

The Potaraja and Their Goddess

By

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The present essay is based on material collected during three field-trips between 1974 and 1977. Most of the material was collected in Shevgaon, a small town of about 12.000 inhabitants, in Ahmednagar District in the Indian State of Maharashtra, and in villages in the Districts Ahmednagar, Bhir, and Aurangabad.

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Introduction

In the Indian State of Maharashtra, more than ten per cent of the 50 odd million inhabitants belong to the so-called Harijans ('creatures of Hari', i.e. Viṣṇu) or former untouchables of the country. Although untouchability has been legally abolished in 1948, and although the conditions of the Harijans have changed considerably in the last few decades, those communities still form the lowest strata of Indian society and suffer discrimination by the highest castes. Their living quarters in the villages are set well apart from the village proper; they have usually separate wells to fetch their water, and separate temples to worship their gods.

Of the Harijan castes in Maharashtra by far the most numerous and also the most enterprising group are the Mahār. They are followed in number by the Māṅg and Cambhar. The Mahār in earlier times were important village servants with many different duties. Nowadays most of them earn their income as landless labourers. In the last two decades great changes have taken place in the Mahār community. Many

Mahār have tried to improve their pitiable social position by getting themselves converted to Buddhism. In doing so they followed their great leader Dr. Ambedkar, who became a Buddhist on Oct. 14, 1955, "setting in motion a conversion movement that was to encompass three million people" (Zelliot 1972: 91).

The business of the Māṅg in former times was "... to play on the flute and to make known the wishes of the Raja to his subjects by the beat of the drum. . . . He (the Māṅg) was to remove the dead bodies of strangers, to hang criminals, and to take away and appropriate the clothes and bedding of the dead" (Russell and Hira Lal 1916: 184). Similar to the Mahār, nowadays the Māṅg work as agricultural labourers and add to their meagre incomes by making ropes.

The Potarāja

Mahār and Māṅg share in the service of Mari (Mariāi) or Laxmī (Laxmiāi, Laxmibāi)¹, a goddess of conflicting character. The priests of this goddess are called *potarāja*. This name is believed to be of southern origin (Robertson 1938: 69), but until now I have not found any proof for an etymological connection with a Dravidian language. On the other hand, *pota* in Sanskrit means 'purifier', 'name of one of the 16 priests who officiate at a sacrifice; *potī*, *potrai* or *pautrai* is an epithet of Durga; the suffix 'ja' in Sanskrit means 'born from or in, produced or caused by, descended from...' (Apte 1965, Monnier-Williams 1964). *Potarāja* thus could be understood as "one, who is born from Durga", "Durga's child".—Another, more farfetched explanation could be the following one: *pota* in Marathi means 'child', *rāja* means king, but is also used by the Mahār when speaking about their own community.—(Referring to the living quarters of the Mahār caste in a village, members of other castes will speak of the 'Mahārwāḍā', whereas the Mahār themselves will often be heard using the term 'Rājawāḍā' instead).—Thus *potarāja* would mean 'child of the Mahar'. Even if this interpretation of the word is very speculative, it may be interesting to note in this context that in former times the Mahār claimed the exclusive right to perform all ceremonies connected with the goddess. Robertson reports that these rights had even been emphasized in a royal

1. I will use the spelling Laxmī, when talking about the goddess Mari/Laxmī, and the spelling Lakṣmī, when speaking about the consort of Viṣṇu and well known Hindu goddess of luck and wealth, in order to avoid confusion. Actually, for both names the spelling 'Lakṣmī' would be the correct one.

order (*sanada*) which was given to the Mahār at Paithan, District Aurangabad, in the temple of Svāmi Ekanāth, and that the Māṅg in this *sanad* were explicitly forbidden to serve the deity (Robertson op. cit.: 69–70).—Fuchs believes that possibly the Mahār were responsible for the propagation of the worship of the goddess in other parts of the country (Fuchs 1960: 526), and Karve mentioned only a few years ago the Mahār as priests of Mariāi/Laxmiāi (Karve 1968: 187).

The office of the *potarāja* is not hereditary. Of course it may happen that the son of a *potarāja* also becomes a priest of the goddess, but the usual procedure is that a married, childless couple takes the vow that, if a son should be born to them, he would serve Mariāi. A vow may also be taken if a small boy is very sick and the parents fear that he might not survive: They promise the goddess that the boy would become a *potarāja* if he remained alive.

The priests of Mari/Laxmi are colourful figures. Robertson describes a *potarāja* as "... a man who has long hair falling on his shoulders and very ample skirts as of a woman flouncing about ankles on which are many tinkling ornaments. His face is smeared red in spots with vermilion, round his neck hangs chain upon chain of cowrie shells; and on his shoulders is an enormous plaited whip of hempen cords" (Robertson op cit.: 67).—This whip is the most important part of the *potarāja's* outfit, which consists otherwise of a skirt, made from blouse-pieces for ladies, round the neck strings with green glass-bangles and silver-pendants, bearing the image of the goddess, and brass anklets with little bells, which give tinkling sounds when the *potarāja* begins his ecstatic dance and whirls himself into a frenzy which is considered divine. Whereas all things of the costume can be substituted by the *potarāja* himself in case they get spoilt or are lost, this does not hold true for the whip. This whip (*āsūḍa*, *koraḍa* or *cābūka*) is made of a coconut and ropes, which are produced by the Māṅg community, and it contains a number of magic things, which the teacher (*gurū*) of a young *potarāja* puts into it, before handing it over to his disciple. A priest, who has lost his whip, is not supposed to make himself a new one, but has to request his *gurū* to prepare one for him. The goddess herself is supposed to reside in the *cābūka*.

The *potarāja* is priest and shaman² at the same time and has to perform several duties in these capacities: looking after the temple,

2. Shaman is here not understood in the narrow sense of e.g. Hermanns and Eliade, but in the sense of Fuchs, who includes spirit-possession in the concept of shamanism (see Eliade 1964, Hermanns 1970, Fuchs 1973).

supervising the blood sacrifices, performing the ritual for expelling epidemic diseases from the village, and curing the sick by falling into a trance and diagnosing in this state the cause of the sickness with the help of the goddess³. Apart from those duties he may follow any other profession, e.g. working as daily labourer or making ropes. He can add to his income by begging and by keeping the offerings that are made by devotees of the goddess at the temple of Mariāi (for example grain).

There are many stories explaining the origin of the *potarāja* institution. I want to give here two, which I myself had been told, and one from the Dharwar-Volume of the Bombay Gazetteers⁴. The latter is typical for the South and will appear again in a somewhat different version in connection with the buffalo sacrifice.

a) There was a time when the human beings were already divided into the four *varṇa* (1). Many people prayed to certain gods. The Māṅg people did not have a special deity to pray to. There lived one Māṅg. His character was very good. His name was Mātaṅga (2). He was a very good man. He prayed to some spirits, because he wanted a son.

At that time Ādimāi was living on the ground of the ocean. When Mātaṅga was praying to the spirits, she came out of the water. She said that she could give him a son, but the son should serve her (3). Then she explained all the necessary and important things to Mātaṅga. Afterwards Mātaṅga had a son, Huṅkārbābā (4). Mātaṅga brought up his son in such a way that Huṅkārbābā became the first *potarāja*.

Ādimāi appeared in the dream of the patil of Ayodhya (5). She said that from now onwards she wanted to live in this village and that her temple should be constructed there. The temple was built, and Huṅkārbābā was *potarāja* in the temple of Ayodhya. When sick people came, the goddess told him whether he could cure them or not. If they could be cured, he had to apply *aṅgara* (6) on their foreheads. If they could not be cured, the goddess told him to send them away (Vetschera op. cit.: 460–461).

Explanatory remarks:

(1): The division into the four *varṇa* is the division into Brāhmaṇa (priests), Kṣatriya (warriors), Vaiśya (merchants), and Śūdra (servants). According to Ambedkar and others, the untouchable is outside the scheme of creation, as he does not belong to any one of those four groups. The Sudra is *savarṇa*, as against him the untouchable is *avarṇa*, that means without *varṇa* (see Ambedkar 1948: 32–33).

(2): Mātaṅga is the Sanskrit name of a sage (see Apte), but also

3. For details see Vetschera 1976: 457–60.

4. The stories which I collected myself will be marked a), b) ... and the songs A), B), C)... Stories which I am quoting from other authors will all be marked with x).

means “a Caṇḍāla, a man of the lowest rank” (Burrow and Emeneau), and corresponds to the Telugu *māḍiga*. The Māḍiga are a Harijan caste of South India.

- (3): As I mentioned before, usually boys become *potarāja*, who had born after a vow had been made that they would serve Mari/Laxmī.
- (4): ‘*huñkār*’ in Marathi means “consent, assent, saying yes”; ‘*bābā*’ means “father”.
- (5): Ayodhya: the holy city of Rāma, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇaepic.
- (6): ‘*aṅgara*’: ashes (probably ashes of *aṅgarāg*, sweet-smelling incense sticks).—The healing ceremony, which is conducted by the *potarāja*, is called *aṅgara*-ceremony.

b) A Brahmin girl was secretly in love with a Mahār boy. The young Mahār was the lover of the girl. After some time she became pregnant and died. Neither people from the Brahmin community nor from the Mahār caste were prepared to arrange for her funeral. Thus the Mahār boy carried his dead beloved on his shoulders to the border of his village and buried her there. But while doing so, he became mad. He removed her *coḷī* (sari blouse) and the *joḍave* (toe ornament) from the girl’s body and wore them himself. Then he ran through the village, shouting “Laxmī, Laxmī” (1).—Actually this event had nothing to do with the goddess Laxmī, but this is the way in which her worship started, and the young Mahār boy, who wore the dress and ornaments of a woman, became the first *potarāja*. Others followed him, and later on also the Māṅg became *potarāja*, as they are also a low caste.

Explanatory remarks:

- (1): Some time ago, Marathi speaking people in this area used the word “Laxmī” for wife. Older people can sometimes still be heard using this term, whereas younger ones refer to their wives preferably as “my Mrs.”

Whereas the first story, told to me by a Māṅg, gives a mythical explanation for the origin of the *potarāja* institution, the second one, told by an old Mahār, is very prosaic: A young Mahār boy, heart broken because of the death of his beloved, becomes mad while burying her body. He takes and wears some of the dead girl’s clothes and ornaments and runs around, madly calling for her. Eventually he becomes a sacred man and founder of the *potarāja* institution. This sounds rather incredible; but we should at least consider the fact that in India there is a tradition of holy people who claim that God has revealed himself to them and who, not caring for the world, behave like children, mad men or the possessed. “. . . And whereas there is a belief that a mad

man was possessed by an evil spirit, in the case of a holy man he is possessed either by a god or a benevolent spirit" (Karve op. cit.: 192)—in our case he is possessed by Laxmiāi.

x) "...Potrajas or buffalo kings are a class of Holayas. The story of the origin of their name is that their ancestor in the guise of a Brahman became the husband of Dayamava, an incarnation of the goddess Laxmī. They lived together for several years and had children. On Dayamava's request the Holaya brought his mother to the house. As they were eating some of Dayamava's sweet meats the mother said to her son, "How like this is to a roasted buffalo tongue". Dayamava finding out that she had been deceived and degraded, burnt her house, slew her children and persuing her husband, who had become a buffalo, killed him. The descendents of the husband are called potrajas, that is buffalo kings. They are a small body and are found only in a few villages. On Dayamava's fairs, which last for eight days, the potrajas are sent for. On one of the eight days several male buffaloes, representing the Holya who married Dayamava, and a number of sheep representing the children, are slaughtered before the deity. The officiating potraja tears open the throat of a lamb with his teeth and drinks the blood..." (Bombay Gazetteers Vol. XXII: 217).

Women, who are devoted to Mari/Laxmī, cannot become *potarāja*, but they can also use the whip for their worship and they can call the goddess into their bodies, in order to be able to recognise the cause of a sickness. I want to describe now in short one such ritual which I could attend in Dadegaon, a small village near Shevgaon:

An old Mang woman—a devotee of Mari/Laxmī—decided to arrange a healing ceremony for the sake of her grand-daughter, a small girl of about eleven years of age, who apparently was suffering from tuberculosis. The woman wanted to fall into trance and find out the reason of the child's disease.

We had been told to come to the village on a Tuesday; Tuesdays and Fridays are the days sacred to Mari/Laxmī. We arrived at the time of sunset near the old woman's house. The woman had fasted during the whole day. When we arrived, she was taking bath. When she had finished and left her house, two musicians began to play their instruments, a drum and a *sanaī* (an instrument similar to an oboe). In front of the image of the goddess—a row of seven small stones, which were red with vermilion, and surrounded by bigger stones—a square had been drawn with white powder. Embers and green lemons were kept in the four corners of the square. In the centre a brass plate, containing lemons, *gulāl* (red powder), *buka* (black, fragrant powder) and *uḍabattī* (incense sticks) was kept.

The old woman squatted down in front of the image of the goddess and her body began to sway a little in the rhythm of the

music. Gradually her movements became faster, and when after about ten minutes the goddess entered her body, the old woman greeted her with a loud shout.

The little girl, for whose sake the ceremony was performed, was seated in front of her grandmother. Shaking all the time, the old woman—or rather Mari/Laxmī, who now spoke through her mouth—said, “The little girl got scared, that time I was in my chariot, believe me”. I was told that the meaning of this sentence was: The goddess, who due to her supernatural powers can be at many different places at the same time, was passing by in her chariot, when she saw that the child got scared of something.

In the meanwhile one of the onlookers had started trembling. He was a young boy of perhaps 15 or 16 years of age. Suddenly he was rolling on the ground and rolling his eyeballs so that only the white part remained visible. The old woman shouted, “Now you tremble. But a short while ago you took bath at a place in the river, where the *asara* live, and you gave them a lot of trouble”. The *asara* are said to be identical with the *apsaras*, water-nymphs, who are regarded sometimes as the “sisters” of the goddess (see below). The boy said something, but his words were unintelligible. One man got up, brought two lemons and cut them above the boy’s head. This is regarded an effective remedy for freeing a person from a trance, into which he had fallen unwillingly. Such cases are not rare; especially when the sound of drums can be heard, the goddess is said to enter very easily human bodies.

When the boy stopped shivering, the woman again turned to the little girl, said something which we could not understand, and then called the girl’s mother, i.e. her own daughter-in-law. She told the woman, “If you want your daughter to get cured, you have to offer a coconut, a goat, wheat, and wheat-flour at my temple at the time of the fair of Varakhed (see below). You must come to Varakhed every year at the time of the fair”. Then she asked the girl, “Did you see water in your dream?” The girl said, “Yes”. “Did you go to the fair?” Again the answer was, “Yes”. The old woman continued, “I did not come here for you alone, but for all people. I saw your worship, and therefore I do not want to trouble a *jhāda*”. *Jhāda* actually means ‘tree’, but in this context the word was used in the sense of ‘a person who is possessed by an evil spirit’.—Then again the woman addressed her daughter-in-law and said, “You did not believe in me, therefore I am now giving trouble to your daughter.

You did not offer the goat, which you had promised me, and therefore I trouble your daughter. Will you also give me a *reḍa* (buffalo-calf)?" The mother of the little girl said in a low voice, "Yes".⁵

Then again one of the onlookers fell into trance. It was a young man, who had a little while before asked in a mocking tone, "Oh goddess, how many forms of appearance do you have?" Now the man shouted loudly, partly using Hindi language: he had got possessed by Hāji Malaṅḍa Bābā, a Muslim *pīr* (spirit). Afterwards a being by the name of Janpīra entered his body. The old woman told the man, "They (the supernatural beings) came, because you asked questions about me. Oh, this state (i.e. trance) is like the holy water of the Gaṅgā, believe it with a pure mind". Again somebody got up to bring lemons and cut them over the possessed man's head, but in the meanwhile the man shouted, "*Salām alekum*". Then he sort of collapsed and remained silent. Apparently the spirit had left him.

The old woman then started shaking her hands fiercely, so that the bangles made a loud noise. Then she bent forward. Her long, open hair fell to the ground. With her hands she collected the charcoal embers in a heap in front of her; she began to roll them with the palms of her hands, letting her head swing to and fro, back and front. After a while her movements became slower, finally they stopped. When the goddess had left her body, the old woman seemed exhausted but cheerful. She tied her hair in a bun in the nape and started talking to the people present.

The Songs of the Potarāja

I want to quote now five songs, which I recorded in Shevgaon in 1975. They were sung by two *potarāja* of the Māṅg caste. Song A) and B) are sung during the installation-ceremony of a new *potarāja*, songs C), D), and E), when the *potarāja* go begging from house to house. As during the time of the installation ceremony the conditions for recording the songs were unfavourable, I asked the two men to

5. Like most uneducated members of low castes and of tribes, also many Māṅg and Mahār believe that diseases are caused by spirits, who entered the body of a human being. Usually, in the course of the healing ceremony, the shaman tries to force the troublesome spirit to reveal his identity. Then the question is asked, under which conditions the spirit was prepared to leave the suffering person. In the above ceremony the case was different: Mari/Laxmī made it clear that she herself had inflicted the disease on the little girl, in order to punish the mother, who did not believe in the goddess.

repeat them at a later time. This was arranged about one week after the ceremony.

The accompanying instrument was a so-called *halagi*-drum, i.e. a small cettle drum with one drum-skin, which is played with a thicker stick in the right and a very thin bamboo-stick in the left hand. The second *potarāja*, while singing, stamped his feet in the rhythm of the song, so that the heavy feet-ornaments gave tinkling and rattling sounds.

The language of the songs is Marathi, but it should be noted that especially the language spoken by the low castes in the villages differs considerably from the standard Marathi.

I am going to use the songs and stories, supplemented by additional informations by Māṅg- and Mahār informants and already published literature in order to arrive at an interpretation of the figure of Mari/Laxmī.—As songs A) and B) seem to me of greater importance for this purpose, I am giving them also in Marathi language, whereas the other songs and all the stories are quoted only in their English translations.

The first song, which is sung at the occasion of the installation ceremony of a new *potarāja*, describes the origin of the huge whip, which is carried by the *potarāja*, and how this whip was prepared by Mari/Laxmī from the body of a cobra and given to Mātaṅga, a man from the Māṅg caste. The contents of the song is as follows:

A legend tells that the British, when they came to Bombay, started digging a tank, and deep in the earth they found an image of Laxmīāī. When the goddess thus had been brought out into the light, she decided to go to Telaṅga's house.—She asks Telaṅga for water. He offers her some from his own water pot, but she refuses to drink from it and tells the weeping Telaṅga that she wanted to drink water in the "middle floor". Telaṅga does not understand what she means to say and runs to a palmtree. There is water on that tree, but it is guarded by a cobra, of which Telaṅga is afraid. Siva and Pārvatī watch from their heavenly abode what is happening, and according to Pārvatī's request, Śiva shoots an arrow at the tree, so that the water falls from it. But Telaṅga again is in troubles, as he does not know how to carry the water to the goddess, who had told him to bring it neither in a pot, nor in a drinking vessel, a plate, in his hair or in cloth. Pārvatī gives Telaṅga the advice to touch his eyelids to the tree, and he carries the water in his eyelids to his door, where Laxmī/Mari is waiting. But again the goddess refuses to drink and says that she would drink only from "cupped hands", an expression, which Telaṅga cannot understand again. The goddess

tells him to go to the Māṅg's house. Telaṅga arrives there, pays his reference to Mātaṅga and requests him to come with him and make Laxmī drink the water. This is done by offering the goddess water in cupped hands. When Laxmī wants to leave the place, Telaṅga requests her not to go, but to stay with him. He says that the goddess had seen only little of his devotion, but not his real worship. To honour him, the goddess should at least weep in front of him. Laxmī says that she could not stay with Telaṅga, but she tears the blouse which she is wearing and gives it to the men. Telaṅga and Mātaṅga start quarreling, because each one wants to keep the blouse of the goddess. Finally they agree to take half of it each. The goddess, before leaving, makes a whip from the body of the cobra, which had been in the tree, and gives it to Mātaṅga.

Text of song A

- 1: *ye mhaṇalī māyā vedī ga paṇḍharapūrātūnī*
Oh, the mad woman of Pandharpur
- 2: *bayā mhaṇṭī mātaṅga tujha ghar khola*
— — Oh Mātaṅga, your house is deep.
- 3: *bayā tulā kāḍhale ga korūna*
You appeared, woman, when they were digging
- 4: *kāḍale mhaṇe bāi phiraṅgyānī*
the English brought you out, oh woman,
- 5: *māyā mhaṇalī masaṇa khāitūnī*
— — from your grave.
- 6: *bayā mithūnna nighalī re lakṣmī*
The woman comes out from there, Laxmī,
- 7: *bayā mhaṇalī hātabhara jībh kaḍhūnī*
she shows her tongue, long like an arm.
- 8: *“gele telaṅgācyā dārī”*
(She says): “I go to Telaṅga's door”.
- 9: *pāṇī māgata pyāyālā lakṣmī*
Laxmī asks for water to drink.
- 10: *“pāṇī pāṇī” āṇi bhoḷā bhakta*
“Water, water”, and the simple bhakta
- 11: *uṭhunasaṇī pāṇī dhyāyalā lāgalā maṭakyakūnī*
stands up and offers her water from his maṭka.
- 12: *“pāṇī pyāyace nāhī”*
“I will not drink this water”.
- 13: *“satra hārana lakṣmī”*

- "I fail in the test, Laxmī".
- 14: *bhakta raḍa dhāyī dhāyī*
The bhakta is weeping.
- 15: "*kāma jhāla lakṣmī pāṇī pyāyālā deto lakṣmī*"
"I did my duty, oh Laxmī, and gave you water to drink".
- 16: *lakṣmī bole "bhakta āṇi pāṇī pyāyace madhyatāḷā"*
Laxmī says, "Bhakta, I want to drink water of the middle floor".
- 17: *pāṇī pāhāta nāhī pāṇī madhyatāḷāta*
He did not see water on the middle-floor.
- 18: *modhyatāḷī koṇata nāhī ṭhāūka bhaktālā*
The bhakta does not know what is middle-floor.
- 19: *bhakta paḷata paḷata jāi*
The bhakta runs fast, fast.
- 20: *jāi sīndūlyāvara*
He runs to a palm-tree
- 21: *māyā tyā tikāṇi tāḍa naṅdruka*
— In that place are a palm-tree and a naṅdruk-tree.
- 22: "*tāḍa naṅdrukevarati*"
"On the palm-tree and nandruk-tree",
- 23: *bayā mhane "śeṣarākhana"*
says the woman, "the cobra is guard".
- 24: *bhakta raḍa dhāyī dhāyī*
The bhakta is wailing,
- 25: *āṇi śeṣāca bheva vāṭata kāhī*
and he feels some fear of the cobra.
- 26: *mahādeva pārvatī āṇi hiṅdata hote kailāṣī*
Mahādeva and Pārvatī wander in the sky.
- 27: *śeṣa nārāyaṇa phaḍī kādūna basala*
The cobra-god spreads his hood and sits,
- 28: *śeṣ nārāyaṇa pāṇī gheū deīnā*
the cobra-god does not allow to take water.
- 29: *bhaktālā pāṇī kāhī disenā*
The bhakta cannot see the water.
- 30: *raḍato ghāi ghāi*
He weeps fast, fast.
- 31: *mahādeva pārvatī hiṅdāḷī kailāṣī*
Mahādeva and Pārvatī wander in the sky.
- 32: *lakṣa gcle mhane bhaktāpāṣī*
They concentrate on the bhakta
- 33: *pārvatī bole saṅkarā*

Pārvatī talks to Śaṅkarā.

- 34: *bhakta raḍato kevhāncā*
The bhakta weeps for a long time.
- 35: “*pāṇī mhane kaśālā*”
“What is water needed for?” (asks ‘Telaṅga’)
- 36: *mhane “mahāmarilā ye mahāmarilā”*
— “For Mahāmarī, oh for Mahāmarī”
- 37: “*pāṇī nyāyace kaśālā*”
“For what (should I) take the water?”
- 38: *mhane “veḍilā pyāyālā”*
“For the mad woman to drink”.
- 39: *bāṇ mārālā pāṇī lāgale gaḷāyālā*
The arrow hits and water begins to fall.
- 40: *bhakta mhane “āi pāṇī nyāvāt kaśāta”*
The bhakta says, “Mother, in what can I bring the water?”
- 41: *veḍina sangītala malā satva ghyāyālā āli dārī*
“The mad woman comes to my door to test me”.
- 42: *vātī nāhī, loṭī nāhī, tamhaṇa nāhī, kes nāhī,*
“Not in pot, not in loṭa, not in plate, not in hair,
- 43: *āṇi vastrāta pāṇī nyāvayāce nāhī”*
and not in cloth carry the water”.
- 44: “*pāṇī nyāyace kaśāt*”
“In what can I carry the water?”
- 45: *pāṇī mhane netrālā*
Water comes to his eyes (He weeps).
- 46: *pāvatī sāṅgatī tyālā*
Pārvatī says to him,
- 47: “*lāva mhane netra śiṅdāḍilā*”
“Touch your eye to the palm-tree”
- 48: *pāṇī lāgale gaḷāyālā*
Water starts falling.
- 49: *pāpanīta pāṇī šeṣā khaṅdhyāvarī*
“Water in eyelids, and cobra on shoulder.
- 50: *pāṇyācyā pāṭhāpāḍha māga lakṣmī*
Laxmī follows after the water.
- 51: *ālā telaṅgācyā dārī*
She comes to Telaṅga’s door.
- 52: “*pāṇī pāṇī pegā marī*”
“Drink water, oh Marī”.
- 53: *pāṇī tesa pīta nāhī*

- She does not drink water.
- 54: *“pāṇī maga kasa pyāyaca”*
“How will you drink water?”
- 55: *mhane “pyāsa madhī”*
She says, “In cupped hands”.
- 56: *“pyāsā koṇatā”*
“Which pyāsa?”
- 57: *mhane śabda samajenā*
The word he does not understand.
- 58: *“byāsa mhane māṅgācyā gharī”*
“(To understand) pyāsa, go to the Māṅg’s house”.
- 59: *māṅga tūtha gelā telaṅga bolāyā lāgalā*
Telaṅga goes to the Māṅg’s house and starts to talk.
- 60: *“he” mhane “mātaṅgā tū dharma mājhā*
“Oh”, he says, “Oh Mātaṅga, you are my religion,
- 61: *bhāu mājhā āṇi baṅdhū tū mājhā*
(you are) my brother and my relative.
- 62: *cala veḍilā pāṇī pājāyā*
Come to the mad woman and make her drink water.
- 63: *pāṇī mhane śeṣ madhya”*
The cobra”, he says, “is in the middle of the water”.
- 64: *ālā bhakta paḷata ghāi ghāi*
The bhakta comes and runs fast, fast.
- 65: *āṇi pāṇī lāvalī mukhālā oṅjaḷi*
And water he offers in cupped hands to her mouth.
- 66: *veḍicyā mukhālā lāvalī āṇi veḍi tethūna gelī*
He touches the mad woman’s mouth, and she goes from there.
- 67: *veḍilā telaṅga jāu deīnā*
Telaṅga does not allow the mad one to go.
- 68: *maga telaṅgācī kathā*
Then Telaṅga’s request (‘story’):
- 69: *telaṅga mhanato “vede thāmba mājhyā javaḷi*
Telaṅga says, “Oh mad woman, live with me,
- 70: *mājha yevaḍhasa baghūṭala kāhī*
you have seen only my small deeds.
- 71: *malā māna dhyāvā lakṣmī*
Give me respect, oh Laxmī.
- 72: *mājhyā svat javaḷa raḍalī pāhījī*
You must weep in front of me.
- 73: *veḍi lakṣmī āḍimāyā nighalī notī mājhyāpāṣī*

- Mad woman, Laxmī, Ādimāyā, you came to me".
- 74: "telaṅgāpāṣī thāmbū śakaṅāra nāhī"
"I cannot live with Telaṅga".
- 75: *māyā mhaṅe tujhā dusaṛā avatāra lakṣmī*
Your other incarnation is Laxmī.
- 76: *angātila kaṅdacoḷī phādūnī*
She tears the blouse, which she wears.
- 77: *nāhī mukataphaḷa āṇi doḷayāta sogyāca kājaḷa*
There is a pearl-ornament in her nose, and sogyāca kājaḷa in eyes.
- 78: *bāi angālā iṅdrabhaga pādūna*
With power she makes holes in her body,
- 79: *āṇi aṅgatalī kaṅdacoḷi dilī ga phādūnī*
and she gives the blouse, which she wore and tore.
- 80: *ya khaṅāpāyī bhāṅḍaṅa matāṅga āṇi telaṅga*
About the blouse cloth Mātaṅga and Telaṅga start quarreling.
- 81: "nimā khaṅa mhaṅe mahā telaṅgālā
"Half blouse-cloth is mine" (says Telaṅgā),
- 82: "dusaṛā khaṅa" mhaṅe "mātaṅgālā"
"the other half", he says, "is for Mātaṅga".
- 83: *pāhāyā mhaṅale hātī mhaṅalī bāṅa*
Come and see, there is an arrow in the hand.
- 84: *bāya basalī mhaṅe siṅhāvāra sobhata tūlā*
It looks beautiful, when you sit on a lion, oh woman.
- 85: *khāṅdhyāvarīṣeṣā cābūka kelā*
She makes a whip from the cobra on the shoulder
- 86: *bāya toca cābūka mātaṅgācyā nātī dilā*
and she gives the whip into the hands of Mātaṅga.

Explanatory remarks:

line

- 1: *mhaṅalī māyā* is often used for the sake of rhythm only and remains untranslated; literally *māyā* means illusion, magic power; *mhaṅalī* means: says
veḍī ga paṅḍharapūrātūnī: the mad (woman) of Pandharpur, i.e. Mari/Laxmī.—The goddess is referred to as *veḍī*, 'mad one', as she sometimes also takes the appearance of a mad woman. Besides, when the *potarāja* works himself into a trance or gets spontaneously possessed by Laxmīāī, he, too, behaves like a 'mad' person.—Pandharpur is a famous place of pilgrimage because of

the shrine of god Vithal or Vithoba, a manifestation of Viṣṇu. Mari/Laxmī is connected with Pandharpur for the following reason:

c) When the big fair of god Vithal was going on at Pandharpur, Mari/Laxmī once took the appearance of a beggar woman, suffering from *indraghagā*, a disease which is similar to smallpox. Nobody was able to recognize her; only Vithal realized that the sick, old woman, who everybody abused, was in reality Laxmīāi. The goddess was very pleased with Vithal and asked him, whether she could stay near him, whereupon he offered her a place at the right side of his temple. Her image can still be seen there, and many people, especially of the low castes, pay first their respect to Laxmīāi, before entering Vithoba's temple.

- 2: *tujha ghar khola*: the meaning is not quite clear; khola means 'deep, profound, secret'.
The first two lines are in no direct connection with the following song and are to be regarded as an invocation to the goddess and to Mātāṅga, who, according to the Ādimāi story (number a) and to this song, is the mythical founder of the *potarāja* institution.
- 8: *Telaṅga*: *telaṅgī* in Marathi means 'a resident of the Telaṅga region', which belongs to northern Andhra Pradesh. Telaṅga, as we shall see later on, is sent by the goddess herself to a Māṅg's house for help. Maybe this is to be understood in a symbolic way: that an originally South-Indian cult has been transferred to Maharashtra, where it is followed especially by the low castes.
- 10: *bhakta*: devotee.
- 11: *maṭka*: big water pot of clay for carrying and storing water.
- 16: *madhyatālā*: *madhya* means 'middle'; *tālā*: local people translated this word as 'floor'; *madhyatālā* thus would mean 'middle-floor'. In Sanskrit *tālā* means palmyra tree', *tālī* means 'a palmtree'. I am not aware now, whether *tālā* has also a similar meaning in Marathi; if it has, *madhyatālā* would mean 'in the middle of the palm tree', which would give more sense regarding the further events of the song.
- 23: *śeṣ* is actually 'the king of serpents'.
- 26: Mahādeva (Śiva) and his consort, Pārvatī, watch from their heavenly abode what is going on on the earth.
- 27: *śeṣa nārāyaṇa*: Nārāyaṇa is an epithet of Viṣṇu as the Primal Lord, who floats on a banyan leaf on the primeval waters; *śeṣa nārāyaṇa* here only seems to mean 'cobra god'.
- 33: Pārvatī is often imagined as requesting Śaṅkar (i.e. Śiva) to help

- a mortal; often enough dispute arises between the god and his consort, when Śiva wants to curse a person whom Pārvatī wants to bless (Thomas 1973: 38).
- 36: Mahāmarilā: another name of Mariāi/Laxmīāi; later on also her name Ādimāyā is mentioned (see line 73).
- 38: 'mad woman': see line 1.
- 39: Śiva has met his wife's request: he shoots an arrow at the tree so that the water begins to fall and Telaṅga can collect it.
- 41-43: To put Telaṅga to the test again, the goddess tells him not to bring the water in any of the mentioned objects. A *loṭa* is a drinking vessel of brass or stainless steel.
- 49: While Telaṅga stands near the tree to collect the water in his eyelids, the cobra, who had guarded the water, apparently moves onto his shoulders. Later on Laxmī takes this cobra and forms it into a whip, which she hands over to Mātaṅga (see below).
- 55: *pyāsa* actually means 'thirst'; I was told that here the meaning of *pyāsa madhī* was: to drink 'from cupped hands'.
- 56: 'which *pyāsa*': Telaṅga cannot understand the meaning of *pyāsa*.
- 57-60: 'you are my religion': to honour Mātaṅga, Telaṅga calls him his 'religion', i.e. his religious instructor.
- 63: This line is not quite clear, as the cobra apparently has already left the tree.
- 70: *yevadḥasa*: 'little things', meaning that the goddess until now had no chance to see his real devotion, but only the small things which he did, and even those not very successfully.
- 77: *sogyāca kājaḷa* is a black colour made from lamp-black and oil, which is used by women for making up their eyes.
- 78: The goddess shows her power by changing her appearance into that of a woman suffering from *indrabhagā*, covering her body all over with sores (*bhaga* means 'ulcer, sore').
- 83-84: Before presenting Mātaṅga with the whip, made from the cobra's body, Mariāi/Laxmīāi shows herself in her glorious form, riding on a lion.

A second song, which also is sung at the occasion of the installation ceremony of a new *potarāja*, has the following contents:

The song begins with a description of the outward appearance of the goddess.—Laxmīāi, in the shape of a sick woman, goes to Pandharpur, while the fair is going on. People get disgusted, when seeing her, and chase her away, as they do not recognise her true identity.

Then the goddess changes her appearance and becomes a girl of twelve years. Again she proceeds to Pandharpur. She goes to the temple of god Vithal and complains to him that nobody was able to recognise her. When people ask, "Who is she?", the goddess becomes angry, and, showing her power, she sends diseases. People die in such numbers that a 'flood of dead bodies' has to be carried to the river. An old woman, who is walking with her grandsons, gets scared when she comes near the river and sees the large number of corpses. She wants to return home, but Laxmīāi decides to tease her. She waits in the branches of a limb-tree. When the old woman takes rest under the tree, the goddess descends from it and asks her to search the lice in her hair. The woman refuses, but Laxmīāi places her head at the old woman's feet. When the old woman finally realizes that the other one is not an ordinary human being, the goddess changes into her fierce form, scaring all those who happen to pass by.

Text of song B

- 1: *āye mhaṇale nīrākāra nīraguṇī*
Aye—shapeless, virtueless,
- 2: *māyā mhaṇalī reḍī lakṣmī*
— oh mad Laxmī.
- 3: *māyā mhaṇalī veḍī avatāra māyā*
Māyā, mad incarnation of māyā.
- 4: *ālī āi veḍī*
Come, mad mother.
- 5: *gulī mulīcyī pāyī papāḷa śendarī*
On your forehead is śendūr,
- 6: *ḍoḷayāta gārūḷī āṭhakūra menḍhī lakṣṇūlā*
in your eyes the white of madness; offer an 8-legged sheep to Laxmī
- 7: *bāyā mhaṇalī cālavita tuja māyā bādāmadhye basalī lakṣmī*
The woman walks; your power is in women, Laxmī,
- 8: *bayā dasaryā avatārī*
A woman is your other avatāra.
- 9: *ālī mhaṇale reḍī veḍī*
"Come, mad one".
- 10: *māyā mhaṇe leṇa kānhī*
She wears different ornaments,
- 11: *pānṭarā pankhī āni hiravī kandacoḷī*
a white fan and a green blouse.
- 12: *muktī mākaḥaḷa bāi leḷī sogyāca kājaḷa*

- A pearl-ornament in nose; appl ysogyāca kājaḷa on your eyes,
woman.
- 13: *ye māyā mhaṇālī jaḷāta jāī*
— She goes into the water,
- 14: *kālīja boke khāī māna moḍī*
She eats liver and heart, she breaks the neck,
- 15: *rakta soḍī hātabhara jībha pādī*
she causes blood-vomiting; her tongue, long like a lower arm,
hangs out.
- 16: *yelammā marīmā kaḷūmā khristimā māyā ādika*
Yelammā, Marimā, Kaḷūmā, Khristimā, other power,
- 17: *bayā mhaṇālī “lakṣmī eka paṇa aneka prakāra”*
The woman says, “Laxmī is one, but has different forms of ap-
pearance”
- 18: *ālī māī mhaṇālī veḍī*
Come, mad mother.
- 19: *māyā mhaṇālī tuja jāṇa koṭhavarī*
— Where do you go?
- 20: *bayā nighālī mhaṇe paṇḍharapurī*
The woman goes to Pandharpur.
- 21: *angī indrabhagā pādūnī*
With power she makes holes in her body.
- 22: *hātī borāṭicī kāṭī doḷī bhedūnī bhujalakṣmī*
In her hand is a bor-stick with thorns; Laxmī with many arms
breaks the heads.
- 23: *māyā mhaṇālī tulā vaḷakhinā ga doṇī*
Nobody can recognise You.
- 24: *naṇḍdharapurāmadhye tāḷakarī māḷakaryacī ghāī*
In Pandharpur is a rush of tāḷakarī-instruments and māḷa,
- 25: *ānī veḍī lakṣmī mailāgiri candanāvāṇivāsa saḍūnī lakṣmī*
Up to one mile, Laxmī smells like the caṇdana-tree.
- 26: *cālalī ubhyā diṇḍita lakṣmī*
Laxmī walks in the procession.
- 27: *māyā mhaṇāle tuḷā vaḷakinā ga doṇa*
— Nobody recognises you.
- 28: *lātha mārūna kādhale hālakūna*
They kick and beat her, and throw her out.
- 29: *bāī rūpa badalavila*
The woman changes her shape.
- 30: *bārā varṣacī mulagī jhālī*

- She becomes a girl of 12 years.
- 31: *angī kandacoḷi levūnasanī*
She wears a blouse on her body,
- 32: *hāthālā cuḍā māyā bandhalā yeḷā*
bangles on her hands, a yeḷā-ornament is tied on the upper arm.
- 33: *nākī natha kānī phūla*
In the nose a nose-ring, in the ear a flower-ornament.
- 34: *bayā mhaṇalī nighalī ga paṇḍharapūrī*
The woman goes to Pandharpur,
- 35: *āṇi bārā varṣacī mulagī hoūnī*
and she becomes a girl of 12 years.
- 36: *ḍoivara ghetalī kaḷaṣī kaḷaṣīlā agarbattī*
On the head she carries a brass-pot, and on the pot she sticks
. *agarbattī*,
- 37: *ana nighalī paṇḍharapūrākade*
and starts for Pandharpur.
- 38: *viṭṭhalācā avatāra lakṣmī gelī*
Laxmī goes to the Vithal avatāra,
- 39: *viṭṭhala tyācā bhāū*
Vithal, your brother.
- 40: *"he" mhanī "viṭṭhalā oḷakhināre koṇī malā"*
"Oh, she says, "Vithal, nobody recognises me".
- 41: *"bārā varṣacī mulagī āḷi tevḥā vaḷakhināre malā"*
"A girl of 12 years comes, therefore they don't recognise me".
- 42: *ardhyāpaḷaḷāpanīcī mubhā dhyāvā malā*
In half a moment give me permission,
- 43: *māyīnā mājhā ādimāyā śivaṣakti*
oh Māyā, my Ādimāyā, Śivaṣakti.
- 44: *āṇi loka mhaṇatī "koṇatī"*
And people ask, "Who is it"
- 45: *yeḍīna dharala māṣāca rūpa dhāraṇa*
The mad one takes the shape of flies and comes,
- 46: *eka bajhī gālāvara durarī basa kānāvara*
one sits on the cheek, one sits on the ears,
- 47: *āṇi tisarī jāi mukhāta*
and the third one goes into the mouth.
- 48: *āṇi kelī dhāḷaulaṭī tyā lakṣmīna*
And Laxmī is dysentery and vomiting
- 49: *ṭāḷakarī māḷakarī puḍha lakṣmī*
First Laxmī, then tāḷakarī-instruments and māḷa (in procession)

- 50: *āṇi murdhyālā murdā dāṭavilā*
and there is no space for dead bodies.
- 51: *āṇi manga gangāmāilā loṭa cālivilā*
They carry the flood (of corpses) to the Gaṅgā.
- 52: *eka mhātārī āṇi calālī mhaṇe darṣanālā*
One old woman goes for worship.
- 53: *donhī nātavanda ghetele nātālā*
She carries two grandsons in her hands.
- 54: *bāi bhyālī manālā*
The woman's mind is scared.
- 55: *āṇi candrābhagelā cālālā mhaṇe murdhyācāpūra*
She walks to caṅdrābhaga—there is the flood of corpses.
- 56: *bayā bheūnī māghārī phiralī*
The woman is scared and goes back.
- 57: *limbākhālī jāūna basalī*
She goes and sits under a limba-tree,
- 58: *vedī māyā mājhjā lakṣmī*
mad power, my Laxmī.
- 59: *varakheḍacyā bāyālā sarvāāngī mhaṇe doḷayā disavilā*
The woman of Varakhed shows herself to all.
- 60: *inī phekalī najara āṇi bhiūna cālālī mhaṇe invaṣūrāṇḍa*
she looks and says, "The foolish old woman is scared and goes,
- 61: *jāte mhaṇe ga āḍavī basate"*
I will go and sit before her."
- 62: *limbācyā dahāḷevara basalī mājhī lakṣmī*
On the branch of a limba-tree sits my Laxmī,
- 63: *utarālī ravālī*
she comes down,
- 64: "he" mhaṇe "mhātāre āī"
"oh", she says, "old mother",
- 65: "āṇi bagha" mhaṇe "mājhjā ḍokyāta vā" lakṣmī
"take out the lice from my head", says Laxmī.
- 66: *māyā mhanī "malā banata ga nāhī"*
Mother says, "I have no time".
- 67: *donhī lekara donhī māṅḍilā*
"There are two children, two legs,
- 68: *āṇi mī tisarī kaṣālā"*
Why should I be the third one?"
- 69: *ḍoka dila pāyālā*
She puts he head on the old woman's feet,

- 70: *āṇi* “*dokyāmadhye mhaṇe sāre gāḍivāṇa cāka*”
(Old woman says): “In your head is a wheel, big like the wheel
of a cart”.
- 71: *bayāna mājhyā kela tevaḍayāta rūpa dhāraṇa*
The woman changes her shape in a moment,
- 72: *badalaṭi mhaṇe māyānā*
changes with power.
- 73: *gāḍicā cāka kelā ḍoḷā*
Makes eyes, big like wheels of a cart,
- 74: *nāngaraphāḷa kele dāta*
teeth like a plough,
- 75: *āṇi bāyā mhaṇi āroḷi karūnī*
and the woman shouts loudly.
- 76: *soḍūnī halaviḷe mhaṇe tina tāsa*
She makes people shiver for three hours.
- 77: *bayā mhaṇāḷi tinhī tālāca gamana*
The woman wanders in the three worlds,
- 78: *āṇi gamana karūnī lakṣmī*
She wanders, merciful Laxmī,
- 79: *āṇi sāryā devācī lāḍakī re lakṣmī*
And all gods love Laxmī.
- 80: *māyā mhaṇāḷi vedīveḍi*
Māyā,—mad, mad,
- 81: *hātī jaharācī puḍi*
In her hand is a paper-bag with poison,
- 82: *lāgavove kavikāra karī māyā caraṇāvāra loṭa lakṣmī*
Humble Kavikāra trembles at Laxmī’s feet.

Explanatory remarks:

line

- 2: mad Laxmī: see A)/1.
- 3: As has already been mentioned, *māyā* normally means ‘illusion, magic power’, and remains untranslated, as also in line 2 of the song. Here *māyā* probably is regarded as ‘the energy of the Supreme Being, who, in union with her, produces all beings . . . Sakti, the widely worshipped goddess of India, is variously described as the consort of Śiva or Viṣṇu, or identified with Māyā’ (Thomas op. cit.: 5). As will be seen below, Mari/Laxmī is regarded as an incarnation of Śakti.

- 5: The first three words of the line are not clear, probably they refer to some foot ornament. *Sendūra* is vermilion, which is used for application on the stone idols of divinities. The priest or other religious functioners, who are in charge of the temples, have to apply vermilion from time to time on the idols.
- 6: *doḷayāta gārūḷi*: in eyes 'the white of madness'; mad people, or people who have fallen into a trance and 'behave like mad' may sometimes roll their eyeballs in such a way that only the white remains seen.
āṭhakūra meṇḍhī: 'an ewe with eight legs': The goddess is sometimes worshipped by sacrificing an ewe at the time, when the unborn baby-sheep already has its fur.
- 7: The goddess is referred to as 'woman'. *Tujha māyā bādāmadhye basalī*: *Māyā* has here to be understood as (magic) power, which becomes manifest in women, as the goddess always chooses the form of a woman for her incarnations.
- 8: This line has probably the meaning "Your next incarnation again will be a woman".
- 10: Laxmīāi wears all sorts of different ornaments.
- 11: *pānkha* is a large fan;
 Green for Māṅg and Mahār is a special colour. It is for example regarded as auspicious for the bride; and a young girl, who was married when she was still a child, is presented with green clothes and bangles on the day of her first menstruation. On the other hand a *haḍaḷa* ("witch") can be recognised, among other things, by wearing only green clothes.—Mari/Laxmī is sometimes represented by green glass-bangles.
- 12: *soḡyāca kājaḷa*: see A) /77.
- 13: 'she goes into the water' means that through the water diseases will come and kill many, who drank the water.
- 14: 'she eats liver and heart, she breaks the neck': This refers to the blood sacrifices, which are made to the goddess. Here the song is somewhat in contradiction with the actual belief of the people: I was told repeatedly that the blood sacrifices were offered in the name of the goddess, but that she "did not accept them but gave them to her guardian or charioteer" whose idol is found outside her temple. (see below)
- 20–21: see song A)
- 22: Bhujalaxmī *bhuja* means 'arm'; Bhujalaxmī therefore is 'Laxmī with many arms'.

- 23: Again nobody can recognise the goddess, as she has changed into the shape of a woman, suffering from *indrabhagā*.
- 24: *ṭāḷakarī*: cymbals which are beaten by devotees, while singing religious songs; *māḷakaryācī*: garlands or rosaries of wooden beads. "In Pandharpur is a rush of *ṭāḷakarī* instruments and rosaries of wooden beads" means that the fair has begun and thousands of pilgrims have come from everywhere to worship Vithoba.
- 25: *cañdana* tree: sandal tree (*santalum album*).
- 28: They kick her, because they do not recognise her.
- 32: *yeḷāi* an ornament for the upper arm.
- 36: Water is carried in a brass pot from a sacred river to a temple, to give bath to the idol. *Agarbattī* are incense sticks.
- 38: see song A). Vithal is *Viṣṇu*.
- 43: different names of Mari/Laxmī.
- 45-48: The goddess appears in the form of flies, in order to communicate diseases.
- 49: Laxmī walks in front of a procession, in which cymbals and *māḷa* (rosaries of *tulaṣī* beads) are carried—it is the procession, in which dead bodies are carried to a cremation ground or river. The goddess has sent dysentery and blood-vomiting, and people have died in such numbers that there is hardly space for the dead bodies.
- 51: *Gaṅgāmāilā* actually means 'to Mother Ganges', but Ganges does not only refer to the actual river Ganges but to any sacred river. In Maharashtra, when speaking of "the Gaṅga", usually the Godavari is meant. Here the word refers to the Candrabhaga, the local name of the river Bhima, on whose banks Pandharpur has been constructed.
- 57: *limb* tree: *azadirachta indica*. The limb tree is often regarded as an abode of ghosts and spirits.
- 59: The 'woman of Varakhed' is Laxmī.—Every year in April a fair of the goddess takes place at different places, the most important one being Varakhed, a small village on the banks of the Godavari. I was told two different stories which explain why the goddess is especially connected with Varakhed:

d) Laxmī originally lived at Paithan (the ancient Pratisthan), which is famous for a temple of Sant Ekanath, one of the "nine *nātha*".—One day the goddess appeared in the dream of the patil (head man) of Paithan and asked him to construct a temple for her. He refused, and a quarrel arose between the two. Finally Laxmīāi got angry and left the place. She moved about for some time. Finally she arrived at Varakhed

and asked the patil of this place to construct a temple for her. He agreed. Thus the goddess settled at Varakhed, but she is still attached to Paithan and regards the town as her 'first home'.

e) In the Godavari, near the village of Varakhed, there is a *ramdoha*, that is a place with dangerous currents and extraordinarily deep water. Once some shepherds happened to come with their flock of sheep to the river bank and saw a beautiful woman jumping from a rock into the river. They believed her to have died in the *ramdoha*, but to their great surprise the woman emerged from the deep water and called the men. The shepherds got scared, for they realized now that a goddess was standing in front of them. But the strange woman said, "Go to your *patil* and tell him to bring a *dhoti* (a man's lower garment of cotton cloth), seven feet long. Then spread the *dhoti* here"—she pointed at a certain place—"and with your own hands keep seven small heaps of rice-grains on it". The shepherds ran fast to meet their *patil*, who provided the *dhoti*. The cloth was kept in the place which the goddess had indicated, and seven small heaps of rice-grains were kept on it. Next morning, instead of the seven heaps of rice-grains, there were seven stones, already painted red with *śendūra* (vermilion). The middle stone, which was the biggest, was Laxmīāi herself, the six smaller ones were her sisters, the *asara* (*apsaras*), who live in rivers in such places, where the water is deep.—After this event Laxmī/Mari appeared in many other places as well, but Varakhed has remained the most important one of all.

As Varakhed is regarded a very important place for the worship of Mari/Laxmī, the goddess is also referred to as '*Varakhedcī āī*', i.e. 'Mother of Varakhed'.

- 60: *ivaṣīrānda*: a term of contempt for a woman; it can mean 'whore, concubine', but also 'widow'. I translated it here as 'foolish old woman'.
- 61: *āḍava* means literally 'across'.
- 65: Laxmīāi wants to test the woman by asking her to do her a good turn and search the lice from her head.
- 67–68: The old woman is busy with the two grand-children, thus Laxmī complains that she is given less importance than the children.
- 70: 'In your head there is a wheel, big like the wheel of a cart': The goddess has special relations to wheels. A wheel may represent her vehicle, when it is put up in front of her temple, and wheels were not permitted to turn in a village, where the goddess was present in the form of a disease. Thus a smallpox inspector of the government told me the following incident:

f) About ten years ago, cases of small-pox were reported from a certain village. The man took his jeep and went there, in order to vaccinate all villagers. When he reached the village border, he was stopped by inhabitants of the village and told that he could not proceed, as the

goddess had come to live in the village. The inspector explained why he had come, and a dispute arose among the villagers whether he should be permitted to perform his duty. Finally the villagers decided to ask the goddess herself.—The wheel of a bullock cart was placed in such a way on the ground that it could turn without difficulty. A *loṭa* (brass vessel) with water was placed in its centre, and five children were called, who had to press one finger each against the *loṭa*. Then the goddess was asked for a sign: If the wheel turned clockwise, it meant that she had no objection against the vaccination; if it turned anti-clockwise, Mariāi did not permit it.—After a short while the wheel began to turn in clockwise direction, and the inspector could vaccinate the people.

- 71: 'the woman': Mari/Laxmī.
- 76: That everyone, who sees the goddess, starts shaking can mean that people get scared because of her terrible looks; but it can also mean that many people get possessed by her and thus start trembling. On certain occasions, for example during the installation ceremony of a *potarāja*, when the goddess is invoked many times, many people may get possessed even against their wish: They stop, wherever they are, unable to continue walking; they roll their eyeballs and start shaking in a characteristic manner.
- 77: 'in the three worlds' means world, underworld, and heaven.
- 81: The meaning of this line is not quite clear. By poison probably are meant diseases which the goddess can inflict. The poison, wrapped in paper, is probably a symbol of her power of destruction.
- 82: Kavikāra is the name of the man who composed the song. By mentioning his own name in the last line, he follows an old tradition of Indian poets.

I want to give now three examples of songs which are sung by the *potarāja* when they go begging through the villages. As those songs were regarded as 'ordinary' by the *potarāja* themselves, I will give them only in their English translations.

Song C

1. There is the village of Varakhed.
2. The street talks.
3. Mother, nine lakh chariots have come to worship you.
4. There is the village of Varakhed.
5. There is trembling of buffalo-calf and goat,
6. There are uncountable hair-locks of coconuts and hens,
7. There is the village of Varakhed,

8. A bathroom made from glass,
9. The mother uses for her bath holy water from Kāśi.
10. There is the village of Varakhed,
11. There are many *loṭa*;
12. When she takes bath, the water goes to the river Ganga.
13. There is the village of Varakhed,
14. How much can I give and take,
15. Where can I see green lemons for the Mother's worship.
16. There is a carrier of a *pālakhī*;
17. The carrier walks slowly.
18. Their kerchiefs and shirts are drenched with sweet.
19. Near the *ramdoha*
20. We put up our seats.
21. From a long distance we recognise the flag of *Mahāmarī*.
22. *Halagi*-drum makes a *ṣaya-ṣayi* noise,
23. And with the Laxmī *pālakhī*
24. The *potarāja* comes walking on foot.
25. Oh mother, here I am.
26. In your ears are ear-rings.
27. Oh mother, the king of Kolapur stands here to worship you.
28. Oh mother, here I am; to which king do you give pleasure.
29. You hoist the flag of pearls.
30. There in Varakhed
31. The procession walks fast, fast,
32. In the hands there are flags and Mariāi comes to meet them.

Explanatory remarks:

line

- 1: Varakhed: see B)/59.
- 2: 'the street talks' means probably that all the people, who have come to attend the fair, make much noise in the street.
- 5: buffalo-calf (*reḍa*) and goat tremble, as many of them are offered as sacrifices to Mariāi. Buffalo calves are nowadays—at least in the area under survey—only sacrificed by members of the Māṅg community. If a man takes the vow to offer a *reḍa*, he takes the animal to the temple and chops off its head. The head and the right front leg as well as the blood belong to the goddess—who is supposed to give the offerings to her 'watchman' (see below)—the rest of the animal is taken to a place that had been decided

upon before, and is cooked there. At first five married women have to be treated with the meat-curry, then the man who made the sacrifice and his family members may eat.

Goats are normally killed by a *mullana*, a Muslim priest, who receives Rupees 1.25 and the skin of the animal for performing the sacrifice.

- 6: Coconuts as well as chicken are also offered. But only cocks are killed in front of the image—(the *mullana* receives 25 Paise for the sacrifice). Hens are not killed; but a hen with *ulatyā parācī* (feathers, which are turned upside down, i.e. if the feathers on the back of the chicken do not grow in the usual, but in the opposite direction, pointing towards the head) may be used for an offering. However, those hens are not killed, but they are taken at evening time to the temple, “shown” to the goddess and thrown towards the river.
- 9: ‘the mother’ refers to the goddess. ‘Water from Kasi’ (Benares) means water from the holy river Ganges; as already mentioned, not only the real Ganges is regarded as ‘holy river’ and referred to as ‘Ganga’, but also a number of other rivers in India, among them the Godavari, on whose banks Varakhed is situated.
- 11: *lota*: a water vessel of brass or stainless steel; in such vessels devotees bring water from the Godavari and pour it over the image of the goddess in order to ‘give her a bath’.
- 15: Green lemons are used for worshipping the goddess.
- 16: To the fair of Varakhed many *pālakhī* (palanquins) or *ratha* (chariots) are brought from other temples. Those *pālakhī* are beautifully decorated sedan chairs, in which an idol of the respective divinity of a temple is carried by four male devotees of any caste. The *pālakhī*-bearers are called *bhoī*⁶.—It is a custom that on the occasion of the fair at a certain temple such *pālakhī* are brought from far and wide. At the great festival at Pandharpur, for example, about 60 palanquins from all over Maharashtra flock to the sacred place (Mate 1970: 215). The number of *pālakhī* coming to Varakhed is smaller, but nevertheless the spectacle is impressive, as each *pālakhī* is carried in a large procession, accompanied by colourful flags. Often there are *bhajan* parties, who come walking with the *pālakhī*, singing religious songs.
- Of all the palanquins which are carried to Varakhed at the time

6. This is actually the name of a caste of fishermen and sedan-bearers. The real Bhoi are a group of the Kaibartta, i.e. the modern Kewat, of Bengal.

of the fair, the one which comes from the temple of Sant Ekanāth at Paithan is the most important one. The fair at Varakhed cannot start, before the Paithan *pālakhī* has arrived. There is also an explanation why that is so:

Many *Māng* and *Mahār* are followers of the Nātha cult. This cult, which is very old, originated in Bengal and spread probably in the thirteenth century to other parts of India. The cult is closely connected with the doctrines of Yoga (Sen 1961: 69, Gonda 1963: 222). Ekanāth, the great-grandson of a certain Bhanudas, whose name is closely connected with Pandharpur and Vithoba, is in Maharashtra regarded as one of the “*nine nātha*” (i.e. ‘protector, leader’), who are worshipped by the followers of the cult. He was one of the famous poet saints of Maharashtra and has his temple at Paithan.—Laxmiāi is regarded as the “elder sister” of the *nine nātha*, and a story gives us the reason for her special relation with Ekanāth:

g) Once Laxmiāi went without clothes to the city of Paithan. Ekanāth saw her from far and felt awkward. He managed to get a sari and a blouse for the goddess to wear, but then he realized that she was still on the opposite side of the river, and the Godavari was full of water, so that he could not get near her to hand over the clothes. But he knew what had to be done: He took a *dhoti* and spread it on the water. Walking on this *dhoti*, he crossed the river, met the goddess and made her wear the clothes. Then he brought her to Paithan and offered her a place at his right side. Her image can be seen even today near Ekanāth’s temple. Ekanāth and Laxmi promised each other: “My fair will take place only, after your *pālakhī* has arrived”, that means that the sedan-chair from the temple of Ekanāth has to reach Varakhed, before the main sacrifice can be performed there, and at the time of the fair at Paithan the *pālakhī* with the image of Laxmi/Mari has to arrive—only then can the main ceremonies start in the temple of Ekanāth.

- 19: *ramdoha*: a place in the river, where the water is deep and dangerous; the sisters of Laxmi are supposed to live in the *ramdoha*.
 22: The procession, in which the *pālakhī* is carried, is accompanied by people carrying drums and other musical instruments.
 32: Mariāi expects the pilgrims, who come, carrying colourful flags.

Song D

1. There in Pandharpur,
2. Sant Ekādaś of Namala
3. And the *tulaśī*-plant outside.
4. Apply *gaṇdhī* to the *tulaśī*,
5. And take Govinda’s name.

6. Offer garlands to the *tulaṣī*,
7. And your sin will vanish.
8. Apply *buka* on the *tulaṣī*,
9. Apply *buka* and go.
10. Apply *kuṅkū* on the *tulaṣī*.
11. Sant Sakhu applies *kuṅkū* and goes.

Explanatory remarks:

line

- 1: That the goddess has some connection with Pandharpur has already been mentioned above.
- 2: Ekādas: *Ekādaśī* is the eleventh day of every fortnight in the moon calendar. The *ekādaśī* day is important for the members of the Varkari sect, who make pilgrimages to Pandharpur, or at least keep a fast on this day.—*Ekādaś* was a saint of the so-called Varkari sect, which is mentioned in Marathi literature already in the 13th century. Members of the sect have to give up certain things like liquor, meat, fish, another's money, and sexual intercourse with another's wife. They have to wear a necklace made from basil wood (the wood of the *tulaṣī* plant) round their necks, observe the fast on every *ekādaśī* day, worship Vithoba of Pandharpur and visit his shrine regularly. The pilgrimages are called *vari*, hence the name of the sect (*varkāri* is 'one who goes to Pandharpur again and again'). The songs of the great poet saints of the Varkari sect are sung even today everywhere in Maharashtra. In the years, when the former capital of the country, Paithan, was in the hands of the Muslims and Maharashtra was without a Hindu king and had no patronage of native kings, it were the Varkari poet saints and the Vithoba shrine at Pandharpur, which preserved the unity of the state. (Karve op cit.: 190–191, Mate op. cit.: 212–213)
- 3: *Tulaṣī* plant: *ozymum sanctum*.
The *tulaṣī* "... is believed to be an incarnation of the wife of Viṣṇu, and every pious Vaiṣṇava takes care to plant and water a *tulaṣī* plant in his compound. The daily circumambulation of the plant is a meritorious act of worship and its leaves are believed to be capable of purifying the soul and the body" (Thomas 1973: 31).
- 4: *gaṅdhī*: a white mark.

- 5: Govinda is another name for Kṛṣṇa, who is an incarnation of Viṣṇu; also Vithoba is believed to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu.
- 8: *buka*: black, fragrant powder for ceremonial purposes.
- 10: *kuṅkū*: A red powder contained in the fruit of mallotus philippinensis. *Kuṅkū* is used for ceremonial purposes; thus for example participants in a religious or social function are greeted by making auspicious marks with red *kuṅkū* paste on their foreheads.

Song E

1. There is the street of Pandari,
2. The whole family goes to the street of Pandari.
3. In the wind one can hear the *pothī* praising Vithal
4. Sant Jana cleans the field of *ova*.
5. In the wind the flute of Vithal can be heard.
6. From here we can see
7. The green building of Pandhari.
8. Here Lava and Ankus walk for their bath.
9. Pandari, Pandari,
10. Don't repeat it like mad.
11. The water of the river Candrabhaga runs like a horse.
12. In Pandharpur.
13. Catching the people,
14. The breath of the mother flows, and people get scared.

Explanatory remarks:

line

- 1: Pandari is Pandharpur.
- 3: *pothī*: a religious book of loose sheets; here the songs, contained in the religious book, are meant.
- 4: *ova*: a plant whose seeds are used for medical purposes.
- 7: 'green building': the temple of Pandharpur.
- 8: Lava and Ankus: Probably Lava and Kuṣa, sons of Rāma. The twins were brought up by the sage Valmiki, and they were taught by the poet to repeat his epic Rāmāyaṇa at assemblies. (Apte)
- 13-14: 'the breath of the mother flows': maybe this should be understood as a reference to the belief that the goddess sends diseases.

The Goddess

Using the texts of the above songs and stories, additional informations by Māñg and Mahār informants, as well as references in literature, I want to discuss now those aspects of the goddess which seem to be the more important ones.

Name and mythical origin of the goddess

The most common names for the goddess in the area under survey are Laxmī(āi) and Mari or Mariāi. In the above songs she is mostly referred to as Laxmī. Usually people speak of her as Laxmī(āi) or Laxmibāi, when they want to emphasize her benevolent aspects (like granting children to her devotees), and as Mari, when they want to refer to her terror-aspect (sending diseases and other misfortune).

It is evident, that apart from the name the goddess has nothing much in common with the Hindu goddess Lakṣmī, who was connected with good and had fortune only in very very early times. At about the middle of the first millennium A.D., Lakṣmī became considered as the wife of Viṣṇu and found her definite place in the Hindu pantheon (Gonda 1963: 116). From then onwards she was considered as the goddess of luck, wealth, and material prosperity. She is renowned for virtues which we consider feminine. Especially she is devoted to her husband. When Viṣṇu descended to the earth in various incarnations, Lakṣmī accompanied him. Thus she became incarnated as Sītā in Viṣṇu's Rāmacañdra *avatāra*; as Rukmiṇī she became the principal wife of Kṛṣṇa. In other *avatāras* she assumed appropriate forms and kept her husband company during his sojourns in worlds other than Vaikuṅtha, Viṣṇu's heaven (Thomas op. cit.: 41, Jons 1967: 91).

Laxmīāi/Mariāi has much more in common with Durgā and Kālī than with their 'sister-in-law', Lakṣmī (see also Vetschera 1976).—I am quoting a few lines from Thomas (pp. 39–40) which inform us about the most important aspects of those two goddesses:

“Durga is represented in art as a woman of gentle countenance with ten arms in each of which she holds a weapon. With one foot she presses on the body of Mahisha and the other rests on her *vahan* (vehicle), the lion, which is depicted as lacerating the body of Mahisha. She wears a crown on her head and her clothes are magnificently jewelled.

The most formidable aspect of the consort of Shiva is Kali, who,

it is said, destroyed Kal, Time, itself. Kali is widely worshipped in India as the goddess of terror and the lower classes are particularly devoted to her. Most of the devil dances, dark rites and obscene ceremonials practised in India can be traced to her. She is the goddess of epidemic diseases and catalysms. She is evidently of non-Aryan origin, a relic of aboriginal savagery incorporated in Hinduism as the personification of destruction.

Kali is propitiated by sacrifices of animals and birds. At one time men were also offered to her as victims. . . . Kali is also worshipped in different forms by thieves and many criminal tribes in India.

Kali's insatiable thirst for blood was occasioned by the circumstance of her having killed an Asura named Raktavira whose blood she drank. This Asura had received a boon from Brahma by the power of which every drop of his blood that fell on the ground became capable of creating innumerable Asuras like himself. Kali in her fight with him held him aloof, pierced him with a spear and drank every drop of blood that gushed from his wound and thus managed to kill him.

Kali is represented in art as a black, half-naked woman of terrible aspects, with claws and tusks, wearing a garland of skulls, her tongue hanging out and a mouth dripping blood."

Let us now return to the more common name of the goddess, Mari. —Although the goddess is probably of Southern origin, in Dravidian languages hardly a word can be found from which her name Mari could be derived. The Tamil word *māri*, for example, means 'water, rain, shower, cloud, toddy, liquor' (Burrow-Emeneau). But *mara* in Sanskrit means 'death, earth', *maraka*: 'plague, murrain, pestilence, an epidemic', and *māri* means 'pestilence, plague, killing, ruin (Apte), and 'death, pestilence, smallpox, killing, slaying, and rain' according to Monnier-Williams.

As far as the origin of the goddess is concerned, tales in Maharashtra seem to be found with difficulty. I was told, for example, that the idol of the goddess was dug up, when the English were constructing a tank in Bombay, and that from that time onwards the goddess began to 'move about'; or that she lived in her *Ādimāi*-form on the ground of the sea and came to the surface, when she heard *Mātaṅga*'s prayer.—In the South, on the other hand, tales about the origin of Mari or Mariamma are many, for example the following two stories:

- x) "One of the nine great Rishis in the olden days, named Piruhu, had a wife named Nagavali, equally famed for her beauty and her virtue. One day, when the Rishi was away from home, the Trimurti came to visit her, to see

whether she was as beautiful and virtuous as reported. Not knowing who they were, and resenting their intrusion, she had them changed into little children. They naturally took offence and cursed her, so that her beauty faded away, and her face became dotted with marks like those of the small-pox. When Piruhu returned, and found her thus disfigured, he drove her away, and declared that she should be born a demon in the next world, and cause the spread of a disease, which would make people like herself. In memory of the change which Piruhu found in her, she was called Mari, i.e. changed, in the next birth" (Whitehead 1921: 115).

x) Another story about the origin of Mari is that she was the wife of the Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar, who was a Pariah, that she got small-pox and went from house to house begging for food and fanning herself with *margosa* leaves to keep the flies from her sores. When she recovered, the people worshipped her as the goddess of small-pox, and hung up *margosa* leaves over their doors to keep the small-pox away (ibid.: 115-116).

Another one is the very well known story about Viṣṇu's Paraśurāma-avatāra, in which he was ordered by his father Jamadagni to kill his mother Reṇuka. Here some details change, even if the essence of the story remains the same:

x) "Mariamma was the wife of Jamadagni, a famous Rishi (Vedic seer). She was so chaste in mind that she could carry water in a mass without any vessel, and that her wet clothes would fly up into the air and remain there till they were dry. One day, as she was coming home from bathing, some of the Gandharvas, or heavenly singers, flew over her, and she saw their reflection in the ball of water in her hand. She could not help admiring their beauty; and, through this slight lapse from the perfect ideal of chastity, she lost her power, the water flowed down to the ground, and her cloth fell from the sky. So she arrived home with no water and with a wet cloth. The Rishi questioned her as to the meaning of this and she confessed her fault. Her stern husband ordered her son Parasurama to take her into the wilderness and cut off her head. So the son took his mother away, and in her longing for sympathy Mariamma embraced a Pariah woman in her arms, whom they met when they came to the appointed place. So Parasurama cut off both their heads together and went back in great sorrow. His father promised him any reward he chose to ask in return for his obedience: so Parasurama asked that his mother might be restored to life. The father granted his request and gave him some water in a vessel and a cane, telling him to put his mother's head on her body, sprinkle the water on her, and tap her with the cane. In his eager haste he put his mother's head on the body of the Pariah woman and vice versa, and restored them both to life. 'The woman with the Brahman head and Pariah body was afterwards worshipped as Mariamma; while the woman with the Pariah head and Brahman body was worshipped as the goddess Yellamma. To Yellamma buffaloes are sacrificed; but to Mariamma goats and cocks, but no buffaloes" (ibid.: 116-117).

Other names of the goddess

In the songs, which I quoted above, the following names of the

goddess were mentioned: Laxmī(āi), Mari(āi), Marimā, Mahāmari, Ādimāi and Ādimāyā, Yelammā, Kālūmā, Khristimā, Sivaśakti, and Varakhedci Ai (Mother of Varakhed).

In addition to those names I was told the following ones by another informant: Tukaāi (in the temple of Tuljapur), Aṭharbhujī (in Caturshingi), Aṭhabhujī Pārvatī (in Poona), Atharbhujī Māmādevi (in Bombay)⁷, Yammāi in Mahurgad, Kālikamātā in Konkan, Tukabāi in Buranagar, Laxmībāi (i.e. 'woman Laxmī') in Paithan, and Mahā-laxmī in Varakhed.—But I want to mention that this was told to me by an informant who otherwise turned out to be rather unreliable, and that in the case of the names of the goddess I had no possibility to re-check the informations.

Besides the names mentioned above, the goddess is referred to as 'woman', 'mad woman', 'mad one', and 'mad incarnation of Māyā'.

In the beginning, when I got confused hearing all the different names and continued asking questions about them, I was told again and again, that "Laxmī was one, but had different names and forms of appearances".—The same situation can be found in South India. Thus Whitehead reports, talking about the many different goddesses in the Telugu country, "The people often told me: They are only different names for one and the same goddess" (Whitehead op. cit.: 31).

Outward appearance of the goddess

Mari/Laxmī can change her shape within a moment. In song B) she changes into a beggar woman, whose body is covered with sores, then into a young girl of twelve years, who carried pots (probably containing holy water) to Pandharpur, and finally into her terrible form.

In song A) the goddess is described as beautiful, holding an arrow in her hand and sitting on a lion. From songs A), B), and C) we learn that she wears a nose ring or a pearl ornament in her nose, earrings or a flower ornament in the ear, bangles on her wrists and a 'yeḷā'-ornament on her upper arm; her eyes are lined with *soḡyāca kājaḷa*, the black paste made of lamp black and oil, which women use for their eye make-up. Her eyes are white like the eyes of mad people. She wears a green blouse and carries a large, white fan in her hand. She smells for one mile like the sandal tree.

In her terrible form of appearance her tongue is long like an arm, on her head on a huge wheel (the symbol of the goddess), her eyes

7. Those names refer to the goddess having eight arms.

become big like the wheels of a cart, her teeth like a plough, and in her hand is poison, wrapped in paper.

Some of those details remind us of Kālī, who is usually depicted as a dark, half naked woman of terrible aspect, with her tongue hanging out, tusk-like teeth and her mouth dripping blood.

Talking about Adimāi in connection with story a), people said that she had 360 different female forms of appearance, all of them shining and beautiful. Otherwise nothing else was known about her. Those 360 different forms of appearance seem to indicate a connection with Uṣas, one of the oldest vedic deities. Uṣas is the goddess of rosy dawn, who is reborn every day to drive away the darkness. Her appearance is brilliant and bright, and the light which she emanates brings gifts, pleasure, glory, prosperity, and luck (Gonda 1960: 91). (In this connection it may be interesting to note that Whitehead came across the idol of one Bisal-Marimma in Mysore City. Bisal in Canarese means sunlight, and he believes that the goddess was originally connected with sun worship (Whitehead op. cit.: 29)).

The small silver-pendants that are worn by the *potarāja* depict the goddess in different forms. Sometimes she is shown standing on the ground, placing one foot on the back of an animal, probably a buffalo. The upper part of the figure is nude, the lower part covered with a cloth with many folds and decorations. On the head she wears a crownlike ornament. There are jewels round her neck, in her ears, and on her upper arms, and bangles on her wrists. The symbol of the moon can be seen at the left side, and that of the sun on the right side of her head. The goddess has four arms, in which she carries a trident, a dagger, and a whip. Sometimes one hand is empty, sometimes she is holding a lotus in her fourth hand. Quite often the objects are not depicted clearly and cannot be recognized. Often her eyes and breasts are shown as large and protruding.

In the temples again the ways of depicting the goddess are different: There may be seven huge stones, or seven (sometimes even only five) small stones in a row, all of them red with vermilion. But there may also be a small human figure with a dark face, dressed in a blouse and a sari. If in a village there is no temple of Mari/Laxmī, the goddess is sometimes represented by a small chariot (*gāḍā*) and some green bangles, which are kept near the roads at some distance from the village border.

Functions of the goddess

Mari/Laxmī is closely connected with small-pox, especially in the south of India, and with cholera in other parts of the country. She inflicts the diseases when she gets angry, but she can also remove them again, when she has been appeased by the way of sacrifices. But we cannot simply call the goddess a 'small-pox goddess' or a 'cholera goddess', as she is usually not connected with one disease alone. Thus I quoted an incident which shows clearly that she is also connected with small-pox, although in Maharashtra she is normally held responsible for epidemics of cholera.

Except for diseases, the goddess may also be responsible for draught and other misfortune. But, on the other hand, she has also positive aspects; thus she may install children on barren women. Such women offer small cradles or cots of silver to the goddess, or promise to make their son a priest of Mariāi, if the goddess fulfills their wish.

Robertson writes: "It is hard to say whether this godling (Mariāi) performs any public service except in days when cholera or bubonic plague or small-pox ravages the populace" (Robertson op. cit.: 67).—This may hold true for the higher castes of the Hindu society, who perform sacrifices to the goddess only at the time of epidemics. But I do not think we may thus generalize, considering the lowest castes, and especially the Māṅg and Mahār, who form the bulk of Harijans or former untouchables of Maharashtra.

Similar to the boundary goddess Kālī of the Tanjore district (Whitehead op. cit.: 32), also Mariāi has the function to prevent any evil coming from without into the village of which she is guardian⁸. Not only does she protect the villages from diseases—apart from those which she inflicts herself, when she gets angry—but also from evil spirits. While Mariāi keeps watch that no ghosts enter the village from outside, Veṭaḷa, the 'knight of the ghosts', is supposed to guard against any evil arising within the village itself.—Mariāi's function as guard against

8. Karve gives the name of Mari-ai or Laxmī along with the following names of goddesses in a list of *gram daivata* or village deities of Maharashtra: Jannidevi, Manai, Gaondevi or Gawdi or Gawdubai, Padmavati or Padubai, Sukai, Baglai, Sadai, Jogeshwari, Devalai, Kalkai, Waghjai, Zolai, Mahakali, Chandika or Chankai, Kalashri, Navlai, Vaghubai, Vajubai, Vithlai, Mavaladevi, Navasari or Nava Shri, Dhavlai, Bhavani, Bahiri, Kalubai, Ambubai (Karve op. cit.: 187).—It may be noted that e.g. Gaondevi means nothing else but 'village goddess', or that some goddesses are named after the village in which they are found, e.g. Vajubai is the goddess of the village Vaje. Of course, a large number of names could still be added to this list.

evil spirits becomes evident at the time of marriage: The bridegroom, on his way to the village of the bride, where the wedding ceremony will be performed, has to break a coconut for Mariāi at the border of each village which he passes by on his journey. By these coconut-sacrifices he hopes not only to pacify the goddess herself, but also to cause her to protect him against evil spirits who might otherwise harm him; because during the days of wedding the bodies of bride and bridegroom are appointed with yellow turmeric-paste, and therefore are much more exposed to the influence of ill-willing supernatural beings than at other times (see Vetschera 1974: 95).

Finally we should mention one more function of less importance: Iravati Karve made a survey in Maharashtra and interviewed 1,416 people about '*kuladaivata*', i.e. chief deity of a particular patri-family. Of all people questioned, 14 said that Mariāi was their special 'family goddess' (Karve op. cit.: 185).

Character and qualities of the goddess

To have a more direct approach towards an understanding of the ideas which people have about their goddess, it might help to have a look at the songs again.

From song A) only a few traits of her character can be understood:

—Apparently the goddess likes to speak in riddles and to put people to the test. Thus she tells Telaṅga at first to bring water from the 'middle-floor' (or 'middle of the palm-tree'). He succeeds only, as Śiva, fulfilling Pārvatī's request, shoots his arrow at the tree and the water starts falling. Then the goddess gives Telaṅga instructions, how to carry the water, and he needs Pārvatī's help, who advises him to bring the water in his eye-lids. Finally Mari/Laxmī speaks in such a way about drinking the water that Telaṅga again cannot follow and needs Mataṅga's help.—The "three trials" of the hero are a worldwide motif in folklore. In our song Telaṅga fails the test, and Mātaṅga, the Māṅg, is given the whip, by which he becomes *potarāja*.

Songs B) and C) provide some more informations:

—The goddess accepts sacrifices ('accepts sheep as sacrifice', 'eats liver and heart, breaks the neck', 'breaks head', 'there is trembling of buffalocalf and goat', 'there are coconuts and hens', 'she is given bath with Ganges water', 'there are green lemons for her worship').

—She causes diseases: 'she goes into the water' (probably in order to

spoil it), 'she causes blood vomiting', 'she comes in the shape of flies and sits on human beings' (flies spread diseases), 'she is vomiting and dysentery'. In song E) we are told that 'her breath catches people and scares them'.

- She is vindictive: People kick her, when she turns into a woman suffering from sores, and they neither recognise her, when she becomes a girl of twelve years. The goddess does not tolerate to be neglected and causes diseases, which make many people die. She herself walks in the procession of the dead bodies.
- The goddess likes teasing people: When the old woman (song B) gets scared of the 'flood of dead bodies' and returns from the river, Laximīāi wants to sit in front of her and scare her.
- She cannot bear to be neglected: When the old woman, who apparently is busy looking after her grandsons, refuses to search the lice from Laxmī/Mari's head, the goddess gets angry and changes into her fierce appearance.
- She can change her shape in half a moment.
- She moves in 'three world's, i.e. in the world of the mortals, in underworld, and in heaven.
- All gods love her.
- She is connected with Pandharpur.
- She causes trance: People, who see her, start shaking.

From the stories we get the following additional informations:

- Mari/Laxmī appears in the dreams of people and requests them that a temple should be constructed for her.
- She prefers to deal with the *patil* (i.e. the head man) of a village.
- She is connected with Paithan.
- Wheels must not turn, when she is present in a village.

As I mentioned above that the goddess accepts sacrifices, I would like to add a few words in this context:

Usually the offerings for the goddess are simple. At first her image is given bath, by pouring water of a holy river (in Varakhed from the Godavari) over her image. Then a coconut is broken, a small piece of it is kept near the goddess, and the rest is distributed to other people. *Uḍabattī* (incense sticks) are lit, and sometimes five or seven *pūrī* (small bread of wheat flour, fried in clarified butter) with *gūḷ* (unrefined sugar) and rice are offered, but of this number only one is given to the goddess and the others to her 'watchman'. The *pūrī* for the watchman may also contain meat, if such a vow had been made

before.

The Marathi name of the 'watchman' is Kotawāla. Other names of his are Gāḍivāna (chariot driver), Saitāna (demon), or Maṅgir?) The idol of the Kotawāla is found outside Mariāi's temple. The most striking feature of the Kotawāla is that according to the belief of many people it is he, who receives the blood-sacrifices and not the goddess. Even if an animal is killed in the name of the goddess, she does not "eat" (i.e. accept) it, but gives it to her watchman and charioteer, who is believed to carry the chariot, in which the goddess rides.—Of course there are again different explanations why that is so:

h) In former times the demon helped Mariāi once to build a temple, to wage a war against her enemies, and to dig a well. As a reward she promised him to leave him all the blood sacrifices, which are brought to her temple.

i) Once there was a demon, who had a buffalo as a pet. When the buffalo became old, the demon took a vow and said, "I will give the buffalo to Mariāi". Then he killed the animal, prepared it as food and offered it to the goddess. But Mariāi refused to accept it, so the kotawāla ate it himself, and even now he is given the meat of the buffaloes which are offered to the goddess.

j) Once the goddess had to fight with the demon Mahihasura. While struggling, she stabbed him with her dagger. When he felt that now he had to die, he touched the feet of the goddess and said, "Now I have seen that you are greater than me. You have defeated me and I am dying. Fulfill me one wish at least: Of all the gifts which you receive give me at least the blood of the buffalo"—for the buffalo is the vehicle of Mahihasura (see Vetschera 1976: 454).

This last one is a well known story from Hindu mythology: The buffalo demon Mahihasur or Mahisa had gained much power by practicing austerities. When the gods were afraid that he would drive them from their celestial kingdom, they created the goddess Dūrḡa, armed her, and sent her forth against Mahisa. The demon attacked her in many forms, but finally was killed by Dūrḡa with a spear (see Jons 1967: 93).

Of all the blood sacrifices the buffalo sacrifice is the most important one. Even if otherwise very often goats are offered, the victim at important occasions is a *reḍa*, i.e. a male buffalo calf. Such occasions are for example the big annual fair at Varakhed, or the installation ceremony of a new *potarāja*.—I think we should not overemphasize the fact that the buffalo, which is offered in the name of Mariāi, finally is "eaten" by her *kotawāla* or *gāḍivanā*. I am at present more inclined to regard this as a local peculiarity, but of course more research will have to be done to clarify the matter. The fact remains

that the goddess is closely connected with the buffalo sacrifice. This does not hold true only for the area under survey, but also other parts of India:

Thus in Berar a buffalo is purchased by the whole village at the time of the Dasera festival and offered by the 'main Mahār to the goddess (Robertson op. cit.: 69).—In Nimar District buffalo calves were offered at the time of cholera to Mata Mari (Fuchs 1950: 276), and the meat was then distributed to low-caste people. In the south of India the buffalo sacrifice is very common, and many stories are told which explain the origin of the same. One has already been given earlier in another context; another one is the following one, which is found all over the Telugu country, and which explains the prominent part taken by Pariahs (untouchable caste of the South) in the buffalo sacrifice and in the worship of the village goddesses:

x) There lived a karnam (village accountant) who had a daughter. A Pariah, who was well versed in the Vedas, managed to marry her in the disguise of a Brahman. They lived together for some time and had children. By some incident, the mother of the man came to know about the marriage, and managed to come and live in her son's house. Because of her conduct and way of speaking, the daughter-in-law realised that she had been married to a low-caste man and burnt herself alive. "When she was about to be burnt in the fire, she vowed that her husband should be brought before her and beheaded, that one of his legs should be cut off and put in his mouth"... By virtue of her great merit in expiating the sin she had involuntarily committed, she reappeared in the village in a divine form. The villagers seized her husband and treated him in the way, the woman had told them (Whitehead, op. cit.: 117).

It is interesting that in the stories also the way of killing the buffalo is described: The animal should be beheaded, and for one reason or the other his legs, or at least one of his legs, should be cut off and put into his mouth. Even if all the stories quoted are from South-India, the same procedure is followed when a buffalo is offered to Mariāi in Maharashtra.

Geographical spread of the Mari/Laxmī worship

It has already been mentioned before that Mari/Laxmī is worshipped all over Maharashtra, especially by members of the Māñg and Mahār castes, and that the goddess—or at least the type of goddess, which is represented by Mari/Laxmī—is of great importance in South India. But in the south of the country the situation is not everywhere the same: Especially we have to distinguish between the Tamil-speaking and Telugu-speaking parts of the country. "In the Tamil area the

functions of the different 'mother goddesses' are much less clearly defined and separated from each other than in the Telugu speaking areas, where Hinduism had a stronger influence also in the villages" (Gonda 1963: 4)⁹.

Whitehead, on the other hand, is of the opinion that "the functions of the different goddesses are not at all clearly marked in the Telugu country. . . . In some places there is a special small-pox goddess, e.g. Gangamma; but as a rule the infliction and removal of epidemics and disasters is a general function of all goddesses alike. On the other hand, in the Coimbatore, Tanjore, and Trichinopoly districts, of the Tamil country where the people have been for many generations past more influenced by civilization and Brahmanism than in the Telugu country, I found that the functions of different deities were far more differentiated and that often elaborate stories were current as to their origin and characters" (Whitehead op. cit.: 31).

However, most authors agree that the names Mari, Mariamma, Mariyamma, or Mariyattal (Pisani 1969: 106, Whitehead op. cit.: 31, Gonda 1963: 4) are common in Tamiland, where this goddess is worshipped as goddess of small-pox in almost every village. In the Telugu country Polearamma and Gangamma have the same function and seem to be better known than Mari. (ibid).

Even outside South-India and Maharashtra, Mari/Laxmī is well known. But it is interesting to note that only in the South she is regarded as a goddess of small-pox, whereas everywhere else she is more connected with cholera.—Fuchs reports that the Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandla worship Mariai Mātā (Fuchs 1960: 526). The Patlia Bhil in Central India hold a procession of health in time of cholera, and their religious practitioners get possessed by Mariāi and chant all night songs in her honour (Crooke 1925: 127). When cholera appeared in the Rajput State of Bundi (now in Rajasthan), the goddess Mari was banished: "An equipage was prepared for her, decorated with funeral emblems, painted black and drawn by a double team of black oxen; bags of grain, also black, were put into her vehicle, so that the lady might not go forth without food, and driven by a man in sable vestments, followed by the yells of the populace. Mari was transported

9. 'Jedes Dorf, manchmal auch eine kleine Gruppe von Dörfern, kennt aber eine oder mehrere dieser Göttinnen, obwohl es z.B. zwischen dem am besten bekannten Tamilgebiet und dem Telugulande in dieser Hinsicht gewichtige Unterschiede gibt. Im ersteren werden nämlich die Funktionen dieser Gottheiten viel weniger klar auseinandergehalten als im letzteren, wo der Hinduismus auch in den Dörfern einen stärkeren Einfluß ausgeübt hat.

across the Chambal, with the commands of the priests that she should never again set foot in Kotah" (Tod, quoted in Crooke op. cit.: 128). The Balahis of Nimar District in the South of Madhya Pradesh believe that cholera is sent by a "dreadful goddess, Mari Mātā or Haiza. In their opinion there is only one way of escaping death from this disease: a propitiatory offering to the 'Great Mother'. If the goddess accepts the offering, the patient infected by the disease will recover" (Fuchs 1950: 180).

An incident quoted by Crooke even tells us the origin of Mari as cholera goddess in a certain place. "Once upon a time, when a Raja was building a bridge over the river Jargu near the famous fort of Cunar, it fell down several times, and at last the Raja was advised to have a Brahmin girl buried beneath the foundations. This was done and the bridge stood firm, but her ghost had become the Mari, or Cholera Mother, of the place, and when an epidemic is expected she must be propitiated with an offering of pigs and wine" (Crooke op. cit.: 110).

Another story, also quoted by Crooke, shows us that the goddess was also known and feared in Uttar Pradesh: When Safdar Jang, who was Nawab of Oudh between 1739 and 1754, was building the town of Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh), he received a robe of honour from the Emperor of Delhi. When he opened the box, he found an image of Mari Bhavani, and became so alarmed that he abandoned the site, where a fair is now held in honour of the goddess (Crooke op. cit.: 125).

Of course we could easily find more references to substantiate the fact that a cholera goddess by the name of Mari or Mariāi is worshipped almost everywhere in India, but I feel that those examples from places from all over the country should at present be sufficient.

The goddess as mother goddess

Talking of Mariāi or godlings of a similar type, many authors refer to them as mother-goddesses. They regard this as justified not only considering the functions of the goddesses (mainly their connection with fertility), but mostly from the simple fact that the local people refer to them as āi ('mother') in Maharashtra, or amma in South India; and amma, too, means nothing else but 'mother'.

Karmarkar speaks of the 'Mother Goddess Amma' as of the 'Supreme Creatrix of the universe' and of the 'figure of the mighty Mother of Nature'. He believes the Mother Goddess Amma to be the same as the Sumerian Ama (Karmarkar 1950: 36), and sees her repre-

sented not only in the Indian goddesses Adya-Śakti, Kālī, and others, but also in Egyptian Isis, in Aphrodite, Astarte, Babylonian Mylitta, Mexican Ish, African Selembo, Roman Juno, Northern Freia, and many others (ibid.: 92).

Returning to the cult of the mother-goddess in India he says that 'no direct reference is made to her in the Ṛgveda'¹⁰, which implies that she cannot be considered an aryan deity.

Karve regards the cult of the mother-goddess as representing one of the oldest deities worshipped "from the Mediterranean right up to India" (Karve op. cit.: 185).

Gonda, on the other hand, regards the problem as more complicated: He says that Indian folk religion has preserved many old traits. One of its characteristics is that, apart from Viṣṇu and Śiva, who are worshipped by Brahmans in an adequate manner in bigger temples, people expect of all other gods help, but at the same time they fear their wrath. Most of those other divinities are female; their characters are very different from the gods of the Hindu Sanskrit texts. They are neither objects of a theology, nor are they integrated into a philosophical system, and they deal only with the wrath and well-being of the villagers. Brahmans often recognize the specific powers of such divinities, but they participate in their cults only in exceptional cases. . . . The goddesses of the type of Mari (Mariamma) are connected with life, protection, and fertility; this connection can also be seen from their name 'amma', which, although mostly translated as 'mother', rather corresponds to our 'lady'. Many of those goddesses function as village goddess, but Gonda continues that-people in a village that takes shelter with one such goddess do not automatically venerate her as 'mother'; nor does it mean that we may attribute the qualities of the 'mother-goddess' of other people too carelessly to those divinities" (Gonda 1963: pp. 4 and 7).

The seven sisters

We have seen that in Maharashtra Mariāi is often represented in the form of seven unhewn stones. The middle one is bigger than the others, because it represents the goddess, whereas the smaller ones repre-

10. "The Rgveda does not refer to any cult of Sakti, so that it could have acted as the origin of the later all-pervading nature of the Mother Goddess. . . . There is however an indirect reference made to the Mother Goddess in the Rgveda. . . . The pertinent point under consideration is that the 'female (mother Goddess) is said to be joying and triumphing in the arts of the magic' (Rgveda VII, 104.24) (Karmarkar op. cit.: 96).

sent her sisters, the *asras* (*apsaras*).

The *apsaras* in Hindu mythology are beautiful nymphs, who have their abodes in waters, forests, or in the air. In the Atharvaveda samhita they belong to the evil spirits, who live in the bodies of the possessed, whereas in the Upanishads they are celestial beings who welcome the dead in the world of Brahma. Later on they are flirtatious nymphs, who seduce ascetics (Gonda 1960: 100).

It is not quite clear, how Mari/Laxmi came to be connected with the *asras*. Probably this is but a local interpretation, whereas the seven stones, representing the goddess (or different goddesses) are very common not only in Maharashtra and in the South, but also in other parts of India. Crooke, for example, reports of seven godlings who are worshipped in Bengal and who preside over witchcraft. Then he mentions the 'seven godlings of the Deccan' who control various diseases: Pochamma small-pox, Mariamma cholera, Mutiyamma typhoid fever, Dugalamma cough, while Bangaramma presides over gold, and Mahishamma over buffaloes; Ilamma is the general protectrix (Crooke op. cit.: 122).

In the south of India the so-called 'seven sisters' are the most prominent of the femal deities. Their names differ widely from each other, depending on the geographical area. Their specific functions are not always identical and are not at all clearly defined. The 'sisters' cause and cure certain dreaded diseases and are guardians of the village borders. Besides, a man who manages to gain their favour by way of sacrifice, can get from them good harvests, many children, and a long life. If necessary, they even protect him against evil spirits and misfortune (Gonda 1963: 7).

Whitehead mentions seven goddesses in a shrine in Bangalore City. The principal goddess is Annamma, among the others are Maramma, the cholera goddess, and Sikhajamma, the goddess of measles and small-pox. (Whitehead op. cit.: 29).—In Mysore there are seven 'Maris' and all the seven are sisters. Their names are Bisal Mari (the sun), Goonal Mari, Kel Mari (the earthen pot), Yeeranagere Mari, Hiridevathi (the eldest sister), and Uttahnahamma (ibid.: 83). Nevertheless, in another context Whitehead makes a clear differentiation between Mariamma and the seven sisters, saying that "Mariamma is not found in any temple dedicated to one of the seven sisters, as she is considered superior to them in power and much worse in temper. The seven sisters are supposed to be kind and indulgent, while Mariamma is vindictive and inexorable and difficult to propitiate" (Whitehead op. cit.: 31).

Karmarkar (op. cit.: 109–110) regards the seven sisters of South India as an imitation of the 'Mothers' or Matrkas, whose number is seven, eight, nine or 14. There are many different lists, which give their names in a different way. Thomas says that the following goddesses are usually worshipped as Seven Divine Mothers: Brahmi (wife of Brahman), Maheswari (wife of Siva), Vaisnavi (wife of Visnu), Kaumari (wife of Kartikeya or Kumara), Indrani (wife of Indra), Varahi (wife of Varaha), and Chamundi, a form of Durga. Sometimes the number is raised to eight and a goddess by the name of Narasimhi is included in this minor pantheon (Thomas 1973: 42). Those Seven Mothers were worshipped already by members of the Calukya-dynasty, who ruled in the Western Deccan in the 6th century A.D. Probably the Seven Mothers were ancient, popular protectresses of family life (Gonda 1963: 118).

Connection with Śiva

In song B) Mariai is called Śivaśakti.—Śakti, as is well known, means 'power, capacity, ability, strength, energy. . . . The active power of a deity, regarded as his wife, female divinity' (Apte). The Śakti is different from god, but she is an aspect of god. The relation between a god and his Śakti is sometimes explained as similar to the relation between the sun and the sunshine. They are not identical, but one does not exist without the other one. The Śakti alone is active and creative, but only as an expression of God's will (Gonda 1960: 274).

Mariai is referred to as Śivaśakti. Śiva's Sakti is the goddess Dūrḡa, but it seems to be a common phenomenon that the minor deities of some place as well as the "original independent mother-goddesses have been gradually drawn into the particular pantheon belonging to Śiva" (Karve op. cit.: 284). Karve believes that this was due to the effect of the Liṅgayat cult—a sect of the Śaivite Hindus, whose main object of revenue is the liṅga, the most popular symbol of Śiva¹¹. The seven sisters of the south of India, whom we mentioned above, are also mostly regarded vaguely as the wives or sisters of Śiva (Whitehead op. cit.: 29). Whitehead believes that attempts to connect the village goddesses with Śiva or Viṣṇu were made in places, where Brahman influence was strong. But he is of the opinion that originally the goddesses had probably nothing to do with either Śaivism nor Vaiṣṇavism, and that

11. A true Lingayat has to wear on his body a silver box containing a linga (Bhir Gazetteer 1969: 184).

the stories told about them in the folklore and which connect them with those two main gods are probably quite late inventions (*ibid.*: 30).

Low-caste devotees of Mari/Laxmī

Fuchs believes that it was possibly the caste of the Mahār, who introduced the worship of Mariāi into northern regions (Fuchs 1960: 526). This is quite possible if we consider the fact that until a short while ago Mariāi was the special deity worshipped by the Mahār. Thus Robertson mentions the Mahār as "guardians of the goddess Mariāi whose shrine is found in every Mahār *wādā* in the Deccan and elsewhere in India. This goddess is often named Laxmī by the Mahārs. She it is who comes in the form of the cholera; and when an epidemic of this disease breaks out she is propitiated by public sacrifice in which the Mahār take a leading part" (Robertson op. cit.: 16).

Nowadays also the Māṅg have become devotees of the goddess. Both Mahār and Māṅg belong to the former untouchable castes of India.—Also in the South Mariamma is served by the lowest castes. Whitehead mentions especially that near Tanjore he came across one temple of Mariamma served by Brahmin priests. "...No animal sacrifices are offered at the central shrine where Brahmans minister. In one corner of the temple area there is a separate shrine with an image of Mariamma where animals are regularly sacrificed; but at this shrine no Brahmans officiate. I believe that it is the only temple or shrine of Mariamma in South India where there are Brahman priests. But then, in these cases, the Brahman pujari never has anything to do with animal sacrifices. These always are conducted entirely by men of lower castes" (Whitehead op. cit.: 19).

There are many stories, especially in the South, which explain why Mari or Mariamma is worshipped only by low-caste people, for example the following ones:

x) Kel Mari was once ordered by her eldest sister to go and bring fire. She went and in her search for fire she found a lot of low-caste men cooking the flesh of a buffalo and eating the same. It was a curious sight for her to see them do so. She sat there and observed what was going on, and lost time. As she was late, the eldest sister was very angry and excommunicated her with a curse, saying that she should only be worshipped by the lowest class of people (Whitehead op. cit.: 83).

x) Another story tells against about a Rishi who had a fair daughter. An outcast, who was well versed in the Vedas, managed to pass himself as a Brahman and married her. They lived a married life for some time and had children. One day it so happened that one of the children noticed the father stitch an old shoe previous to going out for a bath. This seemed curious,

and the child drew the mother's attention to it. Then the mother, by virtue of her austerities, came to know the base trick that had been played upon her husband, and cursed him and herself. The curse on herself was that she should be born a Mari, to be worshipped only by low-caste men. The curse on him was that he should be born a buffalo, fit to be sacrificed to her . . . (Whitehead op. cit.: 84-85).

Conclusion

Mari/Laxmī, the goddess of the *potarāja*, is a divinity who is difficult to describe. She seems essentially to be of Dravidian, or at least non-Aryan origin, even if her name Mari is derived from the Sanskrit. Different items seem to support this hypothesis: The goddess (or at least a goddess of an almost identical name and very similar character) is worshipped almost everywhere in South India; the goddess seems to be closely connected with Kālī, who is regarded a non-Aryan deity; the folklore about the goddess is by far richest in the South of the country; and Maharashtra and the Dravidian South of India in many aspects have much in common.

The second name of the goddess, Laxmī, dates perhaps back to times, when the functions and qualities of the well-known Hindu goddess Lakṣmī were not yet clearly defined¹². But it is also possible that the name of Lakṣmī, the Hindu goddess of wealth, was applied to Mari when people wanted to emphasize her benevolent aspects.

The goddess has many different names, but people insist that in spite of those names and forms of appearance, she always remains one and the same. This is at first a little difficult to understand: Sometimes there are temples in which she is worshipped as Laxmī, in other temples, often a little outside the village, as Mari, In some temples she is represented by a small, human figure, in others by a row of small stones or a number of big, unhewn stones; this number is often seven, but it may be also five.—In spite of all that she remains essentially the same, and only the aspects, which are emphasized, change.

12. The Markandeya Purana, e.g., gives the following account of the origin of Lakṣmī: Maya, the Primal Mother, assumed three transcendent forms in accordance with her three Gunas or qualities, and each of them produced a pair of divinities: Brahma and Lakṣmī, Mahesha and Sarasvatī, Visnu and Kālī; later on Lakṣmī became the consort of Visnu . . . (Thomas op. cit.: 41).—Karmarkar quotes other passages from the same text: "The Gupti-rupi, that is the Devi, who is unmanifest, takes the three forms of Lakṣmī, Mahakālī and Sarasvatī. . . . She is also known in various other ways . . . for instance at the time of Srsti or creation, she is Mahakālī exercising control over Brahma and bringing the world into existence; at the time of the Prayala or universal destruction, she is Mahamari . . ." (Karmarkar op. cit.: 106).

Whitehead believes that in the beginning the village goddesses had simple names, in the South such as Uramma or Gramdevata (meaning village goddess) or Pedamma (great mother), and that later on the imagination of the villagers gradually invented special titles for their own guardian deities, of whom a few—like Mariamma—have won their way to general respect or fear (Whitehead *op. cit.*: 29–30).—This would probably mean that the goddesses all developed from the same prototype of village goddess/first mother. This may be correct, but it does not seem sufficient, as apparently many other influences have been incorporated into the concept of Mari/Laxmī. Thus I have shown above that ideas about the Vedic goddess Uṣas have merged into the figure of Mariāi; that she has been connected with Śiva and with the concept of the ‘Seven Sisters’, even if those ideas have remained rather vague. How well the goddess has been fitted into the local situation of Maharashtra can be seen from the fact that she has been connected with Sant Ekanāth of Paithan, and with Vithoba of Pandharpur, who are both very important for the religious life of Maharashtra: Mariāi is regarded as the ‘elder sister’ of the Nine Nāth, and Vithoba, who besides Khandoba is the most important divinity of Maharashtra, is called her ‘brother’.

The goddess is sometimes called Śivaśakti, and at the same time she is regarded as the ‘sister of Vithoba’. That Mari/Laxmī is connected likewise with Śiva and Viṣṇu is not surprising: It is in the contrary typical for Maharashtra that the rivalry, bordering on enmity, between Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites in other parts of the country, is absent, and that worshippers of Śiva also worship Viṣṇu, and vice versa.

The villagers do not regard Mari/Laxmī as an “evil spirit”, although she may be responsible for much evil that befalls the people—especially for the cholera—but neither do they regard her as an un-mixed benefactress. As we have already seen from the songs, she is looked upon as a being of uncertain temper, very human in her liability to take offence. It seems that nowadays her influence is decreasing, and it can easily be understood why: In spite of other functions, it is the main function of the goddess to remove (or inflict, when she gets angry) cholera and/or small-pox. Due to compulsory vaccinations those diseases have considerably decreased; small-pox has been reported to have disappeared altogether. It is possible that after a generation or two Mariāi’s temples will be abandoned, like those of many other goddesses, who were worshipped only a few decades ago. But as we could see from many examples, the concept of Mari/Laxmī seems to be a

rather flexible one. Thus it might be similarly possible that the ideas about the goddess slowly will change in one way or other, that other aspects of hers will become more important, and that her worship will continue.

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