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Chapter 7



A Family Affair
Krishna Comes to Paṇḍharpūr and
Makes Himself at Home

CHRISTIAN LEE NOVETZKE

Krishna came to Paṇḍharpūr from Dvārakā to make amends with his wife, Rukmiṇī. Rukmiṇī had spied her rival Rādhā sitting on Krishna's lap and she was not happy. Rukmiṇī ran to what seemed to her a secure hiding place: the remote town of Paṇḍharpūr where the Bhīmā River curves into the shape of a crescent moon and is called the Candrabhāgā. Krishna pursued his wife with a contrite heart and a retinue of cows, cowboys, and cowgirls. But when he arrived in Paṇḍharpūr, he could not find Rukmiṇī. He did happen to meet the great sage and singer Nārada who suggested that Krishna inquire of Puṇḍalik, another famous sage who lived nearby. Krishna arrived at Puṇḍalik's door and found him selflessly dotting upon his parents. Krishna was so impressed by Puṇḍalik's filial devotion that he tried to interrupt the faithful son for a moment to express his admiration. Puṇḍalik hardly looked up from where he was massaging his father's feet. Instead of greeting Krishna, Puṇḍalik threw a brick to him and asked him to stand on it and wait until Puṇḍalik's service to his parents was done. Krishna did so and is still standing in Paṇḍharpūr, waiting on the brick for Puṇḍalik's eternal work to be finished. His devotees call him Viṭṭhal, a name many devotees interpret as "the one standing on the brick."

This folk story is attested to in several Marāṭhī and Sanskrit sources, in a number of oral traditions, and with a wide range of variation.¹ All versions explain how Krishna is moved to stay in Paṇḍharpūr as a kind of reward for Puṇḍalik's devotion to his parents.

The legend also provides Krishna with the means to change his randy ways, which in the Marāṭhī tradition he does.² No longer is Krishna the absent lover of the *Gītāgovinda* or the flirtatious cowboy of Vrindāvan among his gopis. In Paṇḍharpūr, he becomes a responsible and faithful husband (for the most part).³ His chief wife is Rukmiṇī, but he is also married to Satyabhāmā and Rādhā or Rādhikā.⁴ However, to his devotees he is primarily seen as a loving father, or more often, a protective mother. In learning how to be a family man, Krishna takes a lesson from Puṇḍalik: it is the need to resolve a fight with his wife over his infidelity to her that brings him to Paṇḍharpūr, but it is the wholehearted devotion of a son that convinces him to stay. Krishna comes to Paṇḍharpūr to see Puṇḍalik but makes a home for himself as the years unfold a lineage of devotees who refer to one another as a family, and revere Krishna as their father—Viṭhobā—and as their mother—Viṭhāi.⁵

This chapter explores the architecture of Krishna worship among the Vārkaris of Paṇḍharpūr and further elaborates on a theme first pointed out by Eleanor Zelliot in her work on “household *sants*” (saints) and especially the family life of the Vārkarī *sants*.⁶ Following Zelliot, I take the theme of family values and domestic issues as a defining character of early Marāṭhī devotional literature. I further this thesis by examining a portion of one of their earliest statements of Marāṭhī devotion, the Marāṭhī *Tīrthāvalī* or “The Garland of Sacred Places,” in order to show how the metaphor of family to express a love of god and others is centrally important.⁷ The story of the *Tīrthāvalī* addresses themes similar to the Puṇḍalik legend, but involves two other *sants*, Nāmdev (c. 1270–1350 CE) and Jñāndev (d.c. 1296 CE). Like Puṇḍalik, Nāmdev is a simple devotee and a faithful son, but to Viṭṭhal rather than to his own parents.⁸ Jñāndev, on the other hand, is an accomplished yogi, orphaned at a young age, who lures Nāmdev away from “Mother Viṭṭhal” and onto the pilgrimage trail of northern India. In a reversal of the story of Viṭṭhal’s arrival to Paṇḍharpūr, these two principal Vārkarī *sants* leave Paṇḍharpūr and travel to Dvārakā. The text ostensibly recounts this pilgrimage. However, the *Tīrthāvalī*, as it is remembered and performed today, is less a spiritual travelogue than an expression of the intimate relationship between Viṭṭhal/Krishna and his devotees. The story serves several agendas. It dramatizes the separation anxiety both god and devotee undergo when apart, as well as the nature of their codependence, as a mother and a child, or a cow and her calf (*vātsalya*).⁹ The friendship struck between Nāmdev and Jñāndev exemplifies a range of social and religious alliances: Nāmdev is an illiterate low-caste tailor and Jñāndev is a scholarly Brahmin and Nātha yogi master. The two represent early facets of the Vārkarī tradition, where the elite and scholarly strata of Krishna worship

(and Śaiva worship) intermingled with “local” or “folk” practice and belief. The story also addresses a theological problem, especially in the remembrance of Nāmdev, whose hagiography in North Indian languages remembers him as a frequent traveler and resident of the North as far as Punjab. Why would a devotee, especially one as seminal to the Vārkarī tradition as Nāmdev, want to travel away from Paṇḍharpūr when Krishna himself came and stayed in Paṇḍharpūr for the sake of his followers? By reinforcing the importance of familial relationships and the centrality of Paṇḍharpūr, the text offers an early sketch of Marāṭhī ethnicity conceived through Vārkarī devotion to Krishna.

Today the Vārkarī tradition is perhaps best known outside India for its biannual pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpūr, documented in writing and film, and for its eloquent *sant* Tukarām (c. 1608–1650 CE).¹⁰ The *Tīrthāvalī* is far less well known but has remained prominent in the discourse of the Vārkarī tradition as a fundamental narrative exemplifying the role of biography and commenting on Vārkarī and Marāṭhī identity in relation to larger religious contexts in India. The story is set in an early period of Vārkarī history when the role of pilgrimage and the nature of a devotee’s relationship to Krishna apparently needed to be articulated. The *Tīrthāvalī* works out several issues within the framework of a story certainly famous by the sixteenth century, if not well before.

My use of the *Tīrthāvalī* as a central text in this chapter is not meant to endorse the idea that the Vārkaris have a definitive transcript of belief; indeed, the religion has often deemphasized texts, evidenced by the lack of written sources for early Marāṭhī devotionalism.¹¹ It is probably for these reasons that European Indologists largely ignored the Vārkaris.¹² My hope in using the text is to elucidate one statement in one medium—one among innumerable others—that has risen over several hundred years to a high level of popularity and adaptability. The text is therefore representative of Vārkarī belief and its historiographic self-understanding, but it is also misleading. The story of the *Tīrthāvalī* is just that, a story, told in many different ways, remembered orally, performatively, and literarily. I have selected what I consider the best known of various retellings. Any devotee of Viṭṭhal’s could supply you with many iterations more eloquent.

The One on the Brick, The Master Yogi, and Crazy Nāmā

The worship of Krishna as Viṭṭhal was firmly settled in and around Paṇḍharpūr by the time the story of Nāmdev’s pilgrimage through northern India became famous. The Vārkarī folk etymology of the name ascribed to Krishna, Viṭṭhal, combines the Marāṭhī/Sanskrit word for

brick, *viṭ*, and a word similar to the Sanskrit root *sthal* in this case, *thala*, to arrive at “the one who stands on a brick,” a reference to Viṭṭhal’s rootedness in Paṇḍharpūr and his iconographic representation: a jet-black figure, he stands with his hands on his hips, his arms bowed, and his feet placed parallel on a square slab. Philologists reject this etymology, instead tracing the origin of Viṭṭhal’s name to the old Kannada word for Vishnu, *biṭṭa* or *biṭṭaga*, suggesting that the worship of Viṭṭhal migrated from the Kannada-speaking region before 1000 CE.¹³ Paṇḍharpūr was probably a center for the worship of Śiva but slowly transformed into a Vaiṣṇava holy place, perhaps under the influence of another Krishnaite devotional tradition, the Mahānubhāv religion. An alternative name for Viṭṭhal, Pāṇḍuraṅga, might refer to a Śaiva deity who remained the inspiration for the name of the town, Paṇḍharpūr. The word Pāṇḍuraṅga certainly implies a figure with “a white (*pāṇḍu*) color (*raṅga*),” rather than the usually black Viṭṭhal or dark blue Krishna. The first reference to the city of Paṇḍharpūr occurs in a copperplate inscription dated 516 CE and calls the place “the village of Pāṇḍuraṅga.”¹⁴ However, by the Yādava rule of the twelfth century, Pāṇḍuraṅga became equated with Vishnu/Viṭṭhal and Paṇḍharpūr became the home of Krishna as Viṭṭhal.¹⁵ There is quite a bit of evidence to suggest this mix of Śaiva worship within the early Vārkarī tradition. For example, before entering Viṭṭhal’s temple, Vārkarīs worship at Puṇḍalik’s memorial (*samādhi*), an ancient and simple Śiva-*linga* temple half submerged in the Bhīmā river. Vārkarīs, as well as some scholars, claim that the conical headdress Viṭṭhal wears is a Śiva *linga*.¹⁶ Śiva is certainly important to the Vārkarī tradition, as are other religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sufism.¹⁷

Observing the eclectic nature of Viṭṭhal worship, and in particular the intersection of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, Charlotte Vaudeville described the religion a “Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava Synthesis” and as “nominal” Vaiṣṇavism, containing a free mix of other religions (1996). However, the Vārkarī tradition in theology and practice is today predominantly Vaiṣṇava.¹⁸ The Puṇḍalik story, as well as the folk etymology of Viṭṭhal’s name, survive as the definitive origin myths of the Vārkarī tradition and reinforce how completely the Vārkarīs bring Krishna into their theology, mythology, and history. In a sense, the Vārkarīs naturalize him, melding his character with folk or pastoral religion, matching his legend with the geography of Mahārāṣṭra¹⁹ and incorporating him into their diverse religious history.

By the early thirteenth century, Viṭṭhal as Krishna was popular in the Deccan region and had attracted the attention of powerful benefactors. An inscription found in Paṇḍharpūr dates the first recorded

use of the title Viṭṭhal for the god of the town in 1189 CE.²⁰ By 1277 CE copperplate inscriptions record that the Yādava King Rāmacandra, through his advisor Hemādri, made generous donations to the Viṭṭhal temple, indicative of its rising importance. The inscription calls the town “Phagūṇipūr,” which G. A. Deulery takes to be a corruption of “Phālgūṇipūr.” He suggests the reference points to Phālgūṇi verses sung by the *gopīs* to their beloved Krishna. By the middle of the thirteenth century the Mahānubhāvs had produced hagiographies of their preeminent guru Cakradar, whom they considered to be the last of five *avatāras* of Krishna, the first of the five being Krishna himself.²¹ A Mahānubhāv work from the early fourteenth century, the *Gādyarāja*, narrates the lives of all five Krishna *avatāras*, but focuses its attention on the Krishna of the *Māhābhārata* and *Bhāgavata Purāna*.²² Though the Mahānubhāvs did not recognize Viṭṭhal as an incarnation of Krishna, their frequent vilification of the Vārkarī’s deity points toward Viṭṭhal’s established importance in the religious milieu of Mahārāṣṭra in that period and perhaps their attempt to discredit this “sixth” Krishna.²³ In any case, Krishna had become a stable and vital figure in Marāṭhī religious life in a variety of ways at least by the beginning of the thirteenth century.²⁴

Jñāndev is remembered to have completed his translation and commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā by 1290 CE. The text is rich with *advaita vedānta*, Nātha philosophy, and Krishna *bhakti*. This work, the *Bhavārthadīpikā* or simply the *Jñāneśvari*, links the Marāṭhī tradition with at least one classical source for Krishna’s legacy at an early stage in the Vārkarī religion. Around this period, Jñāndev may also have written his *Haripāṭh* extolling the names of Vishnu.²⁵ Jñāndev is reputed to have lived a short life, completing his masterpieces by the age of twenty-two. His Brahmin father had renounced his caste and traveled to Vārānasī to live as renunciate. After the birth of his four children—Nivr̥tti, Sopān, Jñāndev, and Muktabāi—he returned to society. In order to reinvest his children with social status and purify them of their inherited sins, Jñāndev’s father and mother were instructed by the Brahmins of Paithaṇ to commit suicide by drowning themselves in the Bhīmā river.²⁶ Jñāndev and his three siblings, now orphans but Brahmins again, were all initiated into the Nātha Śaiva sect and became famous yogis, but retained in their songs a skepticism and critique of ascetical religion and caste.²⁷ At twenty-two, Jñāndev ended his life by entering a state of deep meditation (*mahāsamādhi*) and enclosing himself in a tomb in Aḷandi.²⁸ But before ending his life, Jñāndev resolved to see the most famous Hindu pilgrimage sites of the North. He traveled to Paṇḍharpūr and, as the

Tīrthāvalī recalls, approached a well-known performer of devotional songs (*kīrtankār*) to Viṭṭhal with his wanderlust.

Nāmdev, or Nāmā, is remembered to have lived sometime at the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth century.²⁹ The Vārkarī tradition generally places the span of his life between 1270 and 1350 CE. He was a *śimptī* or tailor by caste, but lived as the archetypical Viṭṭhal devotee (*bhaktā*), who was childlike in his complete dedication to Krishna. The latter affectionately calls his devotee "slow, unworldly, and crazy," as we will see in the *Tīrthāvalī* (908:10). Nāmdev's songs range from the first Marāṭhī versions of Krishna's *bāla-kṛidā* episodes, to autobiography and biographies of his contemporary sants. The *bāla-kṛidā* collection provides a link to the larger classical Krishna tradition and sets a standard in Marāṭhī for the local performative art of *kīrtan* where the child-Krishna stories are an important basic text.³⁰ Nāmdev criticizes pompous religiosity in his songs (*abhaṅgs*, literally, "unbroken"),³¹ advocates absorption in both singing God's name and retelling his legends, and pays explicit devotion to Viṭṭhal's image in Paṇḍharpūr. Nāmdev is also remembered in North India, most notably among the Dādū Panthīs, Kabīr Panthīs, and Sikhs.³² He is famous for spreading bhakti in the North at an early period, where his *pads* blurred the distinction between *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* varieties of devotion. He is also remembered as a child bhakta who literally had Viṭṭhal eating out of his hand.³³ By Nāmdev's early adulthood he had acquired a reputation as a great performer of Viṭṭhal devotional material (songs, stories, *nāmasaṅkīrtana*), but also as being uncouth in his understanding of theology and philosophy. Viṭṭhal himself directed Nāmdev to the Śaiva-Nātha guru, Visobā Khecar (fourteenth century), for more refined religious instruction. Khecar taught Nāmdev to accept the ubiquity of God—in this case, Śiva.³⁴ Despite the pervasive philosophy of nonduality in the *Tīrthāvalī*, Nāmdev and Viṭṭhal experience tremendous separation anxiety. The resolution of this anxiety becomes a central theological issue played out in the narrative.

The Tempered Text

The *Tīrthāvalī* is a story with a diverse pedigree. Two distinct versions, with several variations, exist in old Marāṭhī manuscripts and modern anthologies (*gāthā*), and a third version is part of the quasi anthology of Vārkarī hagiography, the *Bhaktavijay* (Victory of the Devotees), composed in the mid-eighteenth century and attributed to Mahipati (c. 1715–90 CE). The oldest version attested in manuscripts is an autobiographical account of a pilgrimage to sites in North India, whereas the

later two are biographical accounts of Jñāndev and Nāmdev traveling northward, performing miracles, and returning to Paṇḍharpūr to realize the futility of pilgrimage anywhere else. The latter two are by far the more famous; the first, autobiographical version, appears in the appendix of only a few anthologies.³⁵ The three versions each have their own significant variations found in manuscripts that stand one to two hundred years apart, and probably drew their source from a legend about Nāmdev's travels popular from his time in the thirteenth century until the late sixteenth century, when the story was written down. However, a parallel oral tradition of retelling the story of Nāmdev's travels, and his relationship to Krishna, is no doubt older than the written tradition and better known. The written tradition is likely a sort of still-shot, representing important moments of change and emendation of the oral story since the sixteenth century. An examination of the difference between and within the three major versions reveals a process of "authorizing" the Vārkarī tradition through the character of Nāmdev (and Jñāndev to some degree), setting the tradition against the politics and social trends of the sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century, and fixing certain beliefs within the framework of narrative, set to song, drama, and eventually to film in the twentieth century.

In this chapter, I use the biographical version of the *Tīrthāvalī*, attributed to Nāmdev, and found in all anthologies of Nāmdev's work. This version is the "standard" text, and forms the basis of Mahipati's eighteenth-century retelling. The biographical versions—both Nāmdev's and Mahipati's retelling—are the most widely read, recited, anthologized, performed, and accepted versions of the story of Jñāndev and Nāmdev's journey. Manuscripts containing the biographical version attributed to Nāmdev begin to appear in the early seventeenth century, shortly after the renaissance in Vārkarī and Bhāgavata religion in Mahārāṣṭra initiated by Eknāth (1532–99).³⁶ The language of the biographical *Tīrthāvalī* is a mixture of seventeenth-century Marāṭhī and much older Marāṭhī, akin to the language of the *Jñāneśvarī*. The text consists of fifty-eight to sixty-one highly poetical *abhaṅgs* that reveal the author's mastery of the form.³⁷ The story's structure is a dialogue (e.g., between Nāmdev and Jñāndev, Viṭṭhal and Rukmīṇī, Jñāndev and Viṭṭhal) and a third-person narrative. The text recounts miraculous events and presents Viṭṭhal as a character who interacts in a human way with his devotees, in this case, primarily with Nāmdev. I refer to this version of the story as biographical because of the overarching third-person narrative. Nāmdev is praised in the text as the most exalted of all Krishna devotees, a characterization not found in his supposedly autobiographical songs.

The authorship of the *Tīrthāvalī* is sometimes attributed to Nāmdev and sometimes to Jñāndev. The oldest version of the text, dated to 1631 CE, credits authorship to Jñāndev, not to Nāmdev. However, the Vārkarī tradition and other Nāmdev followers attribute the story, as well as this very text, only to Nāmdev. That the text itself seems to be about both sants and, in a sense, by neither sant alone, lends credence to the idea that this is an older, famous legend probably recast by any number of kīrtankārs who remembered and passed on the story orally. As to authorship, I find it helpful to think of Nāmdev as the author of the story in as much as he is the principal actor in it and hence the progenitor of the narrative. In other words, he is the author of the life, if not the author of the life story. However, the story certainly has had a significant genealogy of producers who have embellished the storyline and eventually committed the legend to the medium of writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Since the biographical version of the *Tīrthāvalī* has received a consensus of approval from Vārkarīs (exhibited through more than two hundred years of anthologizing and performance), I take it to be representative—though not definitive—of their beliefs. All my translations and references to the *Tīrthāvalī* found in this chapter are drawn from the biographical version attributed to Nāmdev. I will examine only the first third of the text. I have chosen to focus on this portion of the story because it contains the complete account of the pilgrimage and how it affected all the primary characters: Viṭṭhal/Krishna, Jñāndev, and Nāmdev. The second and third portions of the *Tīrthāvalī* take place after Nāmdev and Jñāndev have returned to Paṇḍharpūr. This subsequent narrative concerns an obligatory feast offered to Brahmins and critiques caste bias, commensality, and Brahminical religious practices, while accommodating Brahmins within the scope of the Vārkarī community.³⁸ These portions are fascinating, but do not directly reflect Vārkarī belief vis-à-vis Krishna and his followers as proficiently as the first portion does, and would lead the discussion away from Krishna bhakti and into intercaste rivalry and other murky waters. The first third of the *Tīrthāvalī* also reflects, in a skeletal form, the earliest strata of the legend itself, attested in manuscripts from 1581 CE.³⁹

A Reluctant Pilgrim on an Antipilgrimage

The *Tīrthāvalī* opens to a great historical moment in Vārkarī religious history. Jñāndev travels from his home in Aḷandi and arrives at Paṇḍharpūr. He knocks on Nāmdev's front door and the two sants convene a meeting that has been incorporated into the Vārkarī pilgrimage and symbolically reenacted once a year, probably since the early

fifteenth century, if not much earlier.⁴⁰ Their introductions are brief. Nāmdev immediately recognizes the great yogi and scholar, and Jñāndev has heard of Nāmdev's devotion; he has come specifically to lure Nāmdev away from Paṇḍharpūr and on to the pilgrimage trail. Nāmdev expresses his humility at meeting such a famous figure, claiming he is "dull, dumb, unintellectual, fit only for the smallest particles of dust kicked up by the feet of the *sants*" (904:4).⁴¹ But he's not complaining. Nāmdev says, "Therefore, the Lord of Paṇḍhari⁴² looks after me, and by god I've got a great life" (5). When Jñāndev discloses his intentions, however, Nāmdev's tone changes. He ponders the offer, "Mother Viṭṭhal gives me everything I need. . . . Why would I want anything less than Viṭhobā's feet. . . . Life after life I've been raised by Viṭṭhal. . . . Why would I sell off all this to Jñāndev?" (905:8–10). Nāmdev tells his guest to ask Viṭṭhal himself.

The ensuing encounter is the first of only two points in the biographical *Tīrthāvalī* when all three major figures—Nāmdev, Jñāndev, and Viṭṭhal/Krishna—gather together; the second time marks the end of the pilgrimage. Standing before Viṭṭhal, Jñāndev asks god to allow Nāmdev to join him on his voyage (*tīrthayātra*) because Nāmdev is the archetypical devotee and Jñāndev wants "to enjoy the sweetness of Nāmā's companionship" (907:11). Viṭṭhal is both amused and saddened. It seems to please Viṭṭhal that a great yogi and scholar would want to keep company with an illiterate tailor. He considers the coupling a "miracle," and gives his permission (908:1). Yet Viṭṭhal does so reluctantly because he is afraid his beloved Nāmdev will forget him when they are separated. Viṭṭhal makes Jñāndev promise to look after Nāmdev, saying, "My Nāmā is slow, unworldly, and crazy (*veda*). Keep an eye on him" (10). Viṭṭhal passes on responsibility for Nāmdev by placing Nāmdev's hand into Jñāndev's hand (12). Before the two depart, they bathe in the Bhīmā River, worship at Puṇḍalik's Śiva-liṅga temple near the water, and cross to the other side, setting out on their way northward.

We are then given a description of Viṭṭhal's severe separation anxiety. Three long abhaṅgs detail his anguish as "a best friend, a brother, mother, and father" who has let Nāmdev out of his care (909:8). In a conversation with his wife, Rukmiṇī, who has found him in a disheveled state, Viṭṭhal describes his love for his bhaktas:

I keep my *bhaktas* close to my heart and to them there is none other as dear as me. I take the form of a human for their pleasure and from age to age continue parading this body around. I give them whatever they need because they are the greatest happiness of my life. They are my refuge and I am their rest. Their mouths invoke my name. I am their mistress (*soyarā*); they are my companions. It's a

wonderful thing to be alone with them. Voice, mind, body, breath—they give it all to me. I please them by living among them. They make me happy; they're in charge. For them I made the dwellings of Heaven. Their secrets I alone know, and they can read my signs of love. They cool my mind by reciting my name. I take such pleasure in those moments. The sun shines with its own rays of light, and those rays are not different from the sun. That's the way it is with my servants and me: I am sad because we are of one essence, without division. They are constituted by their devotion to me and devotion produces my own form just as a flame and a lamp are the same. (910:1–12)

The language of dependence and separation is striking, almost reminiscent of the genre of love songs in Marāṭhī called *lāvāṇī* where a female narrator usually pines away for her absent lover. Even Rukmiṇī is taken aback, reminding Viṭṭhal that his devotees are as close to him as they are to the sound of his name uttered in their throats (909:11). But Viṭṭhal cannot be placated. His anxiety turns to guilt because he gave Nāmdev “no reason to love and work for me, and yet he has never asked anything of me. . . . I gave him neither morals, wealth, or love [*dharmā artha kāma*]. I am the one who owes him a debt in this life” (911:6–7). The idea emerges that Krishna is indebted to Nāmdev, and not the other way around. This relationship is repeated throughout descriptions of Nāmdev's relationship to Viṭṭhal in the poetry of other sants. Nāmdev is, in a manner of speaking, a self-made man, who nonetheless gives everything to his god. The situation is difficult for Viṭṭhal to take and it compounds his sense of obligation to protect Nāmdev.

At this point, the attention of the narration leaves Viṭṭhal and shifts to the two pilgrims walking down the road. We are given the image of Nāmdev reluctantly following Jñāndev, turning around frequently and looking back in the direction of Paṇḍharpūr, sometimes crying out, “O Mother . . . why have you sent me away? I'm nervous among all these foreigners . . . and I don't see anyone who is dear to me” (912:3). Away from Paṇḍharpūr, from his circle of fellow sants, he's like an abandoned child. He cries to Viṭṭhal:

You're my mother and my father, my brother and my uncle, Lord of Paṇḍharī.
You're my best friend; you're loved as the family god of my people. You're my
vow; you're my holy place; you're my morals, wealth, and love, O god. You're my
eye of wisdom; you're my aim in life; you're the witness to my deepest nature . . .
protect your poor orphan. (912:6–11)

Jñāndev tries to console Nāmdev, but he has no experience as a parent and is, in any case, Nāmdev's junior. However, he is an accomplished yogi, a scholar of Sanskrit learning, and a dedicated nondualist,

so he tries to put his knowledge to use in assuaging Nāmdev's suffering. He tells Nāmdev, “You've got to come to your senses and think rationally. . . . Viṭṭhal is spread in every direction, so give up seeing things as divided and separated. Listen instead to the sound that is not sounded, that is without space and time. This is the knowledge that you ought to pursue with abandon” (913:3–11). But Nāmdev is not convinced, “You mean to say that god is like the sky, filling all space? It's not like that. To me god is about the body, voice, and mind. I feel happy and alive when I can sing songs to him, listen to those songs, and see him with my own eyes. In my heart I must reject what you've said, just like the Cataka bird drinks rain only from the clouds and rejects the water pooled and flowing on the Earth” (913:8–17). The great debater, Jñāndev, is not used to this strategy. When presented with reason, Nāmdev reacts with emotion; when offered philosophy Nāmdev replies with feelings. Frustrated, Jñāndev obliquely tells Nāmdev, “Your faith is certainly focused [*ekavidha*].” (913:19).

As they share the road further, Jñāndev's opinion begins to change. We are given the sense that Jñāndev has mulled over Nāmdev's simple way, and has come to second guess his own path of knowledge. He asks more questions as they walk, engaging Nāmdev's beliefs based on empiricism, evidence, and proof. And slowly he becomes convinced that Nāmdev may not be as simpleminded as he appears. He wants to learn more, so he implores Nāmdev:

Nāmā, tell me how your Self became undifferentiated from god, who is the embodiment of love. Pleasure and devotion are unbreakably united in you. What are the details of your method? How do you practice it? Tell me. What rites do you observe? How do you maintain your intellectual activities? What is your way of stilling the mind through meditation? Give me some kind of answer to these questions. How does one hear about your way? How does one think about it? How do you become firm in your practice through concentrated effort? Who is the one that worships? Who is the one that teaches? Show me someone who takes up this occupation? I am giddy and impatient! I should get started fasting and practicing your method today! Tell me your experiences. (914:4–10)

But Nāmdev is reluctant to speak with authority because he feels he has none: “My knowledge is nothing without my teacher. I've never known the power of knowledge without first submitting humbly to Viṭṭhal . . . like a babbling child in his mother's arms” (915:9–10). Despite Nāmdev's eloquent disavowal of any expertise, Jñāndev insists that he tell him everything. Furthermore, Jñāndev changes his strategy. As line 10 above indicates, Jñāndev stops asking Nāmdev about his knowledge, or *jñāna*, and instead inquires about Nāmdev's experience or

bhāva. The former is accessible only by the privileged and educated; experience, however, comes to everyone.

Jñāndev's rhetorical maneuver works, and Nāmdev is moved to fulfill his friend's request. Nāmdev's response articulates a core of belief and practice:

Hearing Jñāndev speak, a great love welled up inside Nāmā. He says, "Listen to the story of my experience. Action, laws of religion, and the rest, they're all extraneous. Knowledge of these things will bore you. For people who follow this knowledge, meeting with the good people—those who have become detached from the world by becoming rooted in the highest love—and just being happy, are very rare events. All spiritual powers should be used for mercy for other beings and all faiths should be about compassion. Those aspects of *bhakti* diminish a sense of otherness. Singing god's name is, to me, the sweetest thing. I see no reason to labor away at religious austerities. I see no sin in bowing to the soft, blissful inner light. Know that the way of knowledge can be hypocritical and misleading. I put no faith in those things in my own life. Unflinching meditation on god's Name is a good thing, which allows me to see everything through Viṭhobā's eyes. I endlessly remember him in my heart by imagining his beautiful feet together on the brick. Like a deer distracted by a sound, one should naturally forget the sensations of the body. On this subject, the mind should remain firmly intent, taking pleasure in hearing god's Name, just like business people who apply their minds in miserly ways, worrying about their profits all the time. Like them, one ought to continually think of ways to apply one's thoughts in the pursuit of self-virtue. Just as when a married woman goes to another man, she knows she deviates from the custom of monogamy. Or just as a bee flies to investigate other things, but remains intent on flowers, it's a good thing to focus your attention inwardly. Only one god, Viṭṭhal, gives all existence life so one should see his form in all beings. We divide and categorize everything, but devotion to him transcends this and is simply the art of love in a state of bliss. One who intensely concentrates on indifference from the world, who stands apart and alone, such a person is called a warrior of the Self. This body does not remember the merit of past lives, but should be firmly and unceasingly fixed upon the present moment. Absent of desire, one should focus the mind completely on self-improvement, and harbor no doubts about one's own knowledge. In this state of personal reflection, Govinda [Krishna] will give you his love. Without doing this, there is no solace from suffering. These are my experiences with the body, speech, and mind, and I have told you all I know . . . all my words are directed by him, Paṇḍurāṅga, who generously gives all wisdom." (917:1–23)

Jñāndev is stupefied: "There are many devotees of Vishnu, many have gone, many more will come, but Nāmdev's words are not like the ordinary poetry those others compose. His words are essential, fantastic, and unparalleled" (918:1–2). Jñāndev has been convinced that Nāmdev's way is superior to the way of knowledge that he himself maintains. He

compares Nāmdev to those who practice *jñāna*, saying "there have been brilliant academics who have become famous for their intellects . . . those who observe rites perfectly, who have a vast knowledge of ritual, and they even have been worshipped by the people. There have been artists, poets, and entertainers . . . accomplished lecturers who produce brilliant books . . . masters of inner-concentration who sit in seats of authority . . . advanced yogis liberated even in life . . . the lucky, rich, and smart, but I know of no one like you, O Slave of Vishnu" (918:2–10). Jñāndev compares all the gems of society to Nāmdev's devotion, and finds they are all dull. And he includes himself within this roster of lesser beings. Despite this, however, there is one thing Jñāndev has not yet been disabused of: the efficacy of pilgrimage and the superiority of his own yogic abilities. In this regard, Nāmdev has one more lesson to teach.

The two eventually arrive at Dvārakā, the former home of Nāmdev's beloved Krishna. In the autobiographical *Tīrthavali*, a version that may be older than the biographical one, Nāmdev continues on from Dvārakā to the Himālayas, Vārānasī, South India, and then homeward to Paṇḍharpūr. However, in the biographical version followed here, the companions go no further than Dvārakā and return to Paṇḍharpūr directly, visiting no holy sites of Śiva. On their return, as they pass through a dense forest, they are stricken with terrible, life-threatening thirst. The two search out a well, but find it is too deep to determine if water is at the bottom. Jñāndev uses his yogic powers to make himself very light. He then descends along the well's wall, finds water at the bottom, and when he's drunk all he can, he comes back up by the same method (919). Jñāndev offers to retrieve water for Nāmdev, who is obviously in dire need, but Nāmdev refuses, responding, "There is no space between my soul and Viṭṭhal . . . if he gives the word, in a second I'll have water," and confidently adds, "Be patient for a minute, O Swami, and I'll show you a miracle" (919:13–15).

However confident Nāmdev appears to Jñāndev on the outside, he is panicking inside. Nāmdev summons Viṭṭhal's image in his mind and addresses that image, "You are my best friend, my brother, my cousin, my mother, and my father . . . come quickly, come running, O Keśava, my Mother and Father" (920:2–3, 5). He reminds Viṭṭhal of how he helped Gajendra and Draupadī in their time of need and that Viṭṭhal himself is responsible for entrusting Nāmdev to Jñāndev's care. He appeals to Krishna, "Treat me like your little boy" (920:15). Back in Paṇḍharpūr, Viṭṭhal gets an uneasy feeling. Though he lives in constant bliss, he knows something's not right with one of his devotees. Just then, Rukmiṇī hears a far-off cry and recognizes Nāmdev's voice. "Nāmā is dying of thirst! Run to him!" (921:9). Viṭṭhal does just that, and within seconds the well

begins to overflow with water, soaking Nāmdev and Jñāndev, and providing water for everyone who lives in the forest.

Jñāndev is impressed. It wasn't just that Nāmdev could get water from the well; Jñāndev himself had no problem doing the same. But Nāmdev's method also provided water for others, something Jñāndev did not do (though he offered). Jñāndev finally sees the limit of his own abilities, "I have known yogīs who can sit in the highest state of meditation, yet none of them can create peace in their own minds. I can't think of anyone else who can immediately indenture god to himself but you, Slave of Vishnu" (922:1-2). The play on servitude is intentional: Krishna is Nāmdev's slave, and Nāmdev is Vishnu's slave. Jñāndev concedes that Nāmdev's way is superior, and he also comes to regard pilgrimage as futile, saying, "I know now that pilgrimage to other holy places is pointless. Only hearing the perfect beauty of your songs means anything" (922:6). I have not noticed these sorts of pronouncements about pilgrimage and yoga in Jñāndev's other works, where knowledge and devotion are generally on an equal footing.⁴³ But here Jñāndev is unequivocal: "The practice of deep meditation detaches one, and keeps one from concentrating on one's home life. The sages, singing angels, and deities—we've all mistakenly set our attention on the Formless god. You have confronted us with our folly" (922:9-11). The abhang ends with Jñāndev lying down at Nāmdev's feet, converted and convinced.

The duo returns to Paṇḍharpūr where Nāmdev is reunited with his beloved Viṭṭhal. The reluctant pilgrim reports to his Lord about the strangeness of the lands through which he traveled: "My eyes did not see the dwelling place of god in the pilgrimage sites, and no one there worshipped god. They did not follow the same tradition that I follow, as if they had never heard of the glorious stories of Viṭṭhal. They didn't worship the one on the riverbank, with his hands at his waist. I didn't see those feet on the brick . . . I didn't hear the Vaishnavas sing the songs that we sing, nor did I see the abundant stories of Hari" (923:8-12). Viṭṭhal also shares his own distress when his bhakta was away from him, and vows never again to let his precious, crazy Nāmā out of his sight.

Śatapāuli: One Hundred Steps

Every night in neighborhoods like the Deccan Gymkhana area of Pune, men, women, and children—entire families—come out of their homes after dinner for a walk, often led by the tug of a shaggy Pomeranian. My friend Tātyā Paranjpe says he has taken a "constitutional" nearly every day for most of his eighty-three years; he calls this

śatapāuli "one hundred steps." He walks fifty steps outside his front door, turns around, and then walks fifty more back home. Tātyā's daily practice reminds me of the *Tirthāvalī* and the emphasis on returning home. Most Hindu pilgrimages are about arriving at the sacred place and returning home again, and nowhere is that more apparent than in the *Tirthāvalī*.⁴⁴ The section of the text I have narrated above comprises barely one-third of the entire story. The remaining two-thirds takes place in Paṇḍharpūr, all in or around Viṭṭhal's temple or *mandir*, a word interchangeable in Old Marāṭhī with "home."⁴⁵ The emphasis on coming back to and being in Paṇḍharpūr suggests that the *Tirthāvalī* is more than an antipilgrimage account; it reinforces the importance of Paṇḍharpūr within the larger context of Krishna worship in India and delineates some of the terrain of the Vārkarī tradition. The text reflects an ethnic self-consciousness that underlines a shared geographic space, a common linguistic heritage, a central iconic figure, and a socioreligious structure constituted by familial metaphors.

The *Tirthāvalī* serves to recognize the larger Krishna tradition in India and situates itself both within and outside that tradition, inscribing its own terrain. The text produces difference while expressing Marāṭhī ethnoreligious unity.⁴⁶ The two pilgrims go no further than Viṭṭhal's former home, Dvārakā, and in essence retrace their god's path back to Paṇḍharpūr. The mimesis of Krishna's journey from Dvārakā to Paṇḍharpūr asserts a relationship, both geographic and historiographic, to a larger Krishna tradition, while exemplifying the "migration" and assimilation of Krishna.⁴⁷ The *Tirthāvalī* focuses on Paṇḍharpūr as a home and gives expression to the relationship between god and devotee through familial metaphors. Nāmdev is a child to Viṭṭhal; Viṭṭhal is his mother, father, brother, and friend. When the two are separated, they suffer and yearn to be reunited, just as Krishna and Rādhā do elsewhere. However, the language used in the *Tirthāvalī* is devoid of the eroticism commonly associated with the sentiment of *viraha* in other Krishna traditions.⁴⁸

The term "*viraha*" denotes the agony of separation, especially that of parted lovers. However, the word "*viraha*" does not appear in the text of the *Tirthāvalī*, and indeed is almost never used in any of Nāmdev's songs.⁴⁹ Instead, one finds *vīyoga*, or "disjunction," and *bheda*, or "distinction," used to designate separation. Similarly, scholarship in Marāṭhī about the text infrequently uses the word "*viraha*" to explain the implications of the sentiment of separation.⁵⁰ The emotional vocabulary of separation found elsewhere in relation to Krishna—the agony of parting and the bliss of reunion—is present in this text but drained of any erotic content. The famous parlance of the lonesome lover, brought on by Kr-

ishna's truancy from the scene of love in such contexts as the *Gītāgovinda*, the poetry of the *ālvārs*, the *paḍas* of Sūr Dās, and the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, is articulated in the *Tīrthāvalī* between Viṭṭhal and Nāmdev, but not as a lover yearning for her absent Krishna. The choice of descriptive terminology both in the *Tīrthāvalī* and in scholarship about it might indicate a deliberate dissociation of the Vārkarī tradition from the erotic devotionalism or *madhura bhakti* of other Krishna traditions, while still aligning itself with the theology of separation.⁵¹ Furthermore, the yearning to be reunited is not one-sided, as it is in the songs of the *Ālvārs*, for instance, but rather is similar to the *Gītāgovinda*, where we hear of Krishna's yearning and his beloved Rādhā's, as well. Rather than the pain of two lovers, however, Viṭṭhal and Nāmdev suffer from the separation of a mother from her child, or a cow from her calf (*vātsalya*).⁵² Nāmdev is forever like a dependent infant who requires constant care from Viṭṭhal. The crisis of the *Tīrthāvalī*—Nāmdev's anxiety away from Paṇḍharpūr—is brought on by Viṭṭhal's decision to allow Jñāndev guardianship of Nāmdev on the pilgrimage trail. The resolution of this crisis of separation comes when Viṭṭhal reunites with Nāmdev and promises never to give him leave again.

The dialectic of separation bears a close relation to the dialectic of different technologies of religious practice (*yoga*) that emphasize a realization of nondualism (*advaita*) as opposed to simple, interpersonal engagement with god (*bhakti*) that presumes a dualistic (*dvaita*) relationship between god and devotee. The apparent conflict of these two positions, plentifully debated in the *Tīrthāvalī*, is also common in other Krishna traditions. Sūr Dās and Nandadas, for example, take up the dialectic with the *bhramargitā* songs. While Krishna is in Mathurā, Ūdho serves as his messenger to the forlorn *gopīs*.⁵³ In Sūr's treatment, Ūdho, similar to Jñāndev, is a scholar and *yogi* who attempts to reason with the afflicted *gopīs* as Jñāndev does with Nāmdev: the world is illusory and through inner contemplation, one realizes the indivisibility and immanence of Krishna.⁵⁴ The *gopīs* retort with their incorrigible devotion, as Nāmdev does, and ultimately persuade Ūdho that his ways and means are inferior to their all-consuming devotion to the visible and tangible Krishna.⁵⁵ For Sūr Dās, the victory of "simple" religion over the complexities of *yoga* invokes yet another dichotomy, that of *saguṇa* (with qualities) and *nirguṇa* (without qualities) modes of devotion.⁵⁶ However, the *Tīrthāvalī* is not concerned with this particular theological distinction.⁵⁷ Nāmdev is not necessarily a proponent of *saguṇa bhakti*. Many scholars have commented on the difficulty of situating Nāmdev within either camp of this theological divide.⁵⁸ Instead, the *Tīrthāvalī* advocates devotion to a specific deity, to Viṭṭhal in Paṇḍharpūr who stands on his

brick. Viṭṭhal dutifully plays his part by taking human form (910:2 above). The complexities of dualism versus nondualism and *saguṇa* versus *nirguṇa* are overrun by Nāmdev's singleminded devotion to the image of his god in Paṇḍharpūr, to a deity with definitive anthropomorphic presence, an exact geographical location, and a particular history; who nevertheless remains equated with an ineffable, nonduality preserved in the work of Jñāndev and others. In the *Tīrthāvalī*, religious categories are broached only to be disregarded as meaningful in the context of Nāmdev's all-consuming worship. The *yogi*, and in particular, the unmarried, ascetic Jñāndev, is antithetical to the family values espoused by the relationship between Krishna and Nāmdev. Ironically, these same values are again disrupted by a sant's rejection of his filial obligations, especially to a wife or child, as Eleanor Zelliott has pointed out.

There is evidence within the textual tradition surrounding the *Tīrthāvalī* and its several redactions that a transition from a pan-Indian representation of Krishna to a specific Marāṭhī one took place. In the biographical version of the *Tīrthāvalī* I have outlined above, and first attested in 1631 CE, the name "Krishna" does not appear. Instead, one finds other proper names like Govinda, Hari, and Keśav, as well as Paṇḍharī Nāth and Yādav Rao. However, in the earliest version of the *Tīrthāvalī*, the autobiographical version, first attested in 1581 CE, the name Krishna appears almost fifteen times.⁵⁹ From the 1581 CE version to the 1631 CE version the name Krishna is completely eliminated from the story of the *Tīrthāvalī*.

In the older version of the *Tīrthāvalī* when Nāmdev speaks of the difference he observed during his travels through the North, he mentions that even among fellow Vaishnavas he did not feel at home. The narrative of the *Tīrthāvalī* was probably formulated in the sixteenth century, but it certainly reflects an older, burgeoning movement among rural, agrarian, low-caste Marāṭhī speakers. As such, it is one of the first articulations of a unique Marāṭhī identity—one among many others—constructed around geography, religious practice, and language. Vārkarī *kīrtankārs* were spreading Viṭṭhal *bhakti* throughout the Deccan and further northward in an environment of diverse political alliances between local and invading Hindu and Muslim rulers, amid a variety of folk religions and literatures, and situated between a vastly expanding literary tradition in the North and an already deep-rooted one in the South. Eknāth, for example, exemplifies the diversity of the sixteenth century: a Brahmin with a guru from a Sufi lineage, he became a famous Vārkarī *kīrtankār* who utilized the language and images of low-caste Marāṭha life to spread *Bhāgavata dharma* while he remained a scholar of Sanskrit. In Eknāth's era, the period when the *Tīrthāvalī* was first

committed to writing, the Vārkarī tradition was undergoing a renaissance that included the refurbishment of holy sites (like Jñāndev's samādhi in Alandi) and sacred Marāṭhī texts (like the *Jñāneśvari*), while Sanskrit works like the *Bhāgavata Purāna* and the epics were being retold in Marāṭhī literature.

The *Tīrthāvalī* is positioned within a discourse of Krishna worship formed by Sanskrit and vernacular devotional literatures, pan-Indian performative traditions like *kīrtan* and *harikathā*, and a sacred geography of Vaishnava pilgrimage sites. Situated amid this terrain, the *Tīrthāvalī* engages these locations of devotionism and transforms them into Marāṭhī, on the one hand, and onto the religious and physical geography of Mahārāṣṭra, on the other. Krishna is familiarized as Viṭṭhal, a process paralleled in the *Jñāneśvari*. In the eleventh chapter, when, at Arjuna's insistence, Krishna reveals his cosmic form, Arjuna pleads with his friend and charioteer to assume his familiar appearance. Jñāndev offers this explanation of verse 45, "Your cosmic form fills me with fear, O Lord. Let me see you just as you were before. Like a pilgrim goes in search of wonder and adventure, then returns to the comfort of his home, so your four-armed form is a home to me" (11:493-4). Nāmdev's *Tīrthāvalī* and his other songs describe a home life in Paṇḍharpūr surrounded by a family of fellow bhaktas, with Viṭṭhal as their patriarch and matriarch. The *Tīrthāvalī* provides a conscious recognition of the Krishna tradition outside Mahārāṣṭra by engaging classical representations, but reinforces a Marāṭhī Krishna, rooted and fixed in Paṇḍharpūr amid a variety of religious and social influences. Nāmdev became anxious when he could not recognize the Krishna images, stories, and songs he encountered on his travels, though he was among fellow Vaishnavas. These strangers, Nāmdev tells us, worshiped Krishna but did not worship Viṭṭhal; they sang songs, but not Marāṭhī songs. Nāmdev may have been among friends, but he was not at home. Only in Paṇḍharpūr is the family portrait complete: Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī benevolently gazing upon Nāmdev and other sants, all children and siblings through the Krishna bhakti of the Vārkarī tradition.

Notes

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Dr. Ashok Kamat, for guidance, encouragement, hospitality, and long discussions about Nāmdev's importance; Dr. Sadanand More, for sharing his insights on Nāmdev and the Vārkarīs with me; Principal Relekar, for his assistance and enthusiasm for my work; Mr. Suresh Subandha, for graciously opening the doors of the Nāmdev Shimpi Mandir to me; Mr. V. Manjul, who has helped me and other scholars in countless ways for many years; Dr. Kalyan Kale, who has patiently

reviewed with me my very imperfect translations, thus saving me from certain embarrassment, and has selflessly shared with me his wealth of information; Dr. Tandale, for offering his musical and philosophical talents; Jack Hawley, Anne Feldhaus, Eleanor Zelliott, Mark Nye, Shana Sippy, Anna Schultz, and others who took their time to read and comment on this chapter; and Sunila Kale, my editor.

1. For Sanskrit and Marāṭhī sources for the Puṇḍalik story see R. C. Dhare (1984), G. A. Deleury (1960), and E. R. Sand (1992, 1994). For oral traditions, see G. D. Sontheimer (1989). E. R. Sand (1994), 132n6, believes that Rukmiṇī is a later addition to the story.

2. This is true of both the Vārkarī tradition, to which this folk story belongs, and of the Mahānubhāv tradition, a bhakti religion as old, if not older, than the Vārkarīs. See Anne Feldhaus (1983b), I. Raeside (1976, 1989) for more on the Mahānubhāv religion and the role of Krishna.

3. In Marāṭhī the first record of devotional-erotic songs (*madhura bhakti*) like those of the *Gītagovinda* appear in the work of Vamana Pandita (1618-95 CE) and are carried on most artfully by *lavanī* poets (*śāhīr*) from the eighteenth century onward, such as Ram Joshi, Honaji, and Saganbhau, who was a Muslim.

4. In Viṭṭhal's temple, he and Rukmiṇī are separated. Rukmiṇī's idol stands in the extreme northwestern corner facing east, with Satyabhāmā and Rādhikā in an adjacent room to her right. However, this does not diminish Rukmiṇī's importance. Aside from the stories of Krishna's life, Rukmiṇī's Svāyamvara ceremony is one of the episodes of Krishna mythology most often retold in Marāṭhī among both Vārkarīs and Mahānubhāvs. See S. G. Tulpule (1979) for literary accounts by at least seven different authors. Rukmiṇī's Svāyamvara is also a fixture of Vārkarī *kīrtan*.

5. Viṭhobā is arrived at through the diminutive of Viṭṭhal, Viṭṭhu, with the addition of the suffix "ba" as in the ubiquitous "baba" or "father". Viṭṭhāī is again a diminutive, but with a feminine ending. Viṭṭhal is also called simply *māuli* or mother. Indeed, the "feminizing" of Viṭṭhal is so complete at times that Viṭṭhal is said to "feed Nāmdev the milk of love from his own breasts" (*namatem pājila premapānhā*) (*Tīrthāvalī* 933:15). The term *māuli* is used by Nāmdev to refer to both Viṭṭhal and to Jñāndev, and later Vārkarīs also use it to refer to Jñāndev and to each other. It is common to hear two or more Vārkarīs greet one another on the biannual pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpūr by calling out "māuli!" reinforcing their metaphor of sharing a common "family" through their devotion to Viṭṭhal and to his sants. The old Marāṭhī word "*kuṭumbā*," or "family," is frequently found in Nāmdev's compositions, those of his fellow sants, and in writing about Nāmdev and his companions, where it refers to all sants and their admirers, past and present.

6. See Eleanor Zelliott (1999a), and Eleanor Zelliott (1999b). I use the word "sant" rather than "saint" to avoid homologies with Christian saints here. For more on the use and history of the term "sant" see Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, eds. (1987).

7. See S. More (1994) for a concise and insightful discussion of the *Tīrthāvalī*. Charlotte Vaudeville (1996), 250-51, suggests that the *Tīrthāvalī*

was "designed to propagate Vaishnava *bhakti* centred on the cult of Viṭṭhala." I am indebted to Dr. More for conversations about this topic in Pune, August 2000.

8. It is interesting to note that like so many of the male sants of the Vārkarī tradition (and figures like Kabir in the North), Nāmdev experiences tremendous problems with the women in his life. Gonāī, Nāmdev's mother, and Rājāī, Nāmdev's wife, both wrote songs condemning Nāmdev's disinterest in the world and his neglect of common daily tasks. On the other hand, Jāṇī, a disciple of Nāmdev's, praised him. Eleanor Zelliot has nicely discussed these problems in the works cited above.

9. In the classical context of Krishna devotion the term "viraha" is often used almost as a technical term to denote separation and the anxiety experienced by the abandoned lover, usually a gopī, and most famously, by Rādhā. However, in the *Tīrthāvālī* and in Marāṭhī scholarship about the text, the word "viraha" does not appear. Instead, the words "*viyoga*" and "*udvega*" are used. The term "*vātsalya*," on the other hand, is used both in the text and in Marāṭhī scholarship about the text.

10. See D. B. Mokashi (1987) and G. D. Sontheimer (1989). For Tukarām, see D. Chitre (1991).

11. See S. G. Tulpule (1960, 1979). For some sants, like Jñāndev, Eknāth, and Tukarām, the image of a manuscript is very important, in legend and in iconography: they are often depicted sitting before a manuscript. However, the fixing of a text or the adherence to written statement of belief is not so important among sants before the sixteenth century.

12. The first reference I have found in any British Indological study comes from W. Crooke, who was a district officer in the Bengal civil service in the late nineteenth century. He writes about "Nāmdeo" as a "cotton carder" (1893), vol. I, 84, a "Chhimpī or cotton-printer" (vol. I, 204), who was a follower of Ramanand and a "tribal sant" (ibid.). W. Crooke assigns a particular geographical and tribal identity to those who follow Nāmdev, "Nāmdeo Shimpis of Ahmadnagar," and observed a funeral ceremony involving Nim leaves in a section devoted to such rites across communities (vol. II, 105). In 1896, a second study by Crooke mentions a "Nāmādeo Bhagata" as a tribal sant among the Dhuniyas (299). The Nāmdev of the Dhuniyas is said to have been born in Marwar in 1443, in the time of Sikandar Lodi's reign. Crooke also mentions an account that Nāmdev came from Paṇḍharpūr in the "Dakkin" (ibid.). Crooke's second account probably confuses two figures with the same name, an seemingly intractable problem with regard to Nāmdev, though he does refer to Nāmdev as a traveler who eventually settled in Ghuman, thus in accord with Sikh hagiography about Nāmdev (144).

13. For a more thorough genealogy of Viṭṭhal's names, see G. A. Deulery (1960) and R. C. Dhere (1984).

14. Charlotte Vaudeville (1996), 201.

15. It is possible that Pundarika became the Puṇḍalik of the story above, transformed from a Śaiva deity into the first devotee of Viṭṭhal. However, this is not the belief of Vārkarīs.

16. Charlotte Vaudeville (1996), 251, agrees that Viṭṭhal's headgear is a Śiva līṅga, whereas G. A. Deleury (1960), 53, disagrees.

17. See R. C. Dhere (1984).

18. Charlotte Vaudeville's assessment was partially based on an analysis of Jñāndev's work. Jñāndev is remembered as both a Śaiva Nātha yogi and a Vārkarī sant, and his songs reflect both elements. For an excellent analysis of Jñāndev's verses and his sectarian affiliations, see C. Kiehnle (1997).

19. I use the term "Mahārāṣṭra" to refer to the Marāṭhī-speaking region, though the region became a state of modern India only in 1960.

20. G. A. Deleury (1960), 193.

21. Cakradar is considered an incarnation of Parameśvar, but he, and the four gurus of the Mahānubhāv sect before him, are collectively called the Five Krishnas. See Anne Feldhaus (1983b).

22. See I. Raeside (1989), xvii–xix. Raeside identifies three significant aspects of the character of the Mahānubhāv Krishna: (1) a lack of erotic elements in his hagiography; (2) the prominence given to his legal wives, especially Rukmiṇī; and (3) the characterization of Krishna as a great warrior.

23. See G. A. Deleury (1960) on two characters named Viṭṭhal and Nemdev, described as cattle thieves in the early Mahānubhāv hagiography, the *Līlācaritra*.

24. See G. D. Sontheimer (1989).

25. See Charlotte Vaudeville (1969).

26. The earliest and most complete biography of Jñāndev is attributed to Nāmdev. The *Ādi* tells the story of Jñāndev's parents and Jñāndev's childhood; the *Tīrthāvālī* narrates the travels of Jñāndev and Nāmdev and subsequent events; and the *Samādhi* contains Nāmdev's account of Jñāndev taking *sañjīvan samādhi* in Aḷandi. The three texts form the core of Mahipati's eighteenth-century retelling of Jñāndev's life, and are widely adapted elsewhere, as in the famous Prabhat Studios film "Sant Jñāneśvar." See S. Irlekar (1995) for a study of Nāmdev's biography of Jñāndev.

27. Another of Jñāndev's works, the *Anubhāvāmṛta*, is a highly poetic exegesis of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy. For more on Jñāndev's Śaiva work, see D. Chitre (1996) and C. Kiehnle (1997).

28. The term "samādhi" here refers both to the mental state and to the actual tomb, rediscovered by Eknāth in the sixteenth century, located in Aḷandi, near Pune.

29. Like many figures of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in India, little is known for certain about Nāmdev's life or which of the thousands of compositions attributed to him are his. It is very likely that the recorded literary corpus of both Nāmdev and Jñāndev is filled with the compositions of others, amended over the years. Some scholars, like S. B. Kulkarni (1992) of Nagpur, believe that there were as many as four different poets using more or less the same name and the same stock of themes as the first Nāmdev. This is almost certainly true of the work of a late-sixteenth-century poet and translator of the *Mahābhārata*, Vishnudāsa Nāmā, who often referred to himself in his songs as a "slave of Vishnu" (*vishnudās*). Nāmdev is also revered by Kabīr Panthīs, Dādū

Pan̄thūs, and Sikhs. This northern tradition remembers Nāmdev differently than does the Marāthī tradition, and it should be recalled that I am engaging the Marāthī remembrance of Nāmdev specifically through the *Tīrthāvalī*, and not the much broader tradition, which represents Nāmdev as a willing and frequent pilgrim to the North.

30. For more on this subject, see Christian Novetzke (2003).

31. For more on the abhaṅg as a form and the *ovī* as a meter, see C. Kiehnle (1997), 36–51.

32. See W. Callewaert and M. Lath (1989), Charlotte Vaudeville (1993), and N. Singh (1981).

33. The miracle of Viṭṭhal drinking milk from Nāmdev's hand is famous in both Marāthī hagiography and in northern hagiographies. See the hagiographies of Anantadās (c. 1588), Nābhādās (c. 1600), and Vyās (c. 1580), as well as abhaṅg in the *Guru Granth Sahib* (1604). Also see Mahipati (1762) and Nāmdev's abhaṅg in *Sakaḷa Santa Gāthā* (1999[1908]), no. 7.

34. See *Sakaḷa Santa Gāthā* (1999[1908]), abhaṅg 118–69.

35. The autobiographical version has appeared in P. S. Subandha's anthology (1960), and the government of Mahārāṣṭra's *Śrī Nāmdev Gāthā* (1970).

36. Janābāī (d. c. 1350), a contemporary of Nāmdev, who called herself "Nāmā's disciple" (*nāmyācī dāsī jānī*) in many of her songs, composed a synopsis of the *Tīrthāvalī*, attested to as early as 1631 CE. Her synopsis conforms to the biographical *Tīrthāvalī* and highlights the pain of separation (*viyoga*) shared by Viṭṭhal and Nāmdev.

37. The number of verses varies among editions. I have used the numbering system of the *Śrī Nāmdev Gāthā*, a semicritical edition published by the government of Mahārāṣṭra in 1970. Though the numbers are different, the text of the *Tīrthāvalī* is exactly the same as the one contained in the *Sakaḷa Santa Gāthā* (1999[1908]) edited by Sakhare. This latter collection of Vārkarī sant literature is generally accepted by Vārkarīs as authoritative and used by kīrtankārs in their performances. The text runs from abhaṅg number 612–70 in the 1999 reprint of the *Sakaḷa Santa Gāthā*. For this project, I chose to use the numbering system of the *Śrī Nāmdev Gāthā* because it is a more standard text for academic citation in Marāthī scholarship.

38. It is important to note that Brahmins have "owned" and managed the Viṭṭhal temple for hundreds of years, and vital sants, like Eknāth, were Brahmins. The Vārkarī tradition is not an antibrahmanical movement, though it is certainly critical of caste-based discrimination and persecution.

39. This is the autobiographical version and mentions only Nāmdev, who gives a first-person narration of his travels. Jñāndev and Viṭṭhal, as characters, do not appear in this version.

40. The *vārī*, as the pilgrimage is called in Marāthī, involves carrying wooden or silver *pādukās*, or sandals, that represent a particular sant, twice a year from the sant's home village to Paṇḍharpūr. The oldest of the sants that are symbolically carried to Paṇḍharpūr is Jñāndev, and a special welcome awaits him outside the city every year. A set of *pādukā* representing Nāmdev are carried a short distance outside the city, where they meet Jñāndev's contingent who have carried his *pādukās* from Aḷandī. The two ritually greet and

Nāmdev's contingent escort Jñāndev's into Paṇḍharpūr. Though the *vārī* takes place twice a year, the particular greeting of Nāmdev and Jñāndev occurs only once a year, in early July, or the *ekādaśī* of the month of *āṣāḍh*. During the other *vārī*, in November or the *ekādaśī* of *kārttik*, Nāmdev visits Jñāndev in Aḷandī, in commemoration of the latter's *mahāsamādhi*, the theme of Nāmdev's final biographical work on Jñāndev's life, the *Samādhi*, a lamentation at his friend's passing.

41. All translations are mine from the Marāthī, unless otherwise noted.

42. Paṇḍhari is another name for Paṇḍharpūr.

43. See C. Kiehnle's (1997) study of Jñāndev, *The Conservative Vaiṣṇava*, for a discussion of a text that presents some of these ideas through the persona of Jñāndev.

44. See A. G. Gold (1988).

45. See J. T. Molesworth (1996), 629.

46. See S. Pollock (1998), 25, for a discussion of "mutually constitutive interaction of the local and the global" with regard to Kannada and Sanskrit literatures.

47. On the subject of bhakti and the origin of vernacular literatures, S. Pollock (1998), 29, writes that, "many vernacular inaugurations show no concern with religious devotionalism whatever" and makes the case well with Kannada. However, the argument is unsupported within the Marāthī milieu where the earliest written literary use of the vernacular occurs in Mahānubhāv hagiographies. See S. G. Tulpule (1979), 314.

48. See Friedhelm Hardy (1983b).

49. I am grateful to W. Callewaert for a complete word index of the *Śrī Nāmdev Gāthā*, provided through personal communication.

50. Though the *Tīrthāvalī* has rarely appeared in scholarship in English, Friedhelm Hardy (1983b), 149–50, mentions the text at the end of an essay on viraha in relation to concrete time and space. However, he does not note that the word never appears in the text itself. He does not mention the *Tīrthāvalī* in his excellent book-length study of viraha (1983a).

51. See J. S. Hawley (1984), 100–13, where he discusses viyoga in the context of Sūr Dās, and argues that the term serves as an antithesis to Ūdho's yoga.

52. The word "*vatsa*" in reference to Viṭṭhal's feeling for Nāmdev does appear in the *Tīrthāvalī* and in Marāthī scholarship on the subject. It is interesting to note that in the oldest collection of songs, from 1631 CE, attributed to Janābāī, a large number of the verses are specifically addressed to *bhaktavatsalatā*. See Dandekar et al., *Śrī Nāmdev Gāthā* (1970), 936–55. Furthermore, in that same manuscript is Janābāī's synopsis of the *Tīrthāvalī* (see note 33), thus reinforcing the connection between vātsalya devotion and this text.

53. J. S. Hawley (1984), 98–102.

54. It is interesting to note that Mahipati considered Nāmdev, and not Jñāndev, an avatāra of Ūdho, or Uddhav. Mahipati 1915 (1762) (chapter 9, verses 7–12).

55. The oldest manuscripts used by J. S. Hawley in his work on Sūr Dās are from the same period as those that contain the *Tīrthāvalī*, from the late 1580s to the middle of the eighteenth century CE. The direction of influence is uncertain, but it is interesting to note that Sūr Dās, along with Kabīr, Rohidās, and Mirābāī, are fixtures of Marāthī hagiography.

56. See J. S. Hawley (1984), 121, and R. S. McGregor (1973), 47.

57. The word "nirguṇa" appears once in the entire *Śrī Nāmdev Gāthā* and the term "saguṇa" appears forty-one times. Neither term appears in the biographical version of the *Tīrthāvalī*.

58. See Friedhelm Hardy (1983a), 150; J. S. Hawley (1984), 194; David Lorenzen (1996), 286; W. Callewaert and M. Lath (1989), 13; Charlotte Vaudeville (1996), 217n16.

59. Manuscript no. 1532 of 1891–95 in the collection of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune.

60. G. D. Khanolkar (1977).

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Chapter 8



Dance before Doom
Krishna in the Non-Hindu Literature of
Early Medieval South India

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Krishna shows up in the strangest of places in the early medieval narrative poetry of Tamil-speaking South India. Perhaps most striking is the fact that none of this literature is explicitly Hindu, much less devoted to Krishna. In the *Cilappatikāram*, a long and beautiful poetic narrative composed perhaps in the fourth or fifth century, a text often assumed to be Jain but of uncertain sectarian affiliation,¹ a compassionate herdsman known as Mātari, in whose care the heroine Kaṇṇaki has been left by her husband, calls to her daughter and the local girls:

Let us dance the *kuravai* [dance] which Māyavaṅ [Krishna] and his elder brother danced along with Piṅṅai [Krishna's consort] of long spear-like eyes . . . [so that] Kaṇṇaki, a jewel among women on earth, may see it.²

The *Maṇimēkalai*, another long and beautiful poetic narrative dating from the sixth century and often paired with the *Cilappatikāram* as its "twin," tells the story of a young woman's gradual awakening to the Buddha's *dharma*.³ The narrative action suddenly shifts, in chapter 19, from *Maṇimēkalai* herself heroically feeding the hungry masses from her prison cell to the king of the royal capital of Pukār frolicking with his queen in the royal gardens. Seeing three lovely birds dancing about a tank, the king mistakes them for Krishna, his elder brother, and Piṅṅai dancing the dance known as the *kuravai*. A few lines later he worships a dark green bamboo tree as Krishna and a "katampū tree thick with white