southern India;

<sup>8</sup> At the time, untouchables were not allowed to enter the temple.

<sup>9</sup> This deity is worshipped only in areas surrounding Mahārāṣṭra where Marāṭhī is spoken. See Stutley 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Mahālakṣmī and Annapūrṇa are both worshipped widely in India. See Stutley 1977.



Map III-15; see Joshi 1982). Finally the following minor deities are worshipped as deemed appropriate.

(c) The twofold structure of the inner temple

Ambā, the tutelary deity of this area (Map III-16), and Kanhopātrā, the disciple of Nāmadeva, who is said to have entered *samādhi* at this spot (Map III-17), are enshrined on the left side of Viṭhobā. In the back of Viṭhobā, from the left side, are Śivaliṅga Rāmeśvara Śiva (said to have been erected by Rāma; Map III-18), Khaṇḍobā Kṛṣṇa (worshipped by Dhangers in the Deccan region, with its main temple in Jesuri; Map III-19), a snake god called Nāgobā (Map III-20), the sun god Sūryanārāyaṇa (Map III-21) and Śiddhivināyaka (Gaṇapati; Map III-22), Rādhā (the lover of Kṛṣṇa; Map III-23) and Satyabhāmā (one of Kṛṣṇa's wives; Map III-24). On the right side are a golden image of a cobra called Kāśīviśvanātha (Map III-25), Rāma (the hero of the *Rāmāyana* and an incarnation of Viṣṇu) and his younger brother Lakṣmaṇa (Map III-26), Kālabhairava (fierce incarnations of Śiva; Map III-27) and Śivaliṅga Rameśvara Śiva (Map III-28), the sage Dattātreya (an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa; Map III-29), and Narasiṃha (a lion-man and incarnation of Viṣṇu; Map III-30). Closer to the entrance is a statue of Hamumān (Map III-30), said to have been erected by Rāmadāsa (1608–1681), who spread the worship of Rāma in Mahārāṣṭra.

(d) The back part of the temple

Upon leaving the temple and taking the road toward the town, finally there is a small shrine of Gopālakṛṣṇa (= Kṛṣṇa; Map II-6) playing a flute. This marks the end of the road of pilgrimage to the Viṭhobā temple which starts from the Bhīmā River.

*The Meaning of the Structure of the Viṭhobā Temple.*

This pilgrimage course, which starts at the Bhīmā River, is centered around the Viṭhobā Temple, and ends at the small shrine of Gopālakṛṣṇa, has a fixed order which contains certain meanings. I would like to refer to Eliade's perspective of "the mutual relationship between the sacred and the profane" (Eliade 1957) to examine the meaning behind this pilgrimage course.

From the Bhīmā River to the front of the temple:

— The realm of the holy ones —

The pilgrims first wash off the impurities of the profane realm by perform-

ing ablutions in the Bhīmā River, and then gradually approach the holy center of the Viṭhobā temple by passing through a fixed route on the Pradakṣiṇā road. This process can be interpreted in terms of what Eliade speaks of in the religious context as proceeding from the “periphery” of the world to the “center” of the world, or from the profane to the sacred. The course from the Bhīmā River to the Viṭhobā temple is, in the sense of progressing from the profane to the sacred, at a lower level of sacredness than the realm of the inner temple itself. The riverside of the Bhīmā river contains many sites where holy people, such as Puṇḍalika, are said to have entered *samādhi*. As the entrance and stairs leading up to the temple contain shrines marking where Chokhāmela and Nāmadeva entered *samādhi*, the course from the Bhīmā River to the front of the temple are, with the exception of the Mallikārjuna temple,<sup>11</sup> the “realm of the holy ones” where the various sages entered *samādhi*. The Viṭhobā temple is even more sacred than the realm of the holy ones, for it is the “realm of the gods.”

The central structure: the realm of the gods I  
— The ranking of sacredness —

Upon entering the temple, one enters the realm of Hindu mythology. This world is basically a collection of Viṣṇu-related deities centered around Viṭhobā. For example, in Sabhā Mandapa there are enshrined various sacred animals related to Viṣṇu such as the sacred Garuḍa bird, which Viṣṇu rides, and the monkey Hanumān, which helped Rāma, an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the center and at the highest place in the temple is an image of Viṭhobā, but to the right is Rukmiṇī, the wife of Viṭhobā and an incarnation of Lakṣmī, and to the left are Mahālakṣmī (a form of Viṣṇu’s consort) and Veṅkaṭeśvara (a form of Viṣṇu).

From the perspective of the placement of these deities with regard to the flow of the pilgrimage, it can be said that they are placed in order from those of lower to higher sacredness, ending in front of Viṭhobā, the most sacred of all. After paying homage at places of lower sacredness, one leaves the realm of the sacred (the realm of the gods = the inner temple) and returns to the profane world. Thus a structure with levels of sacredness, with Viṭhobā at the top, can be discerned. Upon entering the inner temple after passing through “realm of the gods,” one first worships in front of the bust of Siddhivināyaka (Gaṇapati), the son of Śiva, in Mukti Mandapa. Next one worships Dattātreya, the Garuḍa bird and the monkey Hanumān. At this

<sup>11</sup> The Mallikārjuna temple, a Śiva temple, is included in this course because it existed before the Viṭhobā temple. It is said to be the oldest temple in Paṇḍarpūr.

point, though there are already some traces of the “realm of the gods,” one is approaching the gods by coming in contact with the “realm of sacred animals.”<sup>12</sup> After passing through this realm and progressing into the inner temple, one enters the most sacred “realm of the gods” populated by Viṭhobā, his wife Rukmiṇī, Mahālakṣmī, Annapurna, and Veṅkaṭeśvara. In this realm of the gods the pilgrims first worship Viṭhobā, and then the deities of lower sacredness such as Rukmiṇī and Mahalākṣmī. The outer parts of the inner temple is the realm of minor deities.

Secondary structure: The realm of the gods II

– The multi-layered and complex nature of Hinduism –

It is clear that the Viṭhobā temple is structured with layers of sacredness surrounding Viṭhobā, and that this realm of the gods consists of Viṣṇu-related deities with Viṭhobā at the center. However, this analysis still leaves two aspects unexplained. The first is the presence of Mahālakṣmī and Veṅkaṭeśvara in addition to Viṭhobā and Rukmiṇī, and the second is the presence of many and various deities besides those related to Viṣṇu, such as the Śaiva deities Siddhivināyaka and Annapūrṇa. These cannot be explained merely within the context of the Viṣṇu mythology, and this problem becomes even more important when considering the “minor” deities placed in the periphery of the inner temple.

This “realm of the minor deities” is basically structured in the following way, centered on the Viṣṇu myth. Although Rādhā and Satyabhāmā are related to Kṛṣṇa, and Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanumān are related to Rāma, they are all (including Narasiṃha) related in some way to Viṣṇu. Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are incarnations of Viṣṇu. Also, Kanhopātrā, the female disciple of Nāmadeva, was a follower of Viṭhobā, and though she was not a deity, she can be considered as related to Viṣṇu. Next, Rāmeśvara Śiva and Khaṇḍobā Kṛṣṇa are related to Śiva (see Sontheimer 1976, p. 86, pp. 91 ff.), and Sūryanārāyaṇa is a sun god. They are not originally related to Viṣṇu, but these deities have come to be associated in some way with Viṣṇu. For example, the Śivaliṅga Rāmeśvara Śiva erected by Rāma was related to Rāma (see Joshi 1982), or Khaṇḍobā was related to Kṛṣṇa through Khaṇḍobā Kṛṣṇa, or Sūrya was related to Nārāyaṇa (another name for Viṣṇu) in the form of Sūryanārāyaṇa. Other aspects which cannot be explained in terms of relation to the Viṣṇu mythology can be explained in geographical or historical terms. Ambā is the tutelary deity for this area (see Prabhudesai 1967, Joshi 1982). Siddhivināyaka (Gaṇapati) is enshrined

<sup>12</sup> Actually these “sacred animals” are also gods.

because of the popularity of the Gaṇapati faith in Mahārāṣṭra, as seen in the Aṣṭavināyaka faith and the annual celebration of the Gaṇapati festival (Tulpule 1979, pp. 315ff., 338ff.). The three-faced Dattātreya which incorporates Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, and the holy person Dattātreya believed to have been an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, is related to the Mahānubhava sect (worshiping Dattātreya) which was once as powerful as the Vāṅkarī sect (see Tulpule 1979, p. 418ff.). The fierce visage of Śiva as Kālabhairava, the golden cobra Kāśīviśvanātha, and the snake god Nāgobā are enshrined probably because of the influence of the Bhairava sect in this area (see Sontheimer 1976, p. 95). Annapūrṇa remains as the one deity whose inclusion among the deities in the temple remains unclear.

This “realm of the minor deities” is centered on the Viṣṇu myth, but has also incorporated various deities not originally related to Viṣṇu, and even lined up various deities which could not be so incorporated, leaving a multi-layered and complex structure. These deities with their various differing significance all became objects of worship by the pilgrims, and this is not felt at all strange by the priests and the pilgrims themselves. To the contrary, this tolerance for a multi-layered and complex structure is due to the basic characteristic of Hinduism based on its development of always incorporating new and different elements. This character is reflected in the central structure of the inner temple, in that deities such as Mahālakṣmī, Veṅkaṭeśvara, Siddhivināyaka, and Annapūrṇa are enshrined along with Viṭhobā and Rukmiṇī.

In this way the “realm of the gods” in the inner temple of Viṭhobā is based on a certain “mythological structure” centered on Viṭhobā, which is further based on the mythology of Viṣṇu. As a framework for understanding the multi-layered and complex structure which incorporates a variety of deities, we can refer to the “great tradition and little tradition” theory of Redfield and Singer (see Redfield 1955; Singer 1972), and to the concept of Sanskritization, in a broad sense, as expounded by Srinivasa (see Marionette 1955, pp. 1–52; Srinivas 1952).<sup>13</sup> The phenomena described in this article have, on the one hand, developed from a process in which belief in the originally local and indigenous deity of Viṭhobā (little tradition) grew into and was assimilated by the pan-Indian Viṣṇu faith (great tradition). It spread despite its restriction to areas of the Marāṭhī language. On the other hand, Viṭhobā faith which had risen to the rank of a great tradition in the Mahārāṣṭra area, also incorporated other “little traditions” of

<sup>13</sup> Sanskritization, in a broad sense, refers to the idea of the pan-Indian dissemination of the “orthodox tradition” and the “indigenous unorthodox tradition,” and the process by which the latter progresses toward the former.

Mahārāṣṭra such as faith in Ambā and Khaṇḍobā, and faiths other than Viṣṇu faith which were popular in Mahārāṣṭra such as Dattātreya and Siddhivināyaka (Gaṇapati). This multi-layered structure, i.e. Viṭhobā faith as a little tradition with regard to Viṣṇu faith, and as a great tradition with regard to belief in Ambā and Khaṇḍobā, would perhaps be better described if one used the terms "greater tradition" and "lesser tradition." The Viṭhobā faith was assimilated into a "greater tradition" while also absorbing aspects of "lesser traditions." Thus the Viṭhobā faith continues to be supported and remade through this multi-layered and complex "mythological structure."

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