CHAPTER - III

	FAIRS	AND FESTIVALS IN PANDHARPUR
 • • • •		
3.1		Introduction
3.2		Important fairs
	3.2.1	Introduction
	3.2.2	Ashadhi and Kartiki fairs
	3.2.3	Maghi and Chaitri fairs
	3.2.4	Makar Sankrati fairs
	3.2.5	Adhiki fair
3.3		Palkhi procession
	3.3.1	Introduction
	3.3.2	Dnyaneshwar palkhi procession
	3.3.3	Organization of procession
	3.3.4	Organization of Dindis
	3.3.5	Route of palkhi
	3.3.6	Daily routine of the procession
3.4		Festivals
	3.4.1	Introduction

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References

3.1 INTRODUCTION :

India is a land of religion. The major five religions of the world, Hindu, Buddhism, Islam, Jain and Christian are found here. Each religion has its own fairs and festivals and traditionally celebrated according to their own way. These fairs and festivals play an important role in the religious, social and cultural life of the nation. Generally, the festivals are accompained by fairs in India. It is interesting that there is hardly a day in a year which is not a festival day of one religion or the other. Celebrations also extend to weeks and even months. Besides, these fairs and festivals of national importance, different states and regions have their own fairs and festivals. In Maharashtra, village level fairs are found more in the off seasons. The villagers are free from all there agricultural work. Especially these fairs are related to God or Goddess of the village. These fairs vary from a little gathering hardly known outside the village to a huge gathering of some lakhs including representatives of the distant parts of country.

The people of the village and surrounding villages pray to the God for the betterment and long life. They believe that the God protects them. Therefore, the fairs and festivals have got importance especially in the rural India.

Fairs and festivals are held in certain places of various regions which have interest, mostly for regional people. Certain

other festivals and fairs, though may be regional, have an all India importance and are attended by people coming from all over the India.

Fairs involve participation of the people of entire cultural zone, whereas the festivals are more personal or at best comprise a community. The religious element is predominant both in fairs and festivals. The cycle of changing seasons and the consequent shift in the economic activities of the people, their scale of cultural values, their myths and legends provide the framework of both these groups of social phenomena (Census of India, 1981).

The fairs usually serve many purposes. They are primarily religious gathering of persons belonging not to one particular religion. The religion and religious worship then ruled the minds of the people to a greater extent. The local and regional importance attracts a large number of people to express reverence to the deity.

The fairs have also economic importance. Most of the fairs are attended by the agents of many traders. Some of them are from leading firms in distant towns. They bring to the market various indigenous articles produced by the villagers. The articles are mostly cloth, household utensils, pots, toys, minor articles, cheap jewellery articles for religious worship, livestock and articles of religious significance i.e. a rosary of beads, holybooks, images of gods, idols etc.

In this way the fairs have cultural, religious, social and economic values. But in recent times, fairs are losing their importance due to the commercial attitude, setting up of immarkets at important places, and by growth of trade and commerce. In this context the fairs held in Pandharpur have cultural, religious, social and economic importance. But the religious and cultural aspects of the fairs still remain intact.

3.2 IMPORTANT FAIRS :

3.2.1 Introduction :

Important fairs are held in Pandharpur at the time of Ashadhi Ekadashi, Kartika Ekadashi, Maghi Ekadashi, Chaitra Ekadashi, the Adhik month and Makar Sankranti (Table 3.1).

Every eleventh day in the dark as well as bright half of a month is known as Ekadashi and devout Hindus are on fast on this day (in propitiation of God). Ekadashis of the bright halves of Ashadha and Kartika months are considered the more important and attended by many people. God Vishnu who is specially venerated on Ekadashi day is supposed to start his four months long sleep on the Ashadhi Ekadashi and is known as Shayani (Sleeping) Ekadashi. The Ekadashi in the bright half of the Kartika when he is supposed to wake up at the conclusion of Chaturmasa (four months) being known as Probodhini Ekadashi. The period between these two Ekadashis is enjoyed by many people as Chaturmasa (four month period) in which many devout people arrange recitations. In these four

months, certain food articles such as onions, garlic, brinjals etc. are avoided. Lord Vitthal the God of Pandharpur is the incarnation of Vishnu, so Ekadashi has special importance to the devotees of god Vitthal.

Sr. No.	Name of the fair	Duration of fair	MONTRA	Attendance by people (in lakhs)
1	Ashadhi fair	10 days	June-July (Ashadh)	9
2	Kartiki fair	5 days	OctNov. (Kartika)	2.75
3	Maghi fair	3 days	JanFeb. (Magh)	2
4	Chitri fair	3 days	MarApr. (Chaitra)	2
5	Monthly fair (eight monthly fairs in year)	3 days each	Every 11th day of bri- ht half of each month	4
6	Adhiki fair	30 days	After every 3 years (Adhik mass	
7	Makar Sankranti	3 days	14th Januar	y 1.5
8	Monthly fairs (12 monthly fairs in a year)	3 days each	Every 11th day of dark half of eac month	

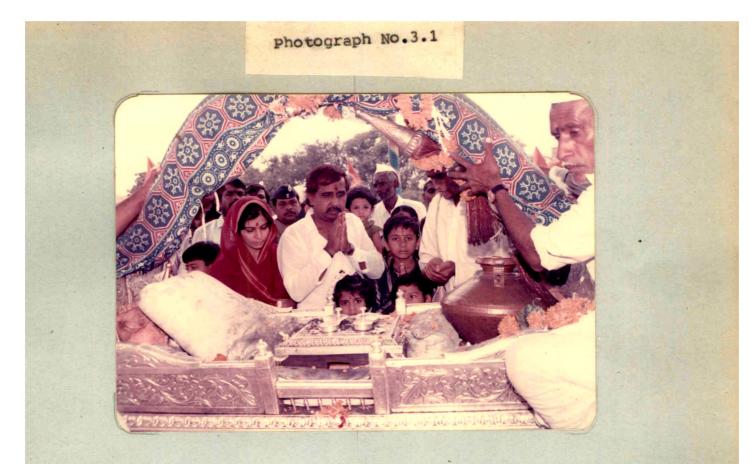
TABLE 3.1 : Important fairs in Pandharpur.

SOURCE : Pandharpur Devasthan Committee.

3.2.2 Ashadhi and Kartiki fairs :

The important fairs in Pandharpur are Ashadhi and Kartiki. It is said that Ashadhi fair was started first and then followed by the fair in Kartika. The remaining fairs were started subsequently. It is also said that the Ashadhi fair was started before the birth of Saint Dnyaneshwar, the follower of Varkari Panth. The pilgrimage in Ashadha is the piligrimage of Varkari panth. It is a very pecular aspect of varkari panth where all the members of the panth, the living as well as the dead gathere at the feet of Lord Vitthal. The saints used to go on pilgrimage with the group of their disciples. It is believed that after his death a saint does not cease to take part in the pilgrimage. Therefore, his disciples carry his palkhi with them to Pandharpur which is called as Palkhi procession. So during this fair palkhis of different saints are carried to Pandharpur from their respective places. About 108 palkhis are taking part in procession with these palkis lakhs of people travel to Pandharpur. The palkhi contains the padukas (foot prints) of a holy man (Photograph No.3.1). They carry the devotee to his beloved God. These padukas are the symbols of the presence of the great saints of the past among the community of the varkaris, whom they still guide through their writings. Nearly 9 lakhs of pilgrims visit the Pandharpur every year (Table 3.1).

The Kartika fair is held in the month of Kartika on



Photograph No.3.2



(October-November) the eleventh day of the bright half of Kartika. At this time there is no palkhi procession. People use to go for darshan of Lord Vitthal. The routine of pilgrims at Kartiki Ekadashi is as Ashadhi Ekadashi. At that time more than 2 lakh pilgrims visit the place.

For the Ashadhi and Kartiki fairs the pilgrims reach the holy town on the 9th day and stay there up to the fullmoon day. The important days are Dashmi (10th day) in the bright half of Ashadha and Kartika), Ekadashi (11th day) and Dwadashi (12th day). On the ekadashi day they observe fast. They take bath in the holy water of the river Chandrabhaga, make obsequies to the deity Vitthal and Rukhmini. They also make holy round and take darshan of saints and temples in the city. In the night they attend Kirtans, Bhajans etc. The next day they offer meals to the deity before taking their meals and then leave the holy place. Some of them, stay at Pandharpur upto fullmoon day and attend the 'Kala Festival' at Gopalpur. The next day, if possible, they also attend the 'Kala Festival' in the temple of 'Lord Vitthal' which is called as 'Namdeo Kala'. During these fairs the main attraction is of the sarkari (government) Mahapuja. A government official, usually a Collector or a Deputy Collector performs the worship on behalf of the government.

3.2.3 Maghi and Chaitri fairs :

The fairs held in the month of Magha (11th day in the bright half of Magha) and Chaitra (11th day in the bright half

of Chaitra) are attended by about two lakh pilgrims. The duration of these fairs is of three days (Table 3.1). The important days are Dashmi, Ekadashi and Dwadashi. They arrive Pandharpur on Dashmi, on Ekadashi they take ablution in the holy water of the river Chandrabhaga, make obsequies to the deity Lord Vitthal and Rukhmini. They also make holy round and take darshan of saints and temples in the city. In the night they attains kirtans, bhajans etc. On Dwadashi they offer meals to the deity before taking meals and then leave the holy place.

At every Ekadashi (11th day of the bright as well dark halves of each month) nearly 50,000 pilgrims visit the Pandharpur.

3.2.4 Makar Sankrati fair :

The most important festival celebrated in Pandharpur is Makar Sankranti. It takes place on the day which is the beginning of Utharayana. On the occasion of Makar Sankranti bathing in holy rivers is obligatary. Bathing in holy Chandrabhaga is considered highly sacred. Nearly 1.5 lakh pilgrims visit Pandharpur at this day. Pilgrims mostly consist of women (Table 3.1).

3.2.5 Adhiki fair :

After every three years the Adhik mass comes in Marathi calender. On this occasion a big fair is held in Pandharpur throughout the month. Everyday 30,000 pilgrims visit Pandharpur. Totally 9 lakh pilgrims visit the town in the month of Adhik Mass.

3.3 PALKHI PROCESSION :

3.3.1 Introduction :

Ashadhi, the principal fair, during which palkhis of different saints are carried to Pandharpur from their respective places. Most of the varkaris accompany the palkhi procession. Table 3.2 shows some of the important palkhis arrived to Pandharpur.

Most of the palkhis have been coming since the last fifty years. The most important as well as the oldest of these palkhis is the palkhi of Dnyaneshwar which comes from Alandi near Poona.

All these palkhis come to a village named as Wakhari which is about 5 kilometers away from Pandharpur, before the evening of the 9th day of the bright half of Ashadha (Navami). In the evening the foot prints of the saints are worshipped at Wakhari by performing Mahapuja. On Dashmi the Palkhi of Saint Namdeo starts from Pandharpur and joins the other palkhis at Wakhari. Then the Palkhi procession starts from Wakhari to Pandharpur at about 10.00 am. on dashmi day and reach a place called 'Visawa'. A huge procession then starts from the Visawa to Pandharpur at about 4 p.m. The procession is accompained by lakhs of men and women singing bhajans with drums (Mridang), veena (a stringed instrument) and cymbals. All the palkhis in procession make a holy round of the temple. On Ekadashi day

Sr. No.	Nam	e of the Palkhi	Starting point (place of origin)	District
1	Saint	Dnyaneshwar	Alandi	Poona
2	Ħ	Tukaram	Dehu	Poona
3	**	Sopankaka	Saswad	Poona
4	**	Laksminarayana	Saswad	Poona
5	**	Nivrithinath	Trimbakeshwar	Nasik
6	**	Muktabai	Edlabed	Talgaon
7	¥\$	Muktabai	Ram	Talgaon
8	**	Muktabal	Mehun	Talgaon
9	\$9	Eknath	Paithan	Aurangabad
10	\$4	Janardhan Swami	Daulatabad	Aurangabad
11	**	Nilobarai	Pimpalner	Ahmednagar
12	#	Limbaraji Maharaj	Daithan	Ahmednagar
13	\$\$	Ramdas Swami	Sajjangad	Satara
14	81	Sekuji Bova	Sirswadi	Satara
15	41	Tukaram Maharaj	Terpute	Satara
16	88	Jayaram Swami	Vadygon	Satara
17	ti	Ghadge Bova	Kale	Satara
18	11	Gorakhnath	Sirale	Satara
19	67	Macchindranath	Macchindranath	Satara
20		Rukhmini	Kondanpur	Amravati
21	и	Sankara Maharaj	Mahuli	Amravati
22	it it	Ses Narayana	Amravati	Amravati
23	48	Narsimha Sarasvati	Mehakar	Buldhana
24	88	Svarupananda	Dhamengaon	Buldhana
25	н	Gajanan Maharaj	Shegaon	Buldhana
26	Shri	Bhuteswar	Nagpur	Nagpur
27	Saint	Janoba	Tuljapur	Osmanabad
28	**	Purnananda Maharaj	Bhognul	Belgaon
29	** •	Balbhima Maharaj	Sude	Solapur
30	*	Damaji Maharaj	Mangalvedha	Solapur

TABLE 3.2 : Important palkhi processions to Pandharpur.

and after the completion of government puja (Sarkari puja) which is performed between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. the pilgrims are allowed to take the darshan of the deities. At 12 noon a procession of the chariot of God Vitthal and Goddess Rukhmini and Rahi starts.

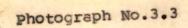
3.3.2 Dnyaneshwar Palkhi procession :

The palkhi of Dnyaneshwar starts from the village Alandi near Poona (Photograph No.3.2). It travels by a way which never alters. The distance is about 230 kilometer. Alandi is the place where Dnyaneshwar took his Samadhi. It is also a place where from Dnyaneshwar used to go to Pandharpur for pilgrimage. After his samadhi his disciples have been carrying his padukas in palkhi to Pandharpur.

3.3.3 Organization of procession :

Dnyaneshwar palkhi is not an indiscriminate mass of pilgrims gathered around a palkhi. It has a definite organization. The procession is divided into several groups called as Dindis. There are 27 dindis before the palkhi and 85 dindis after the palkhi.

On the road, the procession proceeds in a specific order. First comes a man with Red Horse holding a long pennon in hand (Photograph No.3.3). Next to it there is a White Horse (Photograph No.3.4). Both these horses are sacred and people come to have a darsan of them. Behind the horses come some of the dindis with their Ocher, coloured banners floating in the air and cart carrying the palkhi and the rest of dindis (Photograph No.3.5).





Red Horse

photograph No.3.4



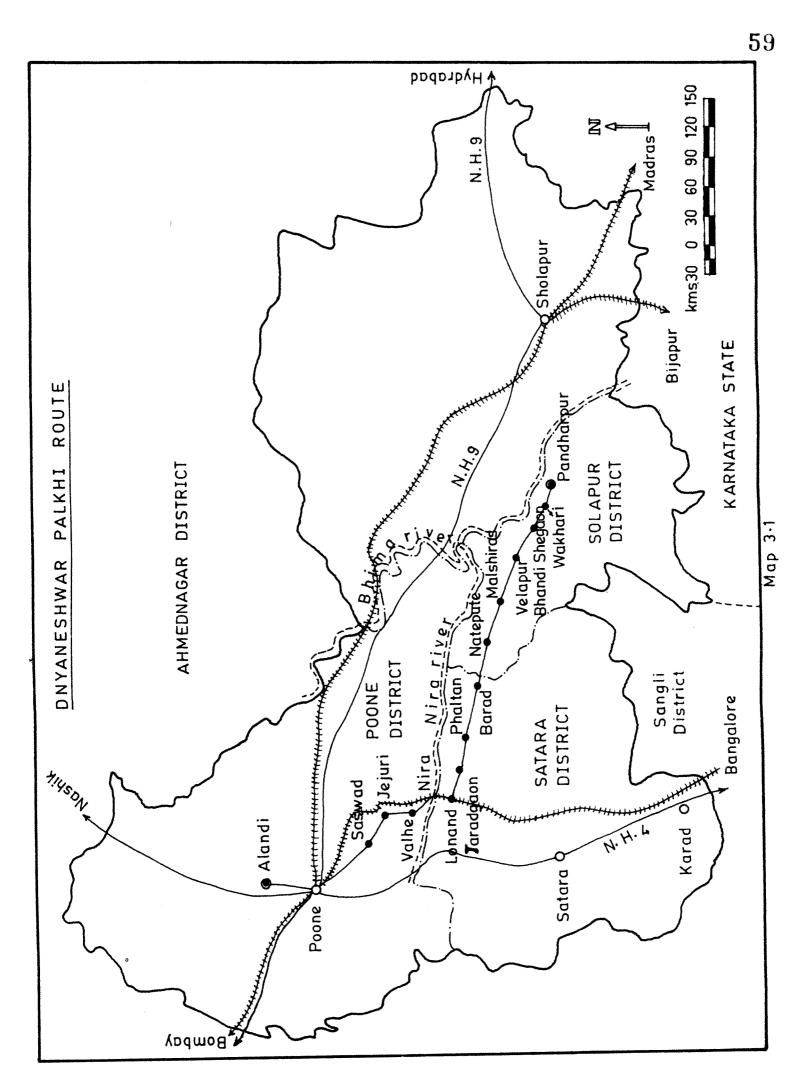
White Horse

3.3.4 Organization of Dindi :

There is an organization within each dindi. Each dindi consists of 100 to 1000 members. A dindi is a group of disciples gathered round their 'Guru'. Each dindi has its fixed place in the procession. The leader of the dindi is the vine bearer. Near the vine bearer there is a drummer playing mrudanga. All other dindi members accompany them by beating the small brass cymbals called as 'Tal' and singing the bhajans. Behind the men there comes the womenfolk of the dindi. Some of the women carry on their head a small brass flower pot with a Tulsi plant (sacred Basil) (Photograph No.3.6). Every pilgrim wears a rosary of Tulsi beads round his neck and many carry with them the ochercoloured banners. Sometimes the banner is folded, sometimes flying in the air. Each dindi makes its separate arrangement for the transport of the luggage of its members, either by lorries or by bullock carts.

3.3.5 Route of Palkhi :

From Alandi to Pandharpur there is a fixed time table. From Alandi the procession starts on Jyesth Sudha Sapatami. One day the procession stays in Alandi itself. It starts towards Pandharpur on Ashtami. The procession must reach Wakhari on Ashadha Sudha Navami, and Pandharpur on Dashmi (10th day). Twenty three days are required to reach the procession to Pandharpur. On their way the procession makes hault at Poona, Saswad.



photograph No.3.5



The Dindi

Photograph No.3.6



Women in Dindi carring sacred tulsi (Basil) plant Jejuri, Valhe, Lonand, Taradgaon, Phalthan, Barad, Natepute, Malshiras, Velapure, Bhandi-Shegaon and at Wakhari. Finally, it reaches Pandharpur (Table 3.3).

The procession crosses many towns, where new pilgrims join it. At first it reaches Poona. The procession stops there for two days. From Poona the procession moves towards south and climbs the 'Dive Ghat' before reaching the old historic city of Saswad, where Sopandeo, the brother of Dnyaneshwar took his Samadhi. There the procession stays for two days. Majority of the pilgrims join the procession at Saswad. From Saswad the road goes down a valley and on the 6th day the procession reaches Jejuri which is famous for God Khandoba. The palkhi stays there for a day and then at Valhe the procession stops for one day. After crossing the Nira river the procession stops at Lonand and stays there for two days. At Lonand many people arrive from Poona by bus or train to join the procession. At Poona, Saswad and Lonand the procession stays for two days, because it enables the people to join the procession. From Lonand to Pandharpur, the road follows a fixed direction east-south-east. It crosses many villages and small towns. It stays one day at Taradgaon, Phaltan, Barad, Nutepute, Malshiras, Velapur, Bhandi-Shegaon, Wakhari and finally it reaches Pandharpur (Map 3.1).

TABLE 3.3 : Dnyaneshwar Palkhi Procession.

Sr. No.	Starting point and day	Haulting place	No. of days hault at each place	District
	Alandi - Jyaishtha Sudha Sapatami	Alandi	1	Poona
2	Alandi - Astami - Navami	Poona "		Poona "
e	Poon a - Deshami (Ekađashi anđ Dwađashi)	Saswad	8	Poona
4	Saswad - Trayodishi	Jejuri	7	Poona
ŝ	Jejuri - Chaturthi	Walhe	-1	Poona
Q	Walhe - Amavasya (Pratipada and Dwitiya)	Lonand	0	Satara
2	Lonand - Tritiya	Taradgaon	-4	Satara
8	Teidgaon - Tritiya	Phaltan	F	Satera
9	Phaltan - Chaturthi	Barad	1	Satara
10	Barad - Panchmi	Natepute	••••	Solapur
11	Natepute - Shasti	Malshiras	•••	Solepur
12	Melshiras - Sætæmi	Velapur	. 1	Solepur
13	Velapur - Ashtami	Bhandi-Shegaon	**4	Solepur
14	Bhandl-Shegaon - Navami	Wakhari	F -4	Solapur
ur T	Wathard _ Dachmid		•	•

61

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3.3.6 Daily routine of the procession :

The palkhi starts usually at 6.30 in the morning (Photograph No.3.7). After one or two hours on the road the procession stops for the first hault. Usually the haulting place is chosen near the river on the way. The villagers from the neighbourhood come to have darshan of the padukas and of the holy horses. The pilgrims are engaged in the preparation of their lunch.

when the lunch is over the signal for departure is given and the procession reforms in the same order as before. The singing goes on as in the morning. There is a short break at about four O-clock in the afternoon. The procession reaches for the night haulting place in the evening and sometimes at night. At the haulting place the whole crowd sing together and all the cymbals and drum beat, a rythem go at quicker and quicker pace. The macebearer then asks for silence and a short arati is performed in front of the padukas (Photograph No.3.8). Then the pilgrims go to their designated places of hault.

Every night, each dindi arranges bhajans and kirtans in front of the palkhis which are attended by some pilgrims and the crowd of the village (Photograph No.3.9).

In any circumstances, the procession must reach Wakhari at Navami day so as to enter Pandharpur on the eve of the Ashadhi Ekadashi day. Though, the pilgrimage takes place at the beginning of the rainy season inspite of heavy rains the palkhi usually does photograph No.3.7



Starting of palkhi procession

not stop and reaches the destination Wakhari, where all the palkhis meet on Navami day.

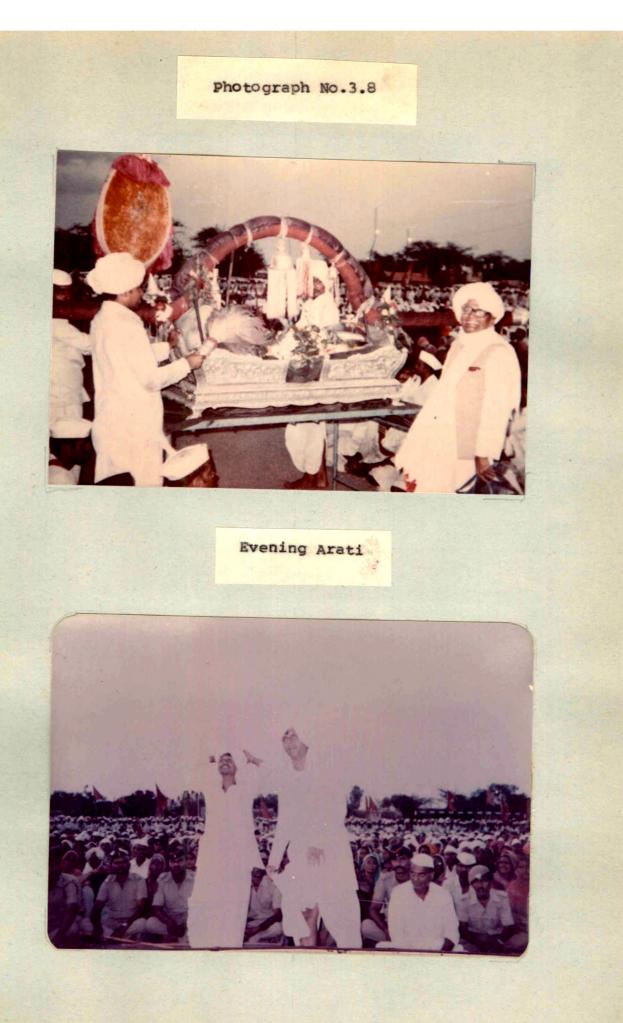
Palkhis start for Pandharpur from Wakhari on Dashmi day. Newly emerged palkhis lead the procession, while the more ancient palkhi of Dnyaneshwar is at the end. Lakhs of people accompany the procession from Wakhari to Pandharpur. At Pandharpur each palkhi has its fixed place to stay. They reach their respective places after Nagar-Pradakshna, and the pilgrimage is over.

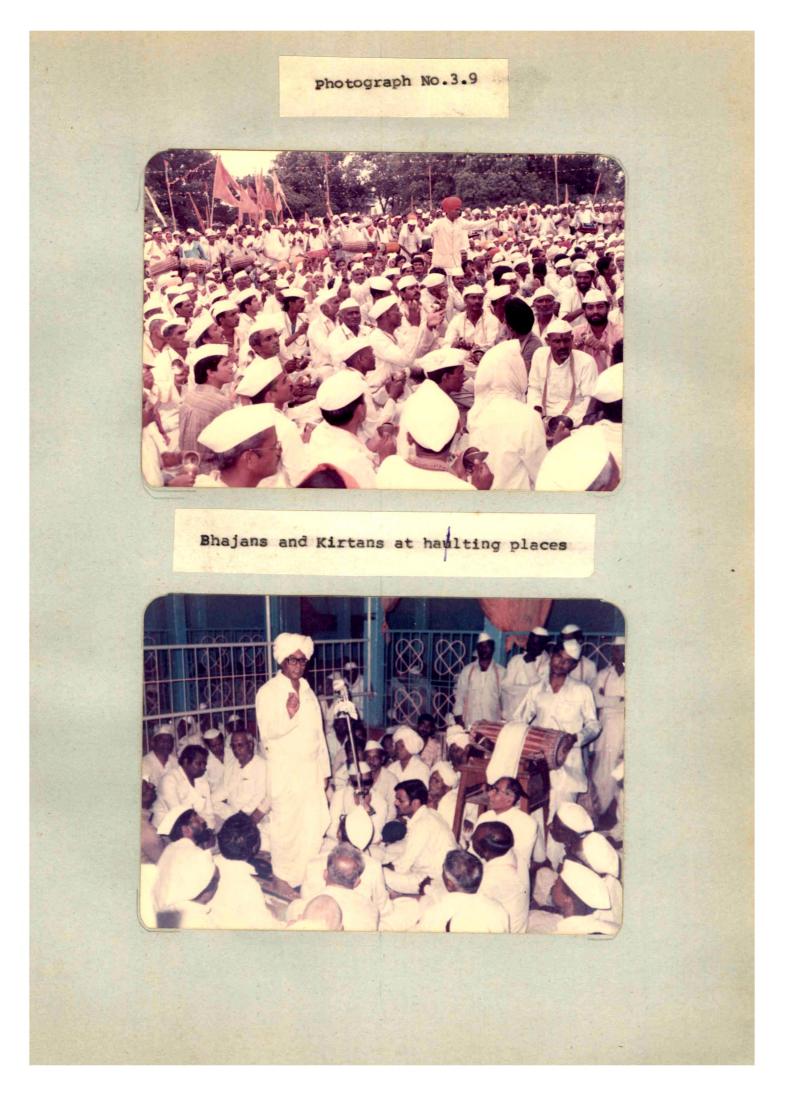
The pilgrims then individually perform the various rites and try to get darshan of Lord Vitthal. They usually stay in Pandharpur until the 'Paurnima Day'. On that day Kala festival is performed in the Gopal-Krishna temple at Gopalpur and also on the next day in the temple of Vitthal named as Namdeo K_ala. Only a few varkaris who are specially associated with the palkhi carry the palkhi back to Alandi.

3.4 FESTIVALS :

3.4.1 Introduction :

The Hindus are profoundly religious people. Therefore, all Hindu festivals have a deep spiritual importance. All great Hindu festivals have religious, social and hygenic value. Festivals mitigate the regour and monotany of life. People tired of hard work and routine need, some relaxation. Thus, they promote a common cause and develop social solidarity, fellow feeling and





mutual co-operation. They also install self-discipline and emphasise the spiritual value of man's existence besides providing them means of enjoyment and recreation.

All Hindu festivals are generally associated with legends of Gods and saints and are intended to inspire faith in virtuous life. Thus, these festivals have a religious value. The origin of festivals is no doubt lost in antiquity, but the religious importance has been given to each festival by having suitable anecdotes handed downfrom generation to generation.

In these festivals regional variations can be found. They are associated with seasonal phases of moon, the movement of planets and heavenly constellations, agricultural operations, birth of divinities and prohets; coming of new year, with reference to historical events, birth days of heroes and coronation of famous rulers. Generally, the festivals are common to all parts of India. The mode of celebration may, however, vary from state to state and from village to village. There are also festivals which are purely regional like Onam and Pongal or Sectarian, while others are observed by all castes and religious.

The festivals can be grouped in National Festivals and Local Festivals. The national festivals are celebrated all over the country, while the local festivals are mostly temple festivals. In India temples have played significant role for the interaction of cultural forces between classes and masses, the refined and the rustic. The festivals like Holi, Dasahra, Divali, Raksha-Bandhan are national festivals, and are celebrated with a great deal of enthusiansm. Also the emergence of some new festivals like the Republic Day, Independence Day, Gandhi-Jayanti etc. are the national festivals which are observed irrespective of cast, colour and creed. Government offices are closed on such important festivals which make the concept of national awareness and a shared nationhood.

In above contest the festivals held in Pandharpur have a cultural, religious, social and economic importance. The common Hindu festivals are seen in the various temple at Pandharpur have also social religious and cultural significance.

The common Hindu festivals are celebrated in the various temples in Pandharpur (Table 3.4) have also a social, religious and cultural significance. Dasahra (Ashvina Sud.10), Navaratra (1st nine days of Ashvina) and Makar Sankrant (January 14th) are considered more important. Other festivals observed in the temples include installation of Gouri and Ganapati. The birth day of Gopal Krishana, the incarnation of God Vishnu is also celebrated enthunastically. There is a chariot procession on the new moon day of Margashirsha. The God Vishnu at Vishnupad is worshipped and its dress is kept in the chariot and brought to the temple in procession.

Besides the above festivals the period between Shayani Ekadashi and Prabodhini Ekadashi is celebrated as Chaturmas.

Sr. No.	Name of the Festival	Festival period	Month	Temple in which the festivals held
	2	Э	4	
	Dasahra	1 day	Ashvina Sud.10 (Bright tenth of Ashvina) 1	 I. Lord Vitthal and Rukhmini temple 11) Chophala temple 111) Vyas temple
	N a Varatra	9 đays	First nine days of Ashvina i	 i) Lord Vitthal and Rukhmini temple ii) Shakambhari temple iii) Ambabai temple iv) Padmavati temple v) Sakhubai temple
	Makar Sankrent	1 day	January 14th	1) Lord Vitthal and Rukhmini temple
	Ganpati	11 days	From fourth of bright half of Bhadrapada	 Lord Vitthal and Rukhmini temple Ganpati temple
	Gouri	1 đay	On six day of bright of Shrav- na	1) Lord Vitthal and Rukhmini temple
	Gokulastami (Birth day of Krishna)	1 đay	Dark eighth of Shravna	 Murlidhar or Dwarkadhis temple Gopalkrishna temple, Gopalpur
	Gopal Kala (Breaking of Dahi-handi)	2 days	Full moon day of Ashadha and Kar- tika	: 1) Gopalkrishna temple, Gopalpur

TABLE 3.4 : Festivals in Pandharpur.

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1) Lord Vitthal temple		Kartiki Ekadashi Chaitra shuɗh Dratinada	1 1 1	evened thin
1) Pandharpur	\$	From Ashadhi Ekadashi	4 months	Chaturmas
e		1	I	le
Vishnupad temple	1)	 Margashirsha	30 d ays	Worshipping of 3
New moon day of Margashi- i) Vishnupad temple rsha	argashi- i)	New moon day of M rsha	1 đay	Charit procession
Ramchandra temple	£ Cha- 1))	First nine days of Cha- itra (March-April)	9 days	Ramavami
i) Kalbhairav temple		Eighth of bright half Chaitra	1 đay	Bhairav Asthami
Datta temple	a- 1)	Full moon of Marga- shirsha	1 đay	Datta Jayanti
Kala Maruti	11)	(March-April)		
Mailikarjun tempie Panchmukhi Maruti	tra 1)	Full moon of Chaitra	1 đay	Hanuman Jayanti
Amriteshwar Mahadeo	v11)			
Garicha Mahadeo	v1)			
Batteshwar Mahadeo	(A			
Babhlyas Mahadeo	1v)			
Shakamberi temple	111)	Magha		
Trimbakeshwar temple	of 11)	of the dark half of		
Pundlik temple	h 1)	Tenth to fifteenth	5 days	Mahashivratra
		Kartika		
	bđ	half of Ashadha and		
1) Lord Vitthal temple		lst day of the dark	2 days	Nandeo Kala

67

SOURCE : Compiled by the author.

The heads of the Monasteries at Pandharpur narrate stories of Varkari saints during the period. Bhajans and Kirtans are also arranged in the temple.

On full moon day of Ashadha and Kartika Gopal Kala (breaking of curd pot) festival is celebrated in the Gopal Krishna temple at Gopalpur and following days Namdeo Kala festival is celebrated in the temple of Lord Vitthal.

The Mahashivratra and Shivratra festivals (tenth to fifteenth of the dark half of Magha) are celebrated in the various temples dedicated to Mahadeo i.e. Babhlyas Mahadeo, Batteshwar Mahadeo, Garicha Mahadeo, Amriteshwar Mahadeo, Mallikarjun temple, Trimbakeshwar temple, Pundlika temple etc.

Navaratra festival is observed in the various temples dedicated to Goddesses, i.e. Shakamari temple, Ambabai temple, Padmavati temple, Lakhubai temple and Rukhmini temple.

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