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THE TALE OF THE TULSI  
PLANT

AND

OTHER STUDIES

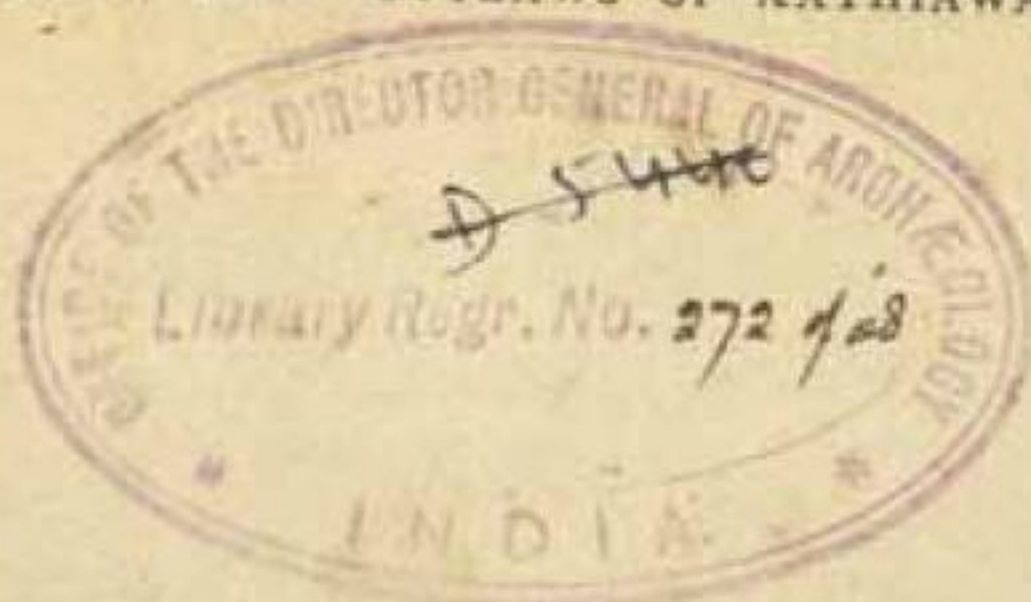
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BOMBAY :

"THE TIMES OF INDIA" OFFICE,  
AND 121, FLEET ST., LONDON, E.C.  
1908.





## PARVATI OF THE PESHWAS.

Near Poona, and itself a spur of the Sinhgad range, stands a hill called Parvati. It is crowned with temples and receives its due share of worship. But for historical interest it has probably no rival. Among its buildings one prince died of a broken heart, another watched his empire tumble to pieces like a house of cards. An English poet\* has sung of its beauties and on its steps an heir to the throne of England nearly met his death. As Parvati is within easy reach of Poona residents and visitors, I have ventured to string together for their benefit a slight account of the famous hill. For to visit it without some knowledge is both unprofitable and uninteresting.

Like most other celebrated Indian celestial dwellings the present gods were not the earliest to live on Parvati. Before they came the old hill goddess was already there. The common tale goes that one day Gopikabai, the wife of the 3rd Peshwa, Balaji Bajirao, suffered from a sore heel and was

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\* Sir Edwin Arnold. By a strange inaccuracy he describes a conversation at Parvati between himself, a priest and a dancing girl. There are, however, no dancing girls at Parvati and never were any.



told that the Devi on Parvati hill was swift to answer prayers. Gopikabai promised, if she got well, to build a temple to Shiva on Parvati's summit. She did so and Balaji Bajirao fulfilled her promise. The tale told in the Peshwas' Bakhar is different. For there the founding of Parvati is ascribed to Balaji Bajirao's wish to honour king Shahu to whose memory the Shivaite temple was erected. It is probable, however, that this latter story really describes the origin of Vishnu's temple and the former that of Shiva's. In either event the pious founder of Parvati was the 3rd Peshwa and it is related in the Peshwa Bakhar that he sent the Holkar and Shinde Jaghirdars to extort for her temples the sacred stones of the Gandaki river from the Maharaja of Nepal.

The hill is usually approached by the Shankarshet Road, which winds past the tombs of unknown French officers once in the Maratha service, past the Deccan Club and a shrine to Bahiroba, himself like Parvati's Devi one of the earlier deities. Then it curves round Parvati lake—now an open ugly hollow—but once a beautiful sheet of water which the sanitary engineers alas! condemned. The lake like the Parvati temples was built by Balaji Bajirao, and the tale runs that enraged with the slow building of the dam he himself descended from his elephant and began carrying stones to the masons. At once courtiers and soldiers sprang from their horses and did likewise and the dam soon neared completion. At a later date Mahadji



Shinde wishing to oust Nana Phadnavis from the control of the second Madhavrao took the latter to the little Ganpati temple on the Sarasbag island in the centre of the lake. While rowing across, Shinde so poisoned the young prince's mind against the old statesman that they in the end quarrelled with terrible results to both. Madhavrao II perished in the Shanwar Wada. Nana Phadnavis died broken hearted and disgraced. But the house of Shinde grew till it overshadowed the whole Maratha Empire.

On reaching the pathway that branches off to Parvati, do not continue until the steps are reached but turn to the right and passing under a limb tree walk with me towards the North. The leaves of this limb tree are in great request on the 1st of Chaitra—the Deccan New Year's day. The ordinary Brahmin eats but one or two because of their bitter taste. But the Brahmacharis or youthful religious celibates, so an Indian informant told me, eat them in handfuls and their bodies so far from suffering ill-effects wax stout and strong and their faces "become lustrous." A hundred yards or so beyond the limb tree is a little shed. Underneath it are kunku and shendur covered stones arranged so as to mark a grave. Its occupant was once a Mang who attended the Peshwa's rhinoceros and one day ended his career with its horn through his body. He was buried here and his disembodied spirit haunts the place. The Mhar attendant when I visited it said to me 'phar navasala pavato'



(he readily hearkens to prayers) and recently plucked feathers lying close by, showed that but a few minutes before a worshipper had offered a fowl to the Mang's ghost. A sad tale was also told me of this Mang's doings. On dark nights he spirits away fair women of high caste while sleeping by their husbands' sides and in the early morning leaves them soiled and helpless on the roadway. Possibly erring ladies of high degree, surprised by daylight, may have found in the Mang's ill-repute a welcome shelter. But let us leave the Mang and still go northward. Twenty or thirty paces on we shall come to the realm of Vetāl\* and Mhasoba. Here indeed we enter on primitive theology. In the centre are two white-washed stones. They are Vetāl and his younger brother Mhasoba who reign over the multitude of ghosts and demons that harass mankind. Round them are a circle of smaller white-tipped stones. They are king Vetāl's sowars, and a larger stone to the south of the royal pair but inside the circle of the horsemen, is their Jemadar known as Bhangya Bava or as we might say Brandy Billy. Twice a month, on the full moon and on the no-moon, does king Vetāl at midnight ride abroad in

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\* The attendant told me that this Vetāl formerly lived at Gopgaum in Saawad Taluka, but that his grandfather had by bhakti or worship induced the god to come to his present abode. One night the god told him walk to Parvati without looking backward and next morning to make a mound of stones where he saw flowers lying. He walked to Parvati and behind him he heard all the way the footsteps of Vetāl and next morning flowers lay where is now the demon ring.