

TALES OF THE SAINTS OF PANDHARPUR

BY

C. A. KINCAID, C.V.O.

Author of "A History of the Maratha People", "Ishtur Phakde",
"The Indian Heroes", "Tales from the Indian Epics", "The Tale
of the Tulsi Plant", "Deccan Nursery Tales", etc., etc.

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To
My friend MR. W. C. SHEPHERD, I.C.S.
in memory
of twenty-five years' unbroken and greatly valued
friendship.

INTRODUCTION

As the following tales have all been translated from the *Bhaktivijaya* (Victory of devotion) of Mahipati, a sketch of that admirable poet's life will not be out of place, especially as it resembles in many particulars the life of one of his own saints.

Mahipati was the son of Dadopant a Rigvedi Deshastha Brahman, who was the hereditary kulkarni of Tarabad in the Ahmadnagar district. Dadopant was an ardent worshipper of Vithoba of Pandharpur. Yet in spite of many pilgrimages to the shrine of Vithoba, Dadopant and his wife remained childless. It was not until Dadopant was nearly sixty years of age that he became a father. The story runs that once when Dadopant had gone to Pandharpur on one of his pilgrimages, the god Vithoba appeared to him in a dream. The god put into his worshipper's hands a ball of sweetmeats and bade him give it to his wife. When Dadopant awoke, he found the ball of sweetmeats still in his hand. Dadopant carried the ball of sweetmeats home and gave it to his wife; in less than a year she gave birth to a son (A.D. 1715). The parents of the little boy called him Mahipati.

From his earliest childhood Mahipati shewed signs of a religious temperament; and he was only five years old when he begged leave from his father to join a company of pilgrims and go with them to Pandharpur. From that time to his father's death, which occurred when he was only sixteen, Mahipati made a yearly pilgrimage to the great shrine. Upon his father's death he became in his place kulkarni of Tarabad. Not long afterwards he resigned Government service, because the Musulman jaghirdar under whom he was employed tried to force him to work, when he (Mahipati) wanted to say his prayers. Not only did he resign the kulkarniship, but he took a vow that not only he but his descendants would never take a post under Government again—a vow which, so it is said, his descendants still scrupulously observe.

After resigning the kulkarniship, Mahipati devoted himself more than ever to the worship of Vithoba. One night his devotion was rewarded. The poet saint Tukaram appeared to him in a dream and bade him write the lives of the Deccan saints. In obedience to Tukaram's command Mahipati

began the Bhaktivijaya, finishing it in A.D. 1762 or 1763. The Bhaktivijaya is Mahipati's principal work. But he also wrote the Katha Saramrit, the Santlilamrit, the Bhaktlilamrit and the unfinished Santvijaya.

Mahipati was a contemporary of Moropant the greatest of all the Maratha poets and won the latter's profound admiration. Indeed had Mahipati used a linguistic medium more widely known than Marathi, he would have ranked high among the world's poets. Even a foreigner can appreciate the easy flow of his stanzas, his musical rhymes and above all his unrivalled imagery. Mahipati died in 1790 A.D., leaving two sons, Vithoba and Narayanboa. Vithoba became a musician of some note at the court of Bajirao the Second and was the lifelong friend of Moropant.

The saints of whom Mahipati wrote not only moulded the religious thought of the Maratha people, but, as Ranade pointed out, they also prepared the way for the coming of Shivaji. In our History of the Maratha People, we have adopted Ranade's view.¹ Readers of the History may therefore like to know more of the saints and of the miracles which, according to popular tradition, they wrought.

In my translation I have adhered as closely as I could to the original; but in many places I have been forced to cut out imagery which, suitable enough in poetry, would seem wearisome and exaggerated in prose. Even as it is, some of my readers may perhaps complain that I have retained too many of the poet's similes. My reply is that I felt bound as translator to retain as much of the original as I could.

In conclusion I have to thank my friend Mr. Dyagude, Chief Karbhari of the Bhor State, for introducing me to Mahipati's work and for reading part of it with me. My thanks are also due to Mr. Mahableshwarkar of the Bombay Educational Service for obtaining for me particulars of Mahipati's life.

C. A. K.

1. History of the Maratha People, by Kincaid and Parasnis, Oxford University Press.

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