PART II

THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT

HINDU AND ALLIED RELIGIOUS SECTS

I. Major Sects: (i) Warkaris, (ii) Advaita, (iii) Dvaita and (iv) Virasaiva.

So far we have discussed secular aspects, like the political relations of the Bahmanis with the Hindu chiefs, and the economic and social conditions of the people. We shall now take up the religious aspect. Here an attempt is made first to describe the various religious cults that flourished in the Deccan during the period under review.

I. Major Sects

(i) Warkaris, (ii) Advaita, (iii) Dvaita and (iv) Virasaiva.

II. Minor Sects


I.

(i) Warkaris

(1) Damajipant.
1) **Damaji Pant - Mangalvedhe**

Among the Warkaris of Mangalvedhe - near Pandharpur, the name of Damaji Pant was very prominent. Namadeva, Chokhamela and others were popular figures of the Warkari cult and they flourished on the eve of the establishment of the Bahmani kingdom. Full details about them are not given here as I have nothing to add to what is already known about them. On the other hand, Damaji Pant of the same cult, who was besides an officer under the Bahmanis is selected here for detailed consideration as I think I have some contribution to make towards the elucidation of his date and work. Later records say that Damaji Pant was a Thanedar or in-charge of warehouses at Mangalvedhe, which was a Thana under the Bahmani rule. By nature, Damaji Pant was kind and generous. He was also a great devotee of Lord Vithala of Pandharpur, the centre of the Warkari cult.

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1 Tukaram mentions that Damaji was acting as Thanedar. This view is supported by Mahipati.

2 D.B. Parasnis, (ed), Bharat Varsha, Poona 1898-99, p.8. Mangalvedhe was a Thana under the Bahmanis and the Sultans of Bijapur. The Mughals continued the similar pattern of administrative units.

:Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, XXIV, Kolhapur, p. 487. Mangalvedhe is close to Pandharpur in South Maharashtra.
An episode which is believed to have occurred in his life is described by three writers namely, (1) Kananath, (2) Tukarm and (3) Mahipati. From the accounts of these writers we learn that Damaji Pant was charged with appropriation when he distributed foodgrains among the needy people of Mangalvedhe without the prior permission of the Sultan of Bidar during a famine. It is further said that Lord Vithala, whose devotee Damaji was, protected him from the wrath of the Sultan of Bidar by his actual intervention in the affair.

Before we describe this episode in detail, we shall try to establish his contemporaneity with the Bahmani times and ascertain the date when the said episode could have occurred.

1) The first famine that occurred in the Deccan was in the days of Muhammad Shah II, who ruled between 1378 A.D. and 1397 A.D. The Sultan successfully faced the situation and made elaborate arrangements to help his subjects. This date is not acceptable because of the following reasons:

a) Tukarm and Mahipati and the existing traditions tell us that Lord Vithala, disguising himself as Vithu Mahar or Begari Vithaji, had come to Bidar and paid the dues to the Government.
b) Gulbarga was the capital seat of the Bahmanis till 1429 A.D. in which year Ahmad Shah, the 9th ruler, shifted his capital from Gulbarga to Bidar. Hence, the said episode could not have taken place between 1378 A.D. and 1397 A.D.

2) Ferishta writes that there was a very severe famine in the Deccan during the rule of Ahmad Shah, who ruled between 1422 A.D. and 1435 A.D. This date is also not acceptable as other writers do not support it.

3) Sherwani gives another date 1472-1475 A.D., when the Bahmani kingdom was terribly affected by famine. "The Bijapur famine lasted two years, during which time the Deccan, both within the borders of the Bahmani State and without, was too much engrossed with the immediate welfare of both men and beasts to achieve anything of importance."

4) This date is further supported by P. H. Khadilkar, who writes that, in 1473 A.D., a famine known as the Damji Pant

2. Sherwani, Bahmanis, p. 328.
   ; Robert Sewell, A forgotten empire, p. 98.
famine took place in the Deccan.  

5) However, we have another date mentioned by Colonel Etheridge, who says that a famine known as the Damaji Pant famine took place in 1460 A.D., and laid waste the Deccan. But this date is not supported by any other writer.

6) V.K. Rajwade mentions that a famine known after Damaji Pant took place in 1475 A.D. His views are based on a document dated 1475 A.D.  

Hence, it is probable that the said episode must have taken place between 1473 and 1475 A.D., and Damaji Pant lived in that period. We know that, during this period, Muhammad Shah III ruled over the Bahmani kingdom. In his time, the Bahmani flag flew over the far West and South. Mangalvedhe, with which we are now concerned, was one of the Thanas of the Bahmani kingdom.

Let us now discuss what Ekanath, Tukaram and Mahipati have said about the episode.

1. Ekanath, who flourished in 1933-1599 A.D., has referred to this incident in one of his Abhangas.\(^1\) From this we learn that Lord Vithala of Pandharapur decided to protect his devotee, Damaji Pant, after having listened to his prayer.\(^2\) He disguised himself as an old man, paid the dues to the Government and took the receipt.\(^3\) Ekanath records the episode very briefly.

2. Tukaram, who flourished between 1608 and 1649 A.D., detailed has given a vivid and detailed description of the episode in his Abhangas.  

1. Tukaram Bavancha Abhangachi Gatha, (Maharashtra Government,)
Tukaram's description, we find, tallies with that of Mahipati. According to Tukaram, Damaji Pant was a devotee of Lord Vithala of Pandharpur. He was universally respected. He was acting as the Thanesar of Mangalvedhe. Once, there was a severe famine, in which people experienced untold sufferings, such as shortage of food. Damaji Pant broke open the ware-house and distributed foodgrains among the people. While the people praised Damaji Pant's generosity to his enemy, a Kanadi Brahmin who was the Mu'umdar, complained to the Sultan of Bidar, against Damaji Pant. After having received the complaint from the Mu'umdar of Mangalvedhe, the Sultan of Bidar sent his servants to bring Damaji Pant to the court. Before he proceeded to Bidar, Damaji Pant went to Pandharpur to have the darshana of Lord Vithala and offered his prayers. Tukaram mentions that Lord Vithala protected Damaji Pant after hearing the heart-touching prayers of Damaji.

1. Tukaram mentions the name of Damaji's enemy as a Kanadi Brahmin, whereas Mahipati has not mentioned this detail.

2. Tukaram and Mahipati mention the same name.

3. The Lord listened to Damaji's prayers and went to Bidar disguised as a servant. He met the Badashah, credited the dues to the Government and secured the receipt. The Sultan was sorry that he sent his servants to bring Damaji Pant. The Sultan asked the name of the servant who said it was Begari Vitha. Then he left Bidar for Mangalvedhe.
Damaji Pant, who arrived at Bidar the next day, explained his action to the Sultan, who, after hearing him, was much surprised and told him that his servant, Begari Vithaji, had credited the dues to the treasury on the previous day and had left for Mangalvedhe with the receipt. At this, Damaji Pant was taken aback and said that he did not send any servant; but he soon realised that Lord Vithala had protected him. Then he was moved and tears rolled down his cheeks. Then the Sultan honoured Damaji with presents etc. Damaji Pant, however, left the service of the Sultan and came back to Pandharpur to spend the rest of his days in the service of Lord Vithala. This is how Tukaram ends the episode.

Mahipati's account is similar to Tukarama's, but he gives us a few more details. He tells us that once a severe famine set in the Bahmani kingdom and the people suffered badly. The people round about Mangalvedhe were also affected by the calamity. People belonging to all castes and cults, went to the town of Mangalvedhe. One Brahmin eventually approached Damaji Pant at the treasury and explained his difficulties. He was very hungry. Damaji Pant soon realised the situation.

1. Bhakti Vijaya, Ch, 40.
and offered him help. Similarly, others began to approach Damaji Pant, who helped them. The procession of needy people became a regular feature and Damaji Pant could not help all the people who came to him. At last, unable to withstand the grim situation, Damaji Pant decided to distribute the foodgrains stored in the warehouse. Without caring for the consequences, he distributed the grains among the needy people. They all were delighted and admired his generous qualities.

Mahipati writes that Damaji Pant had some enemies, who naturally took advantage of this situation and informed the Sultan of Bidar of Pant’s activities. His opponents further criticised Damaji Pant, who had spent the property of the Sultan of Bidar without his permission and persuaded the Sultan to punish him severely.

After collecting the information regarding the activities of Damaji Pant, the Sultan of Bidar, ‘Avindhu’, got wild and sent his servants to bring Damaji to the Court.¹

As Damaji Pant learnt the news of the arrival of the Bahmani Sultan’s servants at Mangalvedhe, he determined to

¹ Bhakti Vijaya, Ch, 40.
proceed to Bidar and explain the matter personally to the Sultan. He was not sure that he would return safely back to Mangalvedhe. Therefore, he wanted to pay a last visit to Vithala on his way to Bidar. Accordingly, he left Mangalvedhe for Pandharpur to have darshana of the Lord Vithala. Mahipati tells have Damaji Pant sang a soulful song of devotion, believing this was his last darshana. After offering his prayers, Damaji Pant proceeded to Bidar.

As in Tukarama's account, Mahipati also says that God Vithala went to the Sultan at Bidar as Vithu Mahar and got the receipt.¹

¹ Bhakti Vijaya, Ch, 40.

According to the story, after hearing Damaji Pant's prayers Lord Vithala transformed himself into an Antya-low-born, and called himself 'Vithu Mahar'. He proceeded to Bidar to meet the Sultan, wearing torn clothes. Vithu Mahar came to the court of the Sultan, announced himself to be a servant of Damaji Pant and wished to see the Sultan. Accordingly, the servants informed that a servant of Damaji Pant of Mangalvedhe had come to meet his Majesty. Vithu Mahar was admitted into the court of the Sultan, before him he explained the entire tragic story of the severe famine and the circumstances under which Damaji Pant had distributed the food-grains among the poor and needy. Vithu Mahar also submitted a letter from Damaji Pant to the Sultan and added that he had brought the money, amounting to one lakh and twenty thousand Mahars. The Sultan felt quite glad and asked his official to receive the money and pass on the receipt to the servant of Damaji Pant. Thereafter, Vithu Mahar, with the receipt, left the court of the Sultan.

¹ MS, Vol, 209.
At the Sultan's reply Damaji Pant was quite surprised and arrived at the conclusion that his Lord Vithala had come to the Court in the form of Vithu Mahar and saved him. He became highly emotional, and with tears rolling down from his eyes, he explained to the Sultan that he did not send any such servant as Vithu Mahar. The Sultan, too, was quite astonished at the activities of Vithu Mahar. Damaji Pant said that he was none else than his Lord Vithala of Pandharpur. Thereafter, the Sultan accorded a warm reception to Damaji Pant and requested him to show his Lord Vithala to him. It is further believed that Damaji Pant came back to Pandharpur along with the Sultan of Bidar, and the Sultan is said to have had the darshana. Damaji Pant later decided to relieve himself of the Sultan's service, but to continue his service to Lord Vithala and stay at Pandharpur till his death.

1 Bhakti Vijaya, Ch, 40.
2 Ibid, Ch, 40.
In addition to these, we have certain traditions that are in vogue to this day in support of the episode.

a) There are two spots, believed to have been the footprints of Lord Vithala of Pandharpur, in Bidar town. One is in the Bidar fort, near the second gate, or Gumbad Darwaza, and the second, in the centre of Shah Gunj gate, in the heart of the town. There are many devotees of Lord Vithala who daily worship these two spots and offer prayers.

b) Another is about the Warkari mandali. It is a fact that, every year, a Warkari group of Pandharpur, consisting of more than 100 people, pay a visit to Bidar and worship the spot at the second gate, in the Bidar fort. The Warkari mandali maintain this tradition in memory of Damaji Pant. In this way, the existing traditions increase the credibility of the story.

Hence, with the help of the following sources and the existing traditions, we can say that the episode appears to be plausible:

1) Ekanath, who lived between 1533 and 1599 A.D., was a near contemporary, earlier writer than Tikaram, and Manipati is the first to describe the episode.
2) Tukaram too had no reason to describe so vividly the episode if it was a myth.

3) Mahipati's narration tallies with the accounts of earlier writers. Thus, these three sources strengthen each other.

4) One of the records found in the Mackenzie Collections\(^1\) gives a version that tallies with those of Tukaram and Mahipati.

5) Further, the existing traditions substantially support the episode.

In this connection, G.S. Sardesai observes:

"The well known story of Damaji Pant, a revenue collector of the Bidar (sic) district, is a typical instance in which he miraculously escaped the wrath of his master for having distributed gratis Government stores of corn, through the actual intervention of the Vithoba of Pahdarpur.\(^2\)"

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1 MS. Vol. 209.

2 Sardesai, New History of the Marathas, I, p.38.
Leaving aside all the details of the miracle, it is clear
(1) That Damaji Pant was a famous figure of the Varkari cult of
the 15th century A.D. He generously helped the people during
the famine. (2) It is also worth noting that untouchables
like Vithu Mahar were employed as messengers of Thanedars.
They were known as Begars or serfs. They were dressed badly.
(3) The Thana unit was like a modern taluka and the
Thanedar was a Tahasildar. He had a warehouse under his
control containing grain, which might have been the revenue
collected to be used in case of famine and such other con­tin­
gencies.
(4) There was another government servant in the Thana. He
was Majumdar. He was a check on the Thanedar. All these
local officers were Hindus.
(5) The grains could be utilised only with the permission
of the Sultan.

ii) Advaita
   1) Sripadasri Vallabha, (2) Narasima Saraswati

Sripada Sri Vallabha and Narasinha Saraswati were two
chief promoters of the Advaita philosophy in the Deccan
during this period. They were also the chief exponents of
the Datta cult. The Guru Charitra explains that the Datta
idea includes the three divine elements Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara. This idea is said to have developed in the puranas of Sati-Anasuya. Dattatreya, a combination of the Trimurti, is iconographically represented as having three heads and six hands, and carrying the representative ayudhas of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva-Shankha, Chakra, Sruva, Trishula and Khatawanga. The trinity embodies the body of the Absolute, who represents knowledge, love and right conduct. Hence, he is called the creator, uplifter, and judge. These are not different figures, but different faces of the Absolute. This cult, or Sampradaya, later became very popular, as it emphasized equality among the trinity.

Let us discuss how Sripada Sri Vallabha and Narasimha Saraswati worked to uplift the people by their intuition and spiritual powers.

1. GC, Ch, IV.


"The figure of Brahma on a wall of the Hoysaleshwara temple at Halebidu is seen to carry in its upper right hand the Sruk and the Sruva, in the lower right hand the Aksemala, the upper left hand the pasa and the lower left hand Kamanadalu".
The followers of the Datta cult believe that Sripada Sri Vallabha was the first incarnation of Dattatreya. He is believed to have flourished between C. 1320 and 1350 A.D., i.e. on the eve of the establishment of the Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan.\(^1\) A brief survey of the life of Sripada Sri Vallabha is quite essential, as his activities have a great bearing on the life and work of Narasimha Saraswati.

He was born at Pithapur, near Rajamahendri, in coastal Andhra.\(^2\) He was the offspring of Apalaraja and Sumati, a couple known for their pure life. The couple also were known for their hospitality. It is said that, once, God Dattatreya paid a visit to the house of this couple, disguising himself as a guest. That day happened to be a death anniversary in the family. Priests had to come to help in the performance of the religious ceremonies and they were to be fed first. Then only would others take their food. But the priests were late in coming.

\(^{1}\) R.C. Dhere, *Datta Sampradayacha Itibasa*, Poona, 1964, p. 84.
\(^{2}\) GC, Ch. IV.
Without waiting for them, Sumati served this guest with love and devotion. It is said that this made Dattatreya take birth as the son of this couple, who was to be Sripada Sri Vallabha.

According to the story, Sripada exhibited extraordinary qualities even at a young age. He refused to marry and remained a bachelor throughout his life.

Sripada Sri Vallabha was an authority on the Advaita Vedanta. He toured the holy places of South India, including Gokarna, where he spent three years. He then proceeded to Kuruvapura, or Kurugadde, where he settled down permanently. In his time, Kuruvapura attained a great name for spiritual activities, to this day enjoys the reputation of being the final abode of Sripada Sri Vallabha.

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1 Gokarna is a coastal town in Karwar district. It has a famous temple of Mahabaleshwar, which is very famous.

2 This is situated in the district of Raichur.
Here it is desirable to note that the mission of Sripada Sri Vallabha was to lead those who were wasting their time, to a life of good deeds. He taught a good lesson to the son of one Ambika. She and her good-for-nothing son were trying to commit suicide. Sripada Sri Vallabha told them to have faith in God and observe the vrata, or regular worship of Siva, in the evening. As a result, the dullard son changed into a scholar and led a purposeful life. Sripada Sri Vallabha blessed the devotees without making any distinction of class or caste. He inculcated in his devotees the idea that attachment to worldly pleasures is of no use. It makes man a slave. These desires always block the path of salvation. The only way is to eschew worldly pleasures. It is a difficult task to overcome desires. But saints like Sripada Sri Vallabha, by their sincerity and pious devotion to God, were a beacon light to ordinary people in this difficult task of overcoming desire.

1 GOCh, Ch. IX.
II) **Narasimha Saraswati (0.1378-1458 A.D.)**

The work of Sripada Sri Vallabha was continued by his spiritual successor, Narasimha Saraswati. We shall first discuss the date and contemporaneity of Narasimha Saraswati with the Sultans of the Bahmani kingdom. The Guru Charitra is the only available authentic source for this purpose. In it, it is clearly mentioned that Narasimha Saraswati passed away on Friday, Bahu Dhana Samvatsara, and this Saka year corresponds to the Christian era 1458 A.D. He had a long life. If we suppose that Narasimha Saraswati lived for 80 years, then his life-span would be

\[ \text{Life-span} = 80 \times 12 = 960 \text{ years} \]

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1. GC, Ch, LII.

: H.S. Joshi accepts this date.

*(Origin and Development of Dattatreya Worship in India, p. 87.)*
between 1378 A.D. and 1458 A.D. If so, he was a contemporary of four Bahmani Sultans.

1) Muhammad Shah II - 1376 to 1397 A.D.
2) Firuz Shah - 1397 to 1422 A.D.
3) Ahmad Shah - 1422 to 1435 A.D.
4) Ala-ud-Din II - 1435 to 1458 A.D.

We shall now give a few significant details of his life and work. He was born at Karanjanagar in the Yarad (Berar) district. His parents were Madhava and Amba. His earlier name was Narahari. When he attained 7 years of age, his parents performed his Upanayana ceremony, and

However, writers like S.K. Belavílkar and R.D. Ranade, R.K. Kamat and P.H. Khadilkar have suggested different dates.

a) S.K. Belavílkar and R.D. Ranade, maintain that Narasimha Saraswati was a contemporary of the Sultan Ala-ud-Din II, 1435-1458 A.D. (History of Indian Philosophy, VII, Poona, 1927, p.215.)

b) R.K. Kamat, who has edited the Guru Charitras, maintains that Narasimha Saraswati flourished between 1320 and 1380 Saka years, corresponding to 1398 A.D. and 1458 A.D.

c) P.H. Khadilkar, in his article "Sri Narasimha Saraswati yancha Kala Ani karya", FY, Poona, 1950, pp. 100-104, has discussed in detail the different dates ascribed to Narasimha Saraswati.
that, till that day, Guru Charitra says, he had not uttered a single word. But on the occasion of his Upasanyana ceremony, he suddenly recited the Vedic hymns and kept all the people spellbound. After some years, his parents desired to perform his marriage, but Narahari flatly refused saying that he had already married the lady called "Vairagya" (asceticism) and then left his parents in order to perform penance. After travelling to many holy places, Narahari arrived at Banaras and accepted Sanyasa under the guidance of Krishna Saraswati, an Advaitin, who renamed him Narasimha Saraswati.

Narasimha Saraswati's mission was to continue the work of Sankaracharya. It is worth noting that Narasimha Saraswati once again established the line of Sanyasa, the fourth Ashrama, the spirit of which had declined during

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1 GC, Ch, XI.
this period. He also established an example of a pure, saintly career. He encouraged the people to be good and do good. This was necessary, because the Muslim rulers attracted the attention of the people towards them by giving them money and rank. Even learned Brahmanas enjoyed the protection of the rulers and insulted the illiterates. He laid stress on *Karma* and *vratas*, which the people of his day needed. He is said to have performed miracles only to make the people realise the value of *devotion*. He instructed his devotees to give importance to purity of mind and not to worldly pains and pleasures. He uplifted the people by directing them along proper actions and punishing the wrongdoers by way of *Prayaecita*, or to suffer for their wickedness. Through his spiritual powers as well as his simple and chaste life, he showed that he was one who had come to protect mankind from the wrongdoers and from ignorance. He blessed all his devotees without considering their caste, colour or any other distinctions. As we shall see later, he also influenced the Muslims and made them behave properly with the Hindus.

After becoming a Sanyasi, Narasimha Saraswati left Banaras and undertook a holy tour. He arrived at Karanja,
where he saw his parents after 30 years. He soon left Karanja and arrived at Vasara Brahmeshwara. Here he halted for a few years. During his stay here, the following episode is believed to have taken place. There lived a village official named Sayamadeva, who originally belonged to Kadaganchi in Gulbarga district. He had taken service under the local Muslim chief of Vasara Brahmeshwar. Sayamadeva met Narasimha Saraswati on the bank of the Godavari and invited him to his house for a meal. In his house, he confessed that he was much afraid of the autocratic and tyrannical behaviour of the local Muslim chief. He also prayed Narasimha Saraswati to bless him. After listening to the request, Narasimha

1 CC, Ch, XII.
2 Ibid, Ch, XIII. It is situated on the banks of Godavari in Nanded district.
3 Ibid, Ch, XIII.
4 Ibid, XIII-XIV.
5 Ibid.
Saraswati consoled him and told him to go to the house of the Muslim chief and talk to him without any fear. Accordingly, Sayamadeva went boldly to meet his superior. The moment the local Muslim chief saw the non-chalant arrival of Sayamadeva, and not expecting such boldness in him, it is said he was seized with some strange and inexplicable fit of pain. Instead of showering abuses as was his wont, he offered some presents to Sayamadeva and told him to leave the place immediately. In a delightful mood, Sayamadeva returned home and explained the entire episode to Narasimha Saraswati. This is one example throwing light on the type of work of Saints like Narasimha Saraswati who emboldened the people to face tyrannical officials.

From Vasar Brahmashwara, Narasimha Saraswati proceeded on his holy tour of South India. He visited places like Purli-Vaijnath, Bhilwadi etc. He stayed for few days in Bhilwadi and imparted knowledge to a Brahmana there. Later, he came to Amarpur and stayed there for 12 years. Still later, he went to Ganagapur after paying a visit to Audumbar.

1 GG: Ch, XIII-XIV.
Narasimha Saraswati spent the major portion of his life at Ganagapur, roughly between 1435 A.D. and 1450 A.D. Here he attained the height of his reputation. He is said to have performed a number of amazing miracles, like bringing the dead back to life, making the poor rich and healing the wounds of his devotees. Ganagapur became the abode of a great saint and his spiritual activities. The dignitaries of Ganagapur offered Narasimha Saraswati a residence, which was later converted into his holy matha. A large number of devotees began to flock to Ganagapur to enjoy the blessings and grace of the great saint.

Another ambition of Narasimha Saraswati was to make the people conform to the true faith. Some of the Bahmani Sultans used to encourage scholars among Hindus, who went to them for patronage. But such scholars were not sincere. The Guru found fault with such insincere and showy learned men and encouraged them not to go to the court for patronage. One such incident was the following.

1 Dhere, Datta Sampradayacha Itihasa, p. 116.
Once, two arrogant Brahmins perhaps, Dvaita Pandits, arrived at the court of the Bahmani Sultan, probably Ahmad Shah, who is believed to have arranged a debate between the court-scholars and those two scholars. The visiting scholars are said to have scored a victory over the court learned men. For this, they received honour and awards from the Sultan. Then they had a meeting with Trivikrama, of Kumasi village, who was a devotee of Narasimha Saraswati. He had no desire to engage in debate with these two scholars. Hence, he brought them to Ganagapur and arranged a debate between Narasimha Saraswati and the two scholars.

Narasimha Saraswati advised them not to engage in such activities for money and certificates. The two Pandits were proud and paid no heed to Narasimha Saraswati. Thereafter, Narasimha Saraswati called upon a Matunga low born and poured on him the holy ashes (Bhasma), as a result of which the Matunga is said to have become...

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid, Ch, XXVI.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
emancipated and recalled to his memory and explained all the details of his previous births. He finally recited the Vedic hymns and spoke very eloquently on the other Sastras, saying that, during his previous lives, he was a great Pandit born in the Brahmana community. It is said, after witnessing this miracle, all the people including these two Pandits felt delighted about the spiritual calibre of Narasimha Saraswati. The two Pandits requested Narasimha Saraswati to excuse them as they felt nervous and could not debate with an authority like Narasimha Saraswati. This incident indicates that Narasimha Saraswati wanted that the Hindus should not change their ways of living for money and certificates and should keep up the traditional ways of learning for its own sake.

Narasimha Saraswati laid stress on the role of the Guru in society. That is why the work is known as Guru Charitra. According to him, Guru is all in all. This is very well revealed in the stories of Tantuka, Narakesari Kavi of Kallesvar etc.¹ Narasimha Saraswati is said to have told a number of stories regarding the importance of Guru, such as those of Dipaka,² Dhaumya Rsi, and his

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1 GC, Ch, L.
2 Ibid, Ch, II.
three disciples. In these stories the refrain is that a disciple without the grace of his teacher cannot hope to win his desires. The only way is to please his teacher and attain all things.¹ One who denounces his Guru cannot hope to attain any bliss. He must learn to serve the feet of one's master, who is the main instrument in attaining all the pleasures. Service of Guru is absolutely essential for acquiring knowledge. A student cannot acquire higher knowledge unless he approaches his Guru with humility. It is true that Guru's grace is the primary need in one's life. It is he who destroys our ignorance and initiates us in the path of Reality. It is only through such Guru that we experience the highest bliss in life and become free from the shackles of life and death.

The strength of body, the possession of worldly things like a house, wealth and all other things and even control of the mind are of no value and of no use without worship of the Guru. Guru is the Brahman, Vishnu and Mahesvara and whose propitiation would pave the way for complete happiness.

¹ GC, Ch, XVI.
That is why many devotees of this cult show their highest reverence to Guru Charitra and many read it daily and complete it in seven days (Saptah-Parayana). The devotees consider Guru Charitra like Veda, as it teaches Karma, Bhakti and Mokti.

Narasimha Saraswati always extended his sympathy to the downtrodden and degraded. He lived among the common people. It is said that he once went to the house of a poor Brahmana and demanded something to eat. But there was nothing in the house, except a she-buffalo that was not giving milk. Narasimha Saraswati was so pleased with the pure life and devotion of the poor Brahman that he is said to have made worthless she-buffalo yield milk. In another instance, he helped a poor family by directing its members to a place where a pot of money was hidden. It appears he did this because he liked their house and pious life. He always took care to see the real purpose behind an action and the right way of doing it. In every miracle performed by him we find some purpose. Through

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1 GC, Ch, XXII.
2 Ibid, Ch, XVIII.
his miracles, he not only attracted people to him, but also made them follow the proper path. In this way, Narasimha Saraswati was a boon to the people. From his life and work we can understand the social and religious conditions of the contemporary society, better than from any other contemporary person's life and work. He was a great leader of his time. That is why he dwells in the heart of all devotees to this day. This is the reason why more stress is laid on his social thoughts and work, although his religious and spiritual aspects were even greater. He said that mere literary knowledge and torturing of the body were of no use. During his tours he met many people and explained to them the meaning involved in the practice of the Vratas laid down in the scriptures. He also encouraged the performance of sacrificial ceremonies as a means to attain salvation.

During his stay in Ganagapur, many people suffering from leprosy and other diseases approached him. Among them, Narahari¹ and Nandi² were lepers.

¹ GC, Ch, XL.
² Ibid, Ch, XLIV.
During his stay in Vasara-Brameshwara, a Brahmana who suffered from an ulcer in his stomach tried to commit suicide. The Guru saved him from such action by telling him that he would prescribe medicine for his disease. He later asked the Brahmana to take as much food and sweets fried in ghee as he wanted, without fear. Usually patients suffering from stomach ulcer are forbidden to eat fried stuff. Surprisingly, the Brahmana got rid of his disease by eating fried food.

In another instance, the Guru is said to have cured his own sister Ratnai, who also suffered from leprosy. He directed her to take a dip in the tank Papavinashini-tirtha and to observe certain _Vratas_ regularly. When she performed all the _Vratas_ as directed by the Guru, she got rid of her disease within three days.

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1 _GC, Ch, XXII._
2 _Ibid, Ch, XLIX._
From these cases, it appears that Narasimha Saraswati must have possessed profound knowledge of Ayurveda and nature cure. Another point to be noted is that he laid emphasis on daily exercises, like watering the plants and other physical exercises, along with sincerity and faith so that the patient could concentrate on his work and forget other worries. He also laid stress on clean life and purity of mind and its concentration in the regular performance of Vratas, which would help in curing the disease.

We have reserved to the last the episode in which Narasimha Saraswati is said to have cured the reigning Sultan of Bidar of a skin disease.
After the death of Ahmad Shah in 1435 A.D., his son Ala-ud-Din II ascended the Bahmani throne. All the authorities on the Bahmanis agree that Ala-ud-Din II suffered much from a wound in his shin and died of it. But, according to the Guru Charitra, the Badashah of Bidar suffered from leucoderma.\(^1\) All the court physicians tried their best, but could not cure the disease. In the end, some Hindu Pandita advised the Sultan that his leucoderma could be cured only with the grace of a great saint like Narasimha Saraswati. Accordingly, the Badashah of Bidar arrived at Ganagapur and met him. When Narasimha Saraswati saw the Badashah of Bidar, he inquired about his health.\(^2\) At this, the Sultan is said to have been extremely agitated and at once recalled to his memory the incident of his previous birth when he was born. Thereafter, the Sultan showed reverence to the saint and told him his sufferings. Narasimha Saraswati asked the Sultan to show his wound, but when the Sultan tried to show it, there was no wound.\(^3\)

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1. GD, Ch, XXXXX. Guru Charitra and Muslim works agree at least on one point vis., that Ala-ud-Din II suffered from a wound.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.
It is said that Narasimha Saraswati was invited by the Sultan to visit Bidar, and did so. The Sultan is said to have arranged a great reception for Narasimha Saraswati, in spite of opposition from orthodox Muslims. This incident is not mentioned in any of the Muslim sources.¹

After returning to Ganagapur from Bidar, Narasimha Saraswati is believed to have expressed his desire to end his life, as he thought he fulfilled his life's mission. He, accordingly, proceeded to Srisaila and attained 'Nirvana' in 1380 Saka year, on a Friday, Bahu Dhanya Samvatasara.²

The age of Narasimha Saraswati proved to be a great epoch in the socio-religious history of medieval Deccan. If we forget the supernatural elements narrated in his biography, it appears that he played a key role in regenerating the Hindu culture and religion. He achieved great success in resurrecting Hinduism, in strengthening it by bringing about harmony among the various caste groups of the Deccan and taught them to live without fear under Muslim

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1. CC, Ch, L.
2. Ibid.
3. HMD, I, p. 212.
rule while at the same time, brings about reconciliation between the ruler and the ruled.

**The Virasaiva Sect**

A silent reform movement in the spheres of both religion and society was a marked feature of medieval Deccan. This revolution was brought about by a number of socio-religious reformers of Karnataka and Maharashtra. It may be traced back to 12th century Karnataka and is popularly known as the Virasaiva movement, which was parallel to the Warkari movement of Pandharpur. A galaxy of Virasaiva leaders, Basaveshwara and others, led this movement.

The aim of this movement was to remove the social stigma attached to the down-trodden and declare that man becomes great by virtue of his character and not by birth. These Virasaiva reformers did not believe in caste organization and its gradations. They advocated equality and liberty in all spheres, including the spiritual. The whole range of *Vachana* literature, from Basaveshwara to Sarvajna, reflects

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1. The literature of this movement is in *Vachana* form, or pithy statements in Kannada.
this religious and social thought. Probably, soon after Basava and his contemporaries, the movement slowed down, because of lack of leaders. But the foreign invasions of Karnataka and Maharashtra in the period from 1297 to 1328 A.D. seems to have revitalised this movement. "In its single-minded devotion to Siva, its fanatical intolerance of the followers of any other creed, whom it stigmatised as bhavis (infidels) and in its ideal of perfect equality among the bhaktas, the new Saivism was a worthy rival of Islam and the impetus it gave to politics had not a little to do with the failure of Tughluq rule to take root in many parts of the Deccan."  

In the 15th century, the Virasaiva activities gathered a new momentum. The Vijayanagara ruler, Devaraya II, evinced considerable interest in promoting the cause of the Virasaiva religion. Tontada Siddhalinga, Yogi of Kunigal, who flourished about 1470 A.D. was one of the chief spiritual figures in this movement. He spread the Virasaiva teachings in various places of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra. He established a number of Virasaiva mathas, which have continued to flourish to this day. He had also a large number of disciples of remarkable calibre who vigorously continued the work of spreading Virasaiva teachings at various places under the Bahmani rule.

2 EC, XII, Kunigal, situated in the Tumkur district, was a famous centre of Virasaiva religion under Vijayanagara. According to this inscription, Siddhalinga flourished about 1470 A.D.

He considers that Tontada Siddhalinga lived between 1450 and 1500 A.D.
From the contemporary literature, we learn that in addition to Tontada Siddhalinga Yati, a large number of Saiva and Virasaiva devotees made a great contribution to the further growth of the Virasaiva sect in the Deccan. Lakkanna Dandesa tells us in detail about them. He gives us information about their professions and the places where they flourished, whether it was Karnataka, Maharashtra or Andhra. They mostly came from the weaker sections of the society. Among them we have teachers, weavers, goldsmiths, jewellers, potters, stone-workers, petty businessmen, masons and skilled workers. It is worth noting that these Sivabhaktas, or Virasaivas, broke the caste barriers and distinctions of high and low. They lived a simple life themselves and engaged in one or the other economic activity.

Of the Saiva and Virasaiva followers mentioned by Lakkanna Dandesa, Soppeya Basava of Kolakur was one of the most prominent. We have selected him for our study at some length, as Lakkanna Dandesa is supported by contemporary inscriptional evidence and later writers. He played a significant role in spreading the Virasaiva teachings in the early part of the 15th century at Gulbarga and other places of Karnataka under the Bahmani rule.
With regard to the early career and other details of Soppeya Basava we have only a little information, and this is gathered from the following sources:

1. **Sivatatva Chintamani**, of Lakkanna Dandesa
2. **Channa Basava Purana**, of Virupaksha Pandita.
4. **Soppeya Basava Sangatva**, of Mallakavi.

Of these sources, **Sivatatva Chintamani** is the best, since the author, Lakkanna Dandesa, was a contemporary of Soppeya Basava. Virupaksha Pandita and Chikkananjesa flourished in the 16th century. Mallakavi is believed to have lived about 1700 A.D. at Kotnur in Gulbarga district.

Before we proceed to describe the life of Soppeya Basava, let us first establish his contemporaneity with the Bahmani Sultans.

1. Lakkanna Dandesa was the first to refer to Soppeya Basava in his work. The author was a commander of Devaraya II and flourished between 1405 A.D. and 1463 A.D. It is further said that he composed the **Sivatatva Chintamani** about 1450 A.D.\(^1\)

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Hence, Soppeya Basava was already well known before 1450 A.D. He must have been a contemporary of Firuz Shah Bahmani (1397-1422 A.D.) and Ahmad Shah (1422-1435 A.D.)

Firuz Shah ascended the throne in 1397 A.D. and ruled up to 1422 A.D., in which year he died. He founded the city called Firuzabad, on the bank of the Bhima, about 20 miles from Gulbarga. He used to reside in the newly built city, where Prince Hasan also lived. Kolkur the place of Soppeya Basava, is 4 miles away from Firuzabad.

Let us now discuss Soppeya Basava's life and work under the Bahmani rule.

Lakkanna Dandsa has not mentioned anything about the early life of Soppeya Basava. Kanchi appears to have been Soppeya Basava's birth-place. It is said that he later

   : Fisher Khan, "Firuzabad on the Bhima 
   IC, XXIX, Hyderabad, 1955, p.246.
3. Shivananda, V., Sagara Nadina Shivagharanaru, 
   Dharwar, 1957, p. 38.
moved to Kolkur and settled there. We get further details about Soppeya Basava and his activities, from Soppeya Basava Sangatya. We do not know when and how he became a disciple of Tontada Siddhalinga.

However, it is a fact that Soppeya Basava played a great role in maintaining the vitality of the Virasaiva religion in 15th century Deccan. This has been very well brought out by Chikkananjesha, in his Raghavanka Charita, which throws light on this aspect of Soppeya Basava's greatness. Chikkananjesha has paid a glowing tribute to Soppeya Basava in the verse mentioned below. From this we learn that Soppeya Basava was a disciple of Tontada Siddhalinga.1

'Soppeya Basava Sangatya' mentions that Soppeya Basava

toured a number of places, like Mirajiya Desha,¹ Kambatpura, Konkana Desha,² etc., and came to 'Komaleya Pattana'³ to settle there.

Lakkanna Dondesa has referred to Soppeya Basava, while describing the activities of 'Nutana Gangalu' in the 90th chapter.⁴ From this verse we learn that Soppeya Basava lived at Kolkur. He had earned a name as a great performer of miracles, ("Karunika"). He lived by selling fodder. People were very much impressed by his spiritual activities.

'Suritana' — the Sultan, have heard much about the spiritual powers of Soppeya Basava inquired about him, and Soppeya Basava went to meet the Sultan.

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Suritana, Sultan, have heard several praises of Soppeya Basava.

Soppeya Basava went to meet the Sultan.
Lakkanna Dandesa further mentions that the Sultan, after hearing of him from his courtiers and people, decided to examine the truth about his greatness and hence called Soppeya Basava to him. From this we learn that the Sultan desired to test Soppeya Basava's worth and so instructed his soldiers to burn him alive, placing him under fodder in the Siva temple. But Soppeya Basava had a miraculous escape.

Lakkanna Dandesa proceeds to write that the Sultan heard about the miraculous escape and went to his shop to greet him.

1. STC, ch. 38, v - 168.

2. Lakkanna Dandesa writes that the moment the men of 'Suritana' put fire to the fodder in the temple, Soppeya Basava miraculously escaped and found himself in his fodder shop as usual.

This episode has also been narrated by Virupaksha Pandita in his "Channa Basava Purana". From this it is clear that the Virupaksha Pandit's narration is based on the account given by Lakkanna Dandesa.

However, this incident is somewhat differently described in "Soppeya Basava Sangatya", according to which the Sultan asked Soppeya Basava to eat fodder like a bull - 'Basava' - and placed him in a house with only fodder.


Later, the Sultan found Soppeya Basava eating fodder. Hence, the Sultan honoured him by placing him on an elephant and took him in a great procession through the streets.

We cannot agree with the account given in Soppeya Basava Sangatva, because it is a later work and the details too are incredible. What Lakkanna Dandesa and Virupakesha Pandita have written appears to be correct, and the account is credible. Soppeya Basava may have had foreknowledge of the Sultan's intention of burning him in his shop and therefore, might have escaped from the shop in good time and his followers may have considered it a miracle.

Other Virasaiva Saints

Besides Soppeya Basava, Lakkanna Dandesa tells of some miracles said to have been performed by several Saiva and devotees. Virasaiva/Satras. They are not mere stories of miracles. They point out how these saints had unflinching faith in God, and describe the contemporary religious atmosphere in the Deccan during this period. Here are some examples.

In Villur, near Srisailam, the Dhupagantala Virabhadra temple was famous. One day, a snake entered the temple and
embraced Virabhadra's idol. The priest, who saw the snake, threw a stone at it, but the stone hit the nose of Virabhadra idol and damaged it. There were five devotees of Virabhadra, viz., Mallisetti's son, Hiriya Mallayya, Viruppa, Timmaya, who lived by selling gold, Timmanna, who was a glass maker and Choudappa, a weaver. Once these five devotees came to the temple of Virabhadra and observed that the nose of the idol of Virabhadra had been damaged. They were shocked at the sight and pledged that Virabhadra must get its nose back immediately, if not, they would sacrifice their lives. They sat in the temple determined to repair the damage to the deity. In the meantime, the nose is said to have appeared on the idol.

Another follower of Virasaiva religion was Basavanna, who lived in Pattesvara. He is said to have performed an amazing miracle. He took his two sons to the Viresvara temple and cut their necks. Again he is said to have brought back to his sons. Bhandari Somanna, of Rajmahendri, was a very famous Sivabhakta. It is said that, once, the brahmins ridiculed him, and as a result the locality of the brahmins

1. STC, Ch, 38.
2. Ibid,
3. Ibid.
caught fire. Then the king called on all the brahmans to bow to Somanna, who, although a brahmin, declared that the real brahmin was a Sivabhakta and not one born as a brahmin.

Vekkalur's Nuliya Kallappa,¹ was a great Siva Bhakta, who lived by selling ropes. He used to feed jangamas daily. He is said to have performed a miracle. Once he went to bring ropes, along with his son. There, in the field, his son died because of a snake-bite. After selling the ropes, Kallappa brought foodstuff and offered it to jangamas (priests). The holy food (prasada) was given to his deceased son, who at once got up as if he had been fast asleep. In another instance, he declared that he would go to Kailasa on a Monday. He invited all jangamas and fed them. They all waited for that auspicious day to see how Kallappa would go to Kailasa. On the auspicious day, a plane (Pushnak) came to Kallappa and he sat in it and went to Kailasa. He passed away as he had predicted.

In Manur, there lived a clever poet, Ekobavu² (Ekobahu). He wielded a great amount of influence on the

1. STC, Ch. 38.
2. Ibid.
people. He is said to have brought life back to a dead horse. His spiritual activities were heard of by (Suritana) (probably Firuz Shah), who brought his deceased son to Ekobavu and requested him to bring back his son to life. Ekobavu is said to have obliged the Suritana by bringing life to his son. In another instance, Ekobavu is believed to have brought back to life a person bitten by a snake.

The Sultan invited the saint to come to his capital. But Ekobavu refused to meet Suritana. Hence, Suritana got wild and asked his soldiers to put fire to his residence. But the fire did not affect Ekobavu and his residence. Suritana, after realising Ekobavu's worth rushed to his darshan.

In Kariyede, near Udayagiri, there was a devotee called Mummadi.1 When a jangama (priest) visited his house, he treated him hospitably and presented him with a cloth. The priest said he did not want the cloth. He wanted instead, a part of the saree which Mummadi's wife was wearing. Mummadi tore his wife's saree and gave the priest a part of it. When the jangama was walking in the street with the torn part of the saree in his hand,
he was stopped by one Addiperma, who said that the Devagiri saree which the priest was carrying belonged to his wife and he had kept it as a mortgage with Mummadi. Then he borrowed money from another person and went to Mummadi and asked him to take the principal and the interest and give him back his wife's saree. Mummadi said he would himself give his debt or the cost of the saree. But the debtor said no, he wanted the saree and nothing else. Mummadi's wife sprinkled the Padodaka of the priest on the torn saree and the original saree came back complete as before.

In addition, Lakkanna Dandesa refers to a good number of Saivas and Virasaivas along with their names, places and where they flourished/the crafts they followed. This fact stands testimony to the popularity of the Siva cult in the Deccan during this period under study. We give below in an appendix in tabular form the name of the saint, his place, craft and rest of the information, if any, under the remarks column. They are further classified as belonging to Andhra and Karnataka parts of the Bahmani kingdom. From Maharashtra and Goa, we have only one example each.

We have already seen how Amir Khusrau praised Devagiri cloth see p. 122-3. We see in this story that it was famous in the east coast also.

1 STC, Ch. 38.