INTRODUCTION

The present investigation is a part of a larger plan of investigations into the religious life of Hindus. In a number of Surveys done in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Poona, material about people's belief was gathered over years. Some of it was published in short tables in other contexts while other material still remains to be utilized. Two research students of this Department are also simultaneously studying religious beliefs of highly educated men and educated women in the city of Poona.

This work is a description and a short analysis of religious life as reflected in one of the most famous temple towns of Maharashtra namely - Pandharpur. The data for this Thesis was collected in the town of Pandharpur and in the various libraries in Poona. The chapters contain historical material and the present day religious practices. The Thesis to which attention is drawn and which shaped itself during the work is that the religious life of Hindus demonstrates the same structural principles which underlie the other Hindu social institutions like the caste and the village.

+ 1)"The Social Dynamics of a Growing Town and Its Surrounding area" by Dr. Mrs. I. Karve and J. S. Randive, Published by Director D.C.P.R.I. in B.C. & S.M. Series: 29, 1965.

++ Mr. V.G. Pundlik - Religion in the life of College Teachers.
Mrs. S. Kirtane - Religious Beliefs among Educated Women.
The author was interested in finding out the organisation of Priesthood of one temple town in Maharashtra. For this purpose Pandharapur was selected because as the seat of the deity Vitthal and the centre of the Varkari sect it has a unique place in the religious life of Maharashtra.

The relations of different types of Priests, the relation of the priest to the deity, and the relationship of the priests with the devotees are analysed in the present study. Special attention is also drawn to social communications of such a centre. The first four chapters are divided into sub-sections. The table of contents will make this division clear. The plates inserted in this Thesis will illustrate some of the points raised in the thesis and give a general view of the temple town Pandharapur.