

Saints and Mahatmas Of India

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PREFACE

HARI ANNANT HARI KATHA ANNANTA-The Lord is Infinite and so are His attributes and the stories related to Him. Saints and Mahatmas are an expression of His glory and attributes and, therefore, they are also indescribable. Yet an attempt has been made in this book to present a glimpse into the lives of some of His Saints and Mahatmas, especially those, who have been the fountainhead of various sects in India, e.g. Mahatma Buddha, Mahavir Swami, Acharya Nimbark, Guru Gorakhnath, Sant Kabir, Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, Guru Nanak, Sant Dadu Dayal, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramhans, Shirdi Sai Baba, Yogiraj Shyamacharan Lahiri, Sahajanand Swami and Swamiji Maharaj-Shivdayal Singhji.

If one asks as to what the saints and Mahatmas do for the society, the answer is that they are like the trees, the spiritual trees. As the trees standing at their own places purify the atmosphere and help bringing rains, the saints and Mahatmas purify the minds of people through their prayers and channelise the grace of the God, at times even raising storm in the Ocean of Mercy of the Almighty. Their presence is a symbol of auspiciousness for all. It is well said: 'EK GHARI, ADHI GHARI, ADHI SE BHI ADH; TULSI SANGAT SADHU KI, KOTI KATE APRADH.'-meaning thereby that the company of Sadhus (satsang), even for a moment, brings auspiciousness in one's life. In my humble opinion reading about saints and Mahatmas also is like spending time in their company and I am sure this also would bring auspiciousness in the life of readers.

The material in this book for compiling the life stories of saints and Mahatmas of India has been taken mainly from 'Bhakt-Mal' by Mahatma Nabhadass; 'Bharat Ke Sant Mahatma' by Ramlal; 'Bhakt-Charitank' published by Geeta Press, Gorakhpur; 'Bharat Ke Yogi' by Dr. Bhagwan Sharan Bhardwaj-Pradeep and various websites. Besides, some anecdotes relating to them have also been included, as heard from great saints.

I must hasten to add that many authors have written about various saints and Mahatmas but that does not make the subject stale. Every time one reads about them, a new dimension of their life and devotion comes to fore, a new understanding is developed. In any case, it is like offering flowers at the feet of the Lord. I have also, therefore, dared to offer this garland of flowers at the feet of the Lord picking up some of the most fragrant flowers from the Lord's own garden.

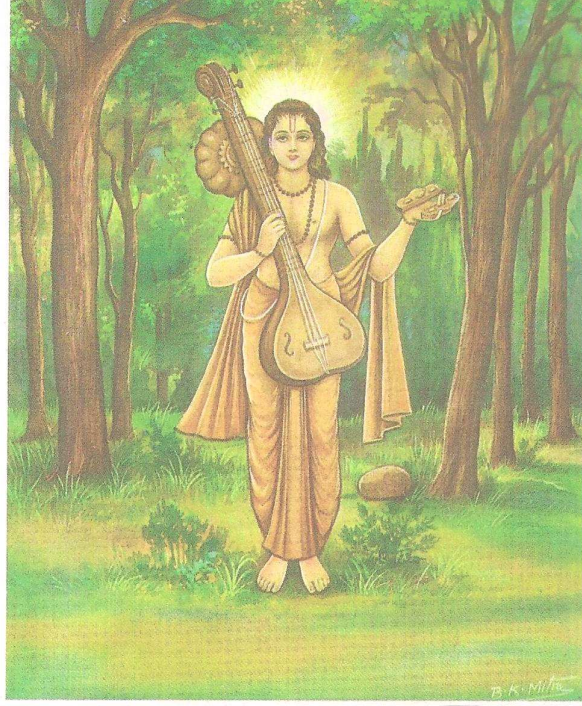
In order to contain the size of the book I have restricted myself to mention only important incidences relating to most of the saints and Mahatmas and in this effort I might have left some other important aspects of their lives untouched. I seek forgiveness of the wise readers for the same.

It is the grace of my Guru Bhagwan Param Sant Thakur Ram Singhji that this book was conceived and completed. I am extremely thankful to my entire family and

friends, who have helped me from time to time in gathering the material and in timely completion of the work.

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Devrishi Narad

Devrishi Narad

Devrishi Narad is the fountainhead of all the saints and mahatmas. He himself has said about his state of devotion that “when I start singing in the praise of my Most Pious and Kind Lord, He immediately enters my heart as an invitee.”

Devrishi Narad always keeps on wandering; it is his job to always keep on moving and playing his *vina* (a large musical instrument of the type of lute) singing in the praise of his Lord. He is one of the twelve main acharyas (Masters) of the *bhagvatdharma* (follower of Lord Vishnu) and the supreme devotional singer. He is also the composer of *Bhaktisutra* (the Compendium of various aspects of Devotion). He is considered to be the master of all the nine forms of devotion. He is an eternal councilor of the Divine Council. His nature is to create situations of conflict so as to protect the interest of righteous and destroy the evil. Scriptures are laid with numerous such instances. His main objective, however, is to encourage devotion to God. Both the gods and devils trust his capabilities to give them protection. Brahma, the lord of creation, first created Marichi, Atri, Sanak, Sanandan, Santkumar and Narad and thus Narad is the *manas-putra* (a son born of mind) of Brahma.

It relates to ancient time. Narad’s eternal relationship with God was a result of his deeds in a previous birth. In his previous birth he was a *Gandharva* (mythol. a heavenly minstrel or musician) by the name ‘Upbarhan’. He was well built, handsome and deeply interested in music. Once many of the great *Gandharvas*, and *Kinnars* etc. assembled before Brahma to sing in the praise of God. Narad was one of them. He, however, had taken some women with him. While singing, his attention got diverted towards them and, therefore, he could not discharge his duties whole-heartedly. Brahma, therefore, cursed him to be borne as a *shudra* (a member of the fourth and the lowest division of early Indo-Aryan society) but this curse turned into a boon for him. He took birth through a *shudra* mother, who was engaged in the service of noble and religious Brahmans (the priest class). By the grace of Brahma, he was blessed with all the good qualities and his mother was very affectionate to him. The life of austerity and self-restraint of his mother had a deep impact on Narad. In the company of his mother he also started to spend his time in the service of sages and saints.

Once some saints observed *Chaturmasya-vrit* (a resolution to follow strict religious discipline during the four months of rainy season). On his mother’s advice Narad started serving them. Narad was only about five years then. Those saints were very kind to him. He used to listen to various stories related to God from them, as a result of which his mind had become pure. At the end of the *Chaturmasya-vrit* they asked Narad to meditate upon the God and told him the method of *Japa* (remembrance of God). After the saints left, Narad started to devote his time accordingly. In the mean time his mother died of a serpent’s-bite. Her death gave Narad the complete freedom from all obligations and he now started to devote the entire time in *Tapa* (penance).

He sat under a *Pipal* tree (holy fig-tree) and started meditation, as instructed by those saints. As the time was passing, his desperation to seek the God was increasing. Suddenly he had a glimpse of the Divine-light in his heart, which disappeared immediately. He could not have the glimpse of that Divine-light again in spite of making repeated efforts. He then got an inspiration that this Divine-light could be seen by only those, who had acquired complete purity of mind. After this incidence, he completely devoted himself in the contemplation of the Divine and after his death, on the start of a new *Kalpa* (mythol. a day of Brahma) he was born as a *manas-putra* of Brahma, as mentioned above. As a Divine councilor he keeps on wandering, playing his *vina* (a musical instrument) and singing in the praise of God. He resides in the Himalayas and because of the curse of Daksha Prajapati he is not affected by the age, i.e. he is beyond the stages of childhood, youth and old age.

He is connected with the happenings in all the four *yugas* (mythol. a day of Brahma, i.e. a *Kalpa* comprises of one-thousand *Chaturyugas-Satyug, Treta, Dwapar* and *Kaliyug*). Narad had given spiritual instructions (*upadesh*) to Prahlad's mother when Prahlad was in her womb, as a result of which he was born with an inclination towards the Divine. Similarly, he had provided guidance to Dhruva, a little child, who was out in the search of the Divine. It also relates to Narad that ten-thousand sons (named as Haryashrva) of Prajapati Daksha were engaged in *Tapa* with the objective of the expansion of the creatures by the order of their father, when Narad found them to be pure-hearted persons, who were deserving to realize the Truth and, therefore, he instructed them and diverted their attention towards God. When Daksha came to know of it, he was very upset. He begot another thousand sons in the name of Shablashrva, who were again similarly instructed by Narad. This made Daksha very furious and he cursed Narad that he would not be able to stay at any place for more than two *Ghari* (a count of time). Narad accepted the curse happily taking it as the Divine will. He thus keeps on continuously wandering and preaching, showing the deserving candidates the path to the Lord. It is his singular aim to help all creatures in seeking the God. He not only guided devotees like Prahlad and Dhruva but also suggested a path to Hirnyakashipu and Kansa, according to their bent of mind.

Once, both Narad and Tumburu were present in the court of Lord Vishnu. Tumburu was an acharya (Master) of singing. Narad wanted to surpass him. Lord Vishnu, therefore, asked him to go to Ulukeshwar *Gandharva*. Having completed his training there, Narad went to Tumburu to defeat him but he was astonished to see the *Ragas* and *Raginiyas* (musical modes or sequences) in the form of men and women in front of Tumburu's house. They said to Narad that by the singing of imperfect singers their organs get mutilated but Tumburu's singing cures them because he is a perfect singer. Narad felt embarrassed at his half-baked knowledge. He went to Lord Vishnu, who gave him an assurance that at the time when He would incarnate as Krishna in Brij, He would fulfill his desire. It is said that in the Dwapar Yuga Narad, Satyabhama, Rukmani and other queens learnt music from Lord Krishna and that it took him four years to learn the same.

It was Narad, who inspired and encouraged Valmiki to compose Ramayana in the praise of Lord Ram in the *Treta Yuga*. Narad had visited Valmiki's Ashram (abode of a

hermit or devotee) and narrated the story of Lord Ram to Valmiki. After a little while when Valmiki was walking at the bank of river Tamsa, the pain that aroused in his heart seeing a wading bird being killed turned into a shloka (verse or couplet). When he returned to his Ashram, Lord Brahma inspired him to compose Valmiki-Ramayan based on the story of Lord Ram narrated by Narad. Similarly, the credit of inspiring Maharshi Vyasa to compose Bhagvat goes to Narad, who narrated the original Bhagvat to him and based on which Maharshi Vyasa composed twelve *skandha* (parts) of Bhagvat. Maharshi Vyasa did not get peace even after accomplishing division of the Vedas, composing Brahmasutra, Mahabharat and Puranas. He felt sad and was wondering about it at the bank of river Saraswati that Narad reached there. Maharshi Vyasa welcomed him and then asked him how he could get peace of mind. Narad explained him that he had not narrated the playful acts of Lord Vasudev because of which his mind was not at peace. A poem devoid of the praise of Lord or any such composition, all are worthless, unless composed in the praise of *Rasa-Kalpataru Nandnandan* (Lord Krishna, the fountainhead of all melody). With the grace of Narad his inclination turned towards bhakti (devotion). The *Gyan* (knowledge-wisdom) given by Lord Vishnu to Narad in his past birth was narrated by Narad to Maharshi Vyasa, which formed the basis of Srimadbhagvat-Mahapuram.

Narad also alerted kings like Yudhister and others from time to time and instructed the great sage Shukdev, who was the son of Maharshi Vyasa. Narad had said to him that knowledge is the greatest light; truth is the greatest *Tapa* (penance); renunciation is the greatest source of peace and happiness and attachment is the greatest source of all miseries; engaging in one's duty in accordance with one's *varnashram* (class and stage of life) is following the path of religion; conquering the Self is the highest knowledge and that Parmatma (the Supreme Soul) is Omnipresent and Eternal.

Narad is always eager and concerned with the welfare of house-holders and he keeps on inspiring them to turn towards the God. Narad's Panchratra is highly appreciated amongst devotees. It is divided in Mantra-Siddhant, Aagam-Siddhant, Tatva-Siddhant and Tantra-Siddhant and includes Satvat-Samhita, which was narrated by Narad on Malay mountain to various Maharishies. It is also known as Narad-Panchratra or Mahopanishad.

Shivpuran narrates the story relating to Narad's marriage. It relates to Narad that he once underwent severe *Tapa* in the Himalayas at the bank of river Ganges. Although he did the *Tapa* to please the God but the king of gods Indra got perturbed. To distract Narad from the *Tapa*, he sent Kamdev (the god of love) but he was defeated by the grace of Lord Shankar. This aroused Narad's ego and he narrated this before lord Shiva and Brahma. He spoke about it to Lord Vishnu also. While he was returning from Vishnuloka, Narad saw a *mayanagri* (city), which had been created by Lord Vishnu. It was a beautiful and rich city with lots of people roaming about. The princess of that city, daughter of king Shilnidhi was to choose her groom in a *swayamvar* (an ancient tradition in which the bride chose her groom from the assembled suitors). Various kings and princes from far-off places had arrived to participate. The princess was extremely beautiful. Her beauty had made Narad restless. He, therefore, went to Lord Vishnu and

begged him to make him (Narad) look like him (Lord Vishnu). Lord Vishnu made him look like a monkey. Narad participated in the *swayamvar*, but the princess on seeing him look like a monkey got angry with him. Lord Vishnu was also present there. The princess chose Lord Vishnu as her husband and put the garland on Lord Vishnu's neck. Narad looked at his face in water and seeing that he was looking like a monkey, he cursed Lord Vishnu that he would have to suffer the agony of his wife being taken away from him and that people looking like him (monkeys) would help him in tracing his wife. Lord Vishnu then removed his *maya* (illusion). Narad now was ashamed on what he had done. He sought forgiveness from Lord Vishnu and fell on his feet. This curse of Narad fructified when Lord Vishnu incarnated as Lord Ram in *Treta-Yuga*.

Narad's curse has always turned beneficial for the humanity. Srimadbhagvat in the tenth chapter mentions about the curse of Narad to Manigreev and Nalkuber, two sons of Kuber. They were once enjoying themselves in an inebriated condition at the banks of river Mandakini in the Kailash region in the company of ladies. They were inside the river when Narad spotted them. The *apsaras* (mythol.-a dancing beautiful girl at the court of Indra) put on their cloths but the two *yaksha*-brothers did not do so. Narad cursed them to be born as trees and told them that they would be emancipated after a hundred years of the gods in *Dwapar-yuga* when they would see Lord Krishna. It was because of this curse that Lord Krishna on being tied with an *Ukhal* (a mortar used for grinding grains etc.) uprooted these two trees and emancipated the two brothers.

Lord Krishna had once said to King Ugrasen that I always recite this *stotra* (a hymn in praise) attributed to Narad by the king of gods-Indra: "The one, who has emerged from the lap of Lord Brahma; who is devoid of ego; who is apt at the scriptures and well known for his conduct, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who is free from anger, anxiety, agility and fear; who has perseverance but not dilatoriness, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who never speaks a lie for gaining something or desiring anything and all the creatures adore him, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who knows the essence of spirituality, who is knowledgeable and who is ascetic, simple and truthful, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who far exceeds in brilliance, fame, intellect, humility and penance, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who is well natured, radiant, well mannered and soft-spoken, who eats pure food and wears pure cloths, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who is always eager to think and do good to others, who has no trace of any sin in him and who is always benevolent, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who always follows the dictates of the Vedas, *Puranas* and *Smrities* and who is beyond likes and dislikes, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who never indulges in any gratifications, who is a learned one, untiring and who narrates various acts of the Divine, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who is never lured by wealth, who has never been under the illusion of desires, who has overcome all weaknesses, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who is a firm devotee of the Divine, who follows the right path and who is introvert, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who is beyond all doubts and dilemma, who is an orator par-excellence, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who has no fault-finding attitude towards any of the scriptures, who is always engaged in the remembrance of the Divine and always exercises restrain over his mind, I bow before that Devrishi

Narad. The one, who is steadfast and completely detached, who is never tired of being in trance, always conscious of his effort, I bow before that Devrishi Narad. The one, who is treasure of all attributes, perfect, pure, bold, knower and prudent, I bow before that Devrishi Narad.” Lord Krishna then further said that he recites this *stotra* daily because of which he (Devrishi Narad) is specially inclined towards him. If anyone else also recites this *stotra* then Devrishi Narad would also be easily pleased with him and would shower his grace on him. Therefore, O’ King you should also recite this *stotra*.

By saying so the Lord has described various attributes of a devotee, which are all present in Devrishi Narad. He is the supreme devotee, who is supposed to be living for ever, singing in the praise of the Lord.

Narad Bhaktisutra

Narad Bhaktisutra is one of the treatises on bhakti (devotion), which is attributed to Devrishi Narad. It says:

bhakti is true love for the Lord. It is that nectar which fulfills the devotee completely, leaving no desire for anything else. He then craves for nothing, nor does he feel attracted towards anything else. He gets absorbed in the Self.

bhakti is indescribable. It is like asking a dumb to describe the taste of sugar. Rarely in someone does such a love manifest. Such a love does not desire anything from the beloved; it has no limitation and keeps on increasing every moment. It has no separation, it is subtler than subtle and it can only be experienced. When such a love manifests, the devotee gets absorbed in it, forgetting everything else.

bhakti is easy; it is soothing and blissful. A devotee should, therefore, adopt truth, non-violence, compassion, purity and faith.

Brahmrishi Vasishtha

Brahmarishi Vasishtha is said to be born to Mitraravun and as a result of Nimi's curse, he took the next birth in Agney's house. In the first *Kalpa* of creation, he was a *manas-putra* of Lord Brahma. The great *Sati* (virtuous lady) Arundhati is his wife. He was not willing to accept Brahma's offer of becoming a *purohit* (a family priest) of Suryavansha. Scriptures do not hail the job of a family priest. Why should then a person, who is not enamored of wealth or gratification accede to be a *purohit*. Brahmaji then told him that in future Lord Ram would be born in this family and that he (Brahmarishi Vasishtha) would be proud to be the *Guru* (Master) of Lord Ram. Brahmarishi Vasishtha, therefore, accepted to be a *purohit* of the Suryavansh.

To begin with Brahmarishi Vasishtha was the *purohit* for the entire Suryavansh, but due to a dispute between him and Nimi, Brahmarishi Vasishtha restricted himself to Ikshwaku *vansh* and started living in an Ashram near Ayodhya. If there was drought or famine Brahmarishi Vasishtha would save the people by producing rains through his *tapobal* (power acquired through penance) and if the royal family of Ayodhya faced any difficulties, Brahmarishi Vasishtha used to remove it. When Bhagirath was tired in his effort to bring the river Ganges from the heavens to the earth, it was Brahmarishi Vasishtha, who encouraged him and told him the requisite *mantra*. Similarly, king Dilip was childless. It was Brahmarishi Vasishtha, who suggested him to serve the cow-Nandini to beget children and thus fulfilled his desire.

Once king Vishvamitra came to visit Brahmarishi Vasishtha along with his paraphernalia. Vasishtha welcomed him and took good care of all of them with the help of the Kamdhenu cow (mytho. the cow of plenty, a fabulous cow that came out by the churning of the ocean and supposed to yield whatever is requested of her). Seeing the influence of that cow he thought that such a cow should be in the possession of the king rather than with a hermit and desired to acquire it from Vasishtha. But a sage cannot sell a cow at any cost and, therefore, Vasishtha refused to part with the cow. At last Vishvamitra tried to take away the cow by force, but Vasishtha through his *Brahmabal* (spiritual power) produced a bigger army and defeated Vishvamitra. This defeat at the hands of Vasishtha made Vishvamitra very envious and he decided to gain power by pleasing Lord Shankar with a view to defeat Vasishtha. He gained access to many divine weapons but was again defeated by the spiritual powers of Vasishtha. Now Vishvamitra decided to undergo severe *Tapa* in order to gain Brahmanhood (to become a Brahman from Kshatriya). He killed a hundred sons of Mahrishi Vasishtha but Mahrishi Vasishtha was forgiveness incarnated, he was not annoyed with Vishvamitra. Vishvamitra then one night came to kill Mahrishi Vasishtha. On reaching near his Ashram, Vishvamitra heard Mahrishi Vasishtha saying to his wife: "In this moonlit-night only a person like Vishvamitra can engage himself in *Tapa* to please the God." On listening these words, Vishvamitra felt greatly ashamed that Mahrishi Vasishtha was praising his enemy and repenting on his deeds he threw away the weapons and fell at the feet of Mahrishi Vasishtha. Mahrishi Vasishtha embraced Vishvamitra and accepted him as a Brahmarishi.

Mahrishi Vasishtha considered his becoming a priest as greatly privileged to get a disciple like Lord Ram. He composed the great work titled 'Yogvashishtha', which is a treatise on spiritual knowledge. Through this work he has established the importance of action and nobility of conduct. Many anecdotes concerning him are described in various scriptures. His only one and the firm resolution was to live in accordance with the divine-will. The younger brother of Lord Ram, Shri Bharatji knew that if Mahrishi Vasishtha asked Ram to stay back then Ram would not leave Ayodhya for proceeding to the jungles but he also knew it that Mahrishi Vasishtha would not say anything, which is not favored by Lord Ram. He would act only in accordance with what Lord Ram really wishes. He had no independent will of his own, which had become one with Lord Ram. Even today Mahrishi Vasishtha along with his wife Devi Arundhati showers his grace on the world as one of the *Saptarishis* (the Seven-stars supposed to represent the seven great sages).

Mahrishi Ashtavakra

Mahrishi Ashtavakra was born to Rishi Kahola (also known as Kahoda) and Sujata. Kahola was the best student of Mahrishi Uddalaka, who ran a school teaching the Vedas. Kahola (also spelled Kahoda) was one of his best disciples. Uddalaka was so pleased that he had his daughter Sujata married to him. When Sujata got pregnant, she had the desire to beget such a son, who would be spiritual and genius. She started sitting in the classes with Kahola.

One day, when Kahola was reciting some verses and Sujata was sitting near him a strange thing happened. The child in Sujata's womb heard the recitation of Kahola and pointed out the mistake to his father. This happened eight times. Kahola was annoyed at the arrogance of his would be son. He cursed the fetus that he would be born with eight deformities in his body.

Around this time King Janak was preparing for a *Yagya*. Sujata asked her husband Kahola to go to the king in the hope that the ceremony will bring money to the family. When Kahola approached Janak, the king received him respectfully but said with regret that he was unable to perform the *Yagya*, as Sage, Vandin (also known as Bandhi) debate by who arrived from nowhere had asked him to start the *Yagya* only after he is defeated in a the sages participating in the *Yagya*. His further included a condition that the defeated sages will be drowned. Janak told him that so far he had killed many learned sages." Kahola, however, agreed to enter into a debate with Vandin. He was defeated and drowned in the nearby river. The widowed Sujata heard the news and repented. A few months later she gave birth to a boy who was deformed at eight joints-the two feet, the two knees, the two hands, the chest and the head. He was named Ashtavakra, which means "one having eight bends".

He got his education from his grandfather Uddalaka. Ashtavakra was extremely intelligent and his grandfather loved him and was very proud of him. When Ashtavakra was only twelve, he finished all that he needed to know from his grandfather. He also heard the fate of his father and the *Yagya* of king Janak which still remained unfinished as no one could defeat Vandin.

One night Ashtavakra ran away from the hermitage and came to king Janak. Looking to his deformed body, the guards were amused. Ashtavakra retorted, "Do not judge a person by his appearance and age, judge him by what he knows. Inform your king that there is a person ready to challenge Vandin." The king came and was surprised to see a small deformed boy. He asked a few questions and was greatly impressed by his knowledge. King Janak soon arranged for the debate with Vandin. When Ashtavakra entered the King's court, the courtesans laughed at him. Ashtavakra too laughed at them, which made the king ask him as to why was he laughing. Ashtavakra replied that he had thought that the king's court would comprise of wise men but he sees cobblers

over there, as those, who judge a man by his skin are no better than cobblers. King Janak realized that the young man was not an ordinary person.

In the debate to everyone's surprise Ashtavakara defeated Vandin in no time. They alternately composed six extempore verses on the numbers one to twelve. Vandin was the first to start. Ashtavakra matched him on all counts. Then while Vandin could compose only the first half of a verse on the number thirteen, Ashtavakra completed the verse by composing the second half and thus won the debate. This debate was full of enigmas and latent meanings, which were hidden under the simple counts of the numbers one to thirteen.

Ashtavakra then requested the king to drown his father's killer. Vandin then disclosed his identity. He said, "I am the son of Varuna, the god of water. I came to earth on the request of my father to get the best sages from here to perform his twelve years of *Yagya*. The only way I could get them to my father was to challenge them in a debate and drown them into water. Now that my father has completed the *Yagya*, let us go to the river bank and watch the sages walk out of the river."

People rushed to the river bank and watched the sages come out of the river. Kahoda was one of them. He embraced his learned son Ashtavakra. Vandin then asked Ashtavakra to take a dip in the river. With the blessings of his father, Varuna, Ashtavakra came out of the river as a handsome young man. Janak rewarded Ashtavakra and Kahoda. They went back to their hermitage to be united with the family. Uddalaka, was so happy to see his worthy grandson surpassing all the great sages of his time in knowledge.

There is another story related to Mahrishi Ashtavakra. Maharaja Janak was considered to be one of the renowned Knowers of his time, who had risen above the materialistic desires. He, however, felt that he had traces of his will still left in him, which could be overcome only by taking shelter under a competent Guru (Master). He, therefore, made up his mind and announced that one who can lead him to realization within the duration, in which he mounts the horse, shall be his Master, and if he fails he will be awarded death.

On the destined day Maharaja Janak was ready with a well-decorated horse to mount on and many wise people from all around had gathered to witness the scene. No one, however, dared to come forward. The time was passing and every one was wondering what was going to happen, as the vow taken by Maharaja Janak was very difficult to be fulfilled.

When no one came forward, a little before the Sunset, Mahrishi Ashtavakra's mother told him to go to Maharaja Janak, fulfill his desire and to rescue all those present from this difficult situation. As desired by his mother Mahrishi Ashtavakra reached the Court of Maharaja Janak. His brilliance shadowed every one including Maharaja Janak. He asked Maharaja Janak to mount the horse. Maharaja Janak, although deeply impressed by him, told him very politely about his vow and that he would not like to subject a child, woman, an old or disabled person to be subjected to death penalty as announced by him.

Mahrishi Ashtavakra on listening to this warning of Maharaja Janak challenged him saying, ‘O Janak, you are surely falling from your position. You are unnecessarily wasting time of every one by showing your cowardice and incapability, besides incurring the risk of not fulfilling your vow. I had heard that Maharaja Janak is a learned person but today in this Court full of wise people you are backing out from your vow. If in the meantime the Sun sets you would not be able to fulfill your vow.’

Maharaja Janak was astonished and bewildered. He proceeded to mount the horse but as he was about to put his foot in the stirrup, Mahrishi Ashtavakra told him, ‘O Janak, you have taken such a harsh vow which has put the lives of saints at risk, but you have not announced the Gurudakshina (a reward presented to the Master as a mark of respect). You should, therefore, first commit the Gurudakshina, which should be matching your vow and also meet with the aspirations of the Master.’

Maharaja Janak felt embarrassed and said, “Kindly tell me what you desire as Gurudakshina. I shall here and now fulfill it.” Mahrishi Ashtavakra replied, “Whatever you claim is yours, you can promise as Gurudakshina. I do not want anything else.”

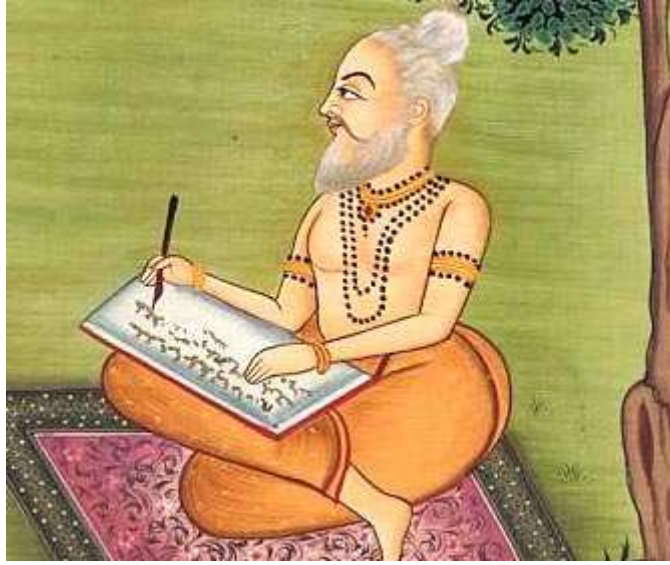
Maharaja Janak accepted this and immediately offered his kingdom, all belongings and even his family members at the feet of Mahrishi Ashtavakra. Mahrishi Ashtavakra laughed at it and said, “O Janak, you are perhaps joking with me. Do really all these things belong to you. The kingdom, property and wealth, which you claim to be yours, did not these belong to somebody else before you and would not these pass to someone else after you. Your family members, whom you consider to be related to you, are they not related to others. Is it proper for you to deny others of their rights as a result of succumbing to your ego. Do you want to deceive your Master.”

Maharaja Janak was stunned. He started gazing at the feet of Mahrishi Ashtavakra and it looked as if he was pondering over something very deeply. Mahrishi Ashtavakra looking at the condition of Maharaja Janak took pity at him and asked him, ‘Why are you feeling so helpless over this trifle matter. Do not get perturbed. Tell me how and what makes you think that all these things belong to you.’ Maharaja Janak felt something igniting inside by the grace of the Master. He said, “It is the mind of this humble servant of yours through which it accepts and thinks anything belonging to it. O Master if this mind belongs to your humble servant, it offers it at your pious feet.”

Mahrishi Ashtavakra said, “Although this mind also does not fully belong to you, but I accept it. Now it is my order that you should not do anything through this mind which is now mine, without or against my order.’ Maharaja Janak although was a great person and had traveled far on the path of spirituality, his mind was not completely free from Sankalp and Vikalp (resolution and negation). It took some time for him to completely empty out his mind. During this period Mahrishi Ashtavakra kept a watch on his mind and reminded him, if he strayed. The moment Maharaja Janak reached the state of perfection, he forgot about himself, his vow and that he was about to mount the horse. Maharaja Janak was about to fall that Mahrishi Ashtavakra supported him. In a moment his heart was filled with the Divine Light. His vow had been fulfilled. Mahrishi

Ashtavakra then told him to ask whatever he wanted to know. Maharaja Janak put his head at the pious feet of his Master Mahrishi Ashtavakra and said, “O my lord, I had taken this difficult vow only to acquire this knowledge. Now there is nothing more to know.” Mahrishi Ashtavakra then told Maharaja Janak that it is only when the disciple completely surrenders his mind to the Master, shedding his own-will, that he is able to acquire the divine knowledge.

Mahrishi Ashtavakra has composed ‘Ashtavakra Gita’, which is a treatise on philosophy.



Mahrishi Valmiki

Mahrishi Valmiki

Ratnakar was a Brahman born in Angira Gotra (a lineage of Brahmans). In the company of dreaded dacoits, he also became a hard-core dacoit. As he entered into bad company right from the childhood, he did not receive any education. He used to hide in woods and looted people with which he used to feed his family. Once Devrishi Narad passed through and Ratnakar challenged him as well. Devrishi Narad was unperturbed and told Ratnakar that he had nothing with him that could be useful to him and asked him very affectionately as to why was he killing innocent people, which was the biggest sin on earth that makes one suffer severely in the hell after death.

Ratnakar had so far come across only such persons, who used to get frightened and started crying seeing him, but this was a new experience for him. A sadhu was standing before him and was not afraid of him; rather he was asking him a question. It is only when the grace of God showers on a person that he finds the company of a true saint. Such a moment had arrived in Ratnakar's life. Ratnakar was impressed with the boldness of Narad. He replied that he was required to feed his family and if he did not collect money that way, they would all be starving.

Devrishi Narad asked him to go and ask his family whether they, for whom he was committing this heinous crime, would be with him in bearing the fruit of his actions in the hell and told him not to worry about him (Devrishi Narad) as he would not run away and if he so wished he may tie him with a tree. Ratnakar did so. He tied Naradji with a tree and asked everyone at his home whether they would be with him in bearing the outcome of his actions. They all replied in the same voice that it was his duty to feed them and that they were not concerned with what did he do to earn money. It was a shocking revelation for Ratnakar. It was he, who day and night in severe cold or heat, killing innocent people had looted the money but his family was not concerned with all that. In a moment his attachment with the family members was gone. He went back crying, untied Naradji and fell on his feet. He asked Naradji how a sinner like him could be salvaged and made eligible to receive God's grace.

Naradji's heart got filled with compassion. He told Ratnakar that there was only one way and that was the recital of the name of the Lord-“Ram”, which is capable of salvaging everyone, be him a sinner or anyone else. Ratnakar, however, could not recite even the name Ram. Naradji, therefore, asked him to recite -“Mara, mara, mara.....”, (reverse of Ram) which was easy to recite for Ratnakar. He sat there itself and started reciting mara, mara, mara..... Days and months passed away; many seasons and years passed away but Ratnakar did not move from his place. He did not open his eyes, his *japa* (recitation) continued unabated. His body got covered with sand and white ants infested him so much so that he was fully covered by ant-hills (Valmik). At last Lord Brahma came to him and woke him up by sprinkling the nectar on his body, which had been eaten away by ants. Brahmaji was the first to address him as Rishi Valmiki because of his emergence from ant-hills (Valmik).

The one, who was once a cruel dacoit, was now a kind *Rishi* (sage) as a result of reciting the name of the Lord. One day when Mahrishi Valmiki was walking at the bank of river Tamsa, the pain that aroused in his heart seeing a wading bird being killed by a hunter turned into a *Shloka* (verse), which was the first worldly-verse (there are many verses in the Vedas but those are considered divine).

During his expulsion to jungles for fourteen years Lord Ram along with Sitaji and Laxmanji had visited Mahrishi Valmiki in his Ashram. Besides, when Lord Ram had sent Sitaji to forest (due to criticism by a common man) she took shelter in Mahrishi Valmiki's Ashram and there gave birth to her twin-sons Luv and Kush. They were the first to receive 'Ramayan' from Mahrishi Valmiki, which is considered to be the fifth Veda and was written by Mahrishi Valmiki much before the incarnation of Lord Ram.

Mahatma Jadbharat

Jadbharat was a great Mahatma, who was solely engrossed in the Self. In his previous birth, he was Rajrishi Bharat after whom this country is named 'Bharat'. Rajrishi Bharat was a great devotee of the Lord, who after ruling for many years had taken *Sanyas* (renounced the world) and started living in the Ashram of sage Pulah located at the bank of river Gandaki.

One day when he was engaged in his daily Pooja (worship), he saw a hind drinking water from the river. She was separated from herd and was being chased by a lion. Suddenly on listening the roar of the lion, she tried to jump across the river and in that effort she miscarried and aborted the child in her womb. The child fell in the water and the hind died in a cave. Rajrishi Bharat saw all this and was greatly moved seeing the plight of that new born child, whose mother had died just after giving him birth and he was left all alone. Rajrishi Bharat picked up the child-deer in his lap and with great care started to look after him. His attachment to that child-deer grew so much that day and night he started thinking about that child's comfort only. One day that child-deer disappeared in the forest. Rajrishi Bharat, however, had his mind occupied with the thought of that child-deer, as a result of which he was born as a deer in the next life. He remembered his last birth and the cause of his present birth as a deer and, therefore, the feeling of detachment was profound in his mind. He moved to Shalgram area and when the time of death arrived, he took bath in the river Gandaki and died. In the next birth he was born in the house of a pious Brahman as Jadbharat. He was born in Angirasa Gotra. His father had great affection for him but Jadbharat was a born recluse, who did not interact with anyone. He had the memory of his past life and, therefore, he used to keep himself away from everyone and used to pretend as frenzied, stupid and mad. He considered it to be the path leading to his salvation.

Jadbharat's father was a staunch Brahman, who was greatly attached to his son. He thought of performing the *Yagyopavit* ceremony (thread ceremony) for his son, which was duly completed but Jadbharat was absorbed in the Self and, therefore, intentionally started behaving otherwise. His father thought of giving him the knowledge of Vedas but Jadbharat for quite some time did not even recite the Gayatri Mantra properly. After some days his father died and later his mother also died leaving Jadbharat and his sister in the hands of their step mother. This gave him an opportunity to completely devote himself in his pursuit of the Self. He was freed of all ties. The mortal and transitory nature of world could not attract him. He chose to remain silent and if someone asked him about something, he would answer like an illiterate. Intentionally he used to put on cheap, torn and dirty clothes, which distracted people away from him. Jadbharat considered this as a boon for his cause. He used to feed himself on whatever he got like wild fruits or vegetables. After the death of his parents, his brothers and other relatives started deploying him as a labor in the fields. He used to work with full strength and eat whatever rotten or leftover was given by them. He worked like a bull and the only reward was that meager food. People used to ask him to do their work, which he readily agreed. He was always absorbed in the Self and would not indulge in criticizing or in

condemning or in praising anyone. He had no attachment or hatred towards anything. He used to sleep on ground and used to bath once in a while.

Once a dacoit chief thought of sacrificing a human being to beget a child. The person who was caught for this purpose ran away. The dacoits were in the search of that man when they saw Jadbharat looking after the fields in the dark of the night. He was healthy and strong and suitable by all means for sacrifice. They asked him to 'come on' and Jadbharat also repeated 'come on'. The dacoits happily took him with them. He was taken to the place chosen for the sacrifice, where he was given a bath and decorated with flowers and garlands etc. and then singing and beating drums they made him sit before the goddess 'Bhadrakali'. The priest was about to sever his head with a naked sword that a miracle happened. They saw a divine glow on Jadbharat's face, who forcefully dragged the sword from the hands of the priest and killed all of them. Jadbharat's life was saved but it appeared to him as if nothing had happened. He kept on attending to his job the same way.

Once Rahugan, the king of Sindhu Sauvira was going to the Ashram of the great sage Kapil for acquiring the knowledge of the Self. He was a very liberal and quiet person. He was being carried in a palanquin. They were about to reach the banks of the river Ikshumati that they felt the need of engaging one more *Kahar* (a carrier of palanquins). *Avdhut* (an ascetic, who is usually absorbed in the Self and, therefore, not aware of the surroundings) Jadbharat per chance arrived over there. Finding him healthy and strong, the other *Kahars* asked him to join them. Jadbharat thought that it was for undergoing the outcome of some deed done in the previous birth that he was asked to carry the palanquin. Happily he started carrying the palanquin on his shoulder. Caring for the small insects, ants etc. that might get crushed under his feet, Mahatma Jadbharat was moving slowly looking for them on the way. The other carriers were moving fast, which resulted in an imbalance of the palanquin. On being asked the reason for the same by the king, they pointed out towards Jadbharat. The king asked him that he was healthy and strong yet he was moving slow, which was inexplicable. Jadbharat very quietly answered that neither he was healthy and strong, nor was he carrying the palanquin, nor was he tired and that it was someone else, who was carrying the palanquin. King Rahugan was looking for the real knowledge of the Self; he was surprised at his answer. The king told Jadbharat that it was clearly visible that he was carrying the palanquin on his shoulder. Jadbharat replied: 'Down below there is the earth, on the earth there are two feet, which are supporting the body, on the shoulders of which the palanquin is rested. In such a situation, there is no weight on me. In the palanquin your body is situated and in your body there is the soul, which is pure, indestructible, peaceful, attribute-less and beyond the *Prakriti* (nature). It is the soul that pervades all living-beings and has no fatness or thinness'.

The king got down from the palanquin. He was a true seeker. He held the feet of Mahatma Jadbharat and asked him whether he was sage Kapil himself, who had come to give him the knowledge of the Self. Mahatma Jadbharat replied that it could not be described as to who he was; the soul was beyond all descriptions which has no relation with the name and forms such as the king, the carrier or palanquin etcetera. The king then

said that he was going to visit sage Kapil to seek the true knowledge of the Self and that it was his fortune that he has met him (Mahatma Jadbharat) and that sage Kapil has appeared for his (king Rahugan) benefit in his (Mahatma Jadbharat) form. The king requested Mahatma Jadbharat to give him the knowledge of the Self. Mahatma Jadbharat then told king Rahugan that those, who are after worldly things, the worldly things like son and kingdom are important and auspicious for them but the one who is a true seeker, for him to realize the Truth alone is the real objective. He should ponder over God alone and become one with Him. The soul is all-pervading, pure, attribute-less and beyond nature. It does not suffer from birth and death and It is full of the true knowledge. It is the same soul that resides in the body of various creatures. This knowledge of the Self is the most auspicious knowledge.

In the history of the knowledge of Self, Mahatma Jadbharat's name is immortal; he was the first one to reveal this knowledge.



Mahatma Buddha

Mahatma Buddha

Born in the family of king, Mahatma Buddha left the royal comforts behind in the search of the Truth. His father was Maharaja Shuddhodhan. He was born in the gardens of Lumbini in Kapilvastu, about five hundred years before the start of *Vikrami Samvat*. His mother was Maharani Mayavati. She was on the way to her parental house. The path was decorated with flowers, flags and pitchers filled with water. Maharani Mayavati was riding a gold-cladded palanquin. When she entered the gardens of Lumbini, Mahatma Buddha was born under a *Sal* tree. He was totally clean and radiating. Mahabrahma received him in a net made of gold and kept him in a soft *Mrigcharm* (skin of a deer) and then gave him in the hands of man in a silken-cloth. In the form of a little child Buddha stood up on the ground and taking seven steps in the North direction uttered these words:

I am the foremost in the world;
 I am the most prominent in the world;
 I am unequalled in the world;
 I would impart the true wisdom to the people of the world;
 I would liberate the people of the world;
 I would salvage the people of the world;
 I would salvage myself.

At the birth of Mahatma Buddha the sky was illuminated and it looked auspicious all around. Maharaja Shuddhodhan donated with free hands and celebrated the occasion fabulously for many days. Before his birth many astrologers had predicted that the prince to be born would be extraordinarily brilliant in front of whom great kings and religious leaders would bow down and that he would be greatly respected in the world. After seven days of his birth, his mother expired and, therefore, he was brought up by step mother Prajavati. The prince was named Siddharth.

Siddharth started to grow slowly like the moon of the bright nights, but he was not interested in playing like ordinary children. The king had provided him with various toys but they could not attract him. At the age of five years he started receiving formal education and in a very short duration he became apt at archery, horse riding and in using various weapons. Right from his early childhood Siddharth was gifted with divine qualities and with the passing of time his heart was filled with compassion for all creatures. His childhood friend Devdutt was jealous of him. Once Devdutt hit a swan with an arrow and the swan fell down on ground. Siddharth's heart was moved seeing the pain of the swan. He took the swan in his lap and very gently pulled out the arrow from its body, cleaned the blood oozing out of the wound and stroked the swan. Devdutt asked Siddharth to give him the swan, but Siddharth refused to give him the swan saying that the swan was saved by him and the saver has a higher right over the swan than the one, who tried to kill it.

King Shuddhodhan noticed that the prince was not attracted towards worldly things. He was worried that the prince might renounce the world and become an ascetic.

He, therefore, got the prince married to Yashodhara, the princess of Devdah kingdom. Siddharth, however, often used to meditate upon the miseries of the world and used to think that others were not as fortunate as he was and that he had come in the world for some extraordinary work and not for getting tied to the momentary worldly pleasures.

One day the prince desired to visit the town. King Shuddhodhan so arranged his visit that no old or ailing person or no unpleasant incidence is seen by the prince, which may arouse the feelings of renunciation in his mind. The prince rode over a chariot, which was cladded with gold and was driven by four excellent horses. Ladies of the town were looking at the handsome prince, who was radiating with brilliance from the balconies and roof-tops of their houses.

As the fate would have had it, Siddharth saw an old person on the way, who had lost his teeth, his back had bent, his face was full of wrinkles and his head was shaking. He had never seen such a person before. The charioteer explained the matter. The prince started pondering over it that everyone has to suffer from old age. He returned to the palace and next day again when he went out, he saw an ailing person. The third day he saw a dead person. His heart was filled with languor and disappointment. The fourth day he saw an ascetic wearing a *civar* (a garment worn by ascetics), which attracted him and strengthened his inclination towards renunciation. His time to leave behind the worldly things was nearing. He could not be kept attached to the royal comforts. As he was entering the palace, he received the message of begetting a son but in his mind this also was another rope to tie him to the world.

Prince Siddharth was dejected. He told his father that he wanted to renounce the world. When his father tried to dissuade him, he said that if his father could assure him that he would not die or would not age or fall sick or become poor, he would give up the idea to leave his family. King Shuddhodhan had no answer. Prince Siddharth told his father that he would gain that wisdom through which he could help people to get over these things.

The young prince retired to his royal bedroom where young ladies were appointed to entertain him but the prince was not lured by them. He went to sleep. The ladies around thought that the one for whom they were appointed has gone to sleep, so they could also go to sleep now. They, therefore, went to sleep. The prince, however, was alert. He saw those ladies, some of whom were coughing and some were secreting saliva while fast asleep. This made the prince even more detached. He asked for a horse to be brought for him to leave the palace. In the meantime he went to the room of princess Yashodhara, his wife, who was sleeping with her hand on the head of seven days old son Rahul. Siddharth thought that if he picks up the child to embrace him, Yashodhara would wake up. He, therefore, decided to embrace the young prince, his son, only after he is enlightened.

He mounted upon the horse and left the palace. The door of the palace, which was locked, opened up on its own. Leaving the royal comforts and the great kingdom behind, Siddharth reached at the banks of the river Anoma in the full-moon night of the month of

Ashadh (the fourth month of the Hindu year, June-July). He resolved not to return to Kapilvastu, without enlightenment.

Siddharth shaved off his dark hair with his sword, removed his silken attire and the ornaments and became a monk. He started looking for a Guru (spiritual Master), who could impart him the knowledge of the Truth and could give him peace, but he was not able to find such a person. For seven days he stayed at Anupiya and then proceeded to Rajgrih. People were astonished to see him in the attire of a monk. Siddharth accepted alms without hesitation. He then proceeded to the forests of Uruvela and engaged in severe *Tapa* (penance). With five of his disciples, he spent his time in gaining knowledge, living on scanty food. Later he gave up even this scanty food. Though this weakened him physically but filled him with brilliance. His five disciples, however, left him thinking that in six years he has not been enlightened and that he was begging for alms. They went to Rishipattan.

A farmer's daughter Sujata belonging to Sonani town of Uruvela had made a prayer before a banyan tree that if she is married in an appropriate family and is blessed with a son as the first child then she would make offerings every year. Her desire was fulfilled in the sixth year of her marriage. She fed five hundred cows with the milk of specially fed thousand cows and prepared *Khir* (a sweet dish made by cooking rice in milk) from that milk in the morning of Baishakh Purnima (full moon night of the month of Baishakh-the second month of the Hindu year, i.e. April-May). She asked her maid Purna to clean the *Devasthan* (the abode of the deity). Siddharth was sitting under the tree. He had firmly resolved that he would receive enlightenment that day. Purna thought that the deity had come down in person to receive the *Khir*. Sujata offered the *Khir*, which Siddharth accepted. After Sujata left, he ate the *Khir* and threw away the plate made of gold in the river Neranjana. He went to the blooming Shalvan situated at the river bank and sat under the Bodhi-vriksha (the tree of wisdom-the sacred fig-tree). He resolved that he would not rise from the *Aparajit-Aasan* (the mode of his sitting in meditation) unless he is enlightened, even at the cost of his life. The river Neranjana was flowing quietly and the sun was about to set when Siddharth got *Sambodhi* (a state of deep contemplation). He remained seated in that posture for seven days contemplating about the Self and that ignorance was the root cause of all evils and removal of ignorance leads to freedom from all worldly desires. He realized that the root cause of all sorrows is desires; all worldly things are mortal and that on bearing the fruit of one's misdeeds and on cessation of desires, one gets nirvana. Self restraint and control over senses is the only way to salvation. Adherence to truth, firm resolution for good deeds, right attitude and true faith are the means to achieve nirvana.

Mahatma Buddha then instructed his five disciples in Rishipattan and established a Sangh (a group of people) in Kashi. He asked his disciples to spread his message far and wide for the benefit of people. His five disciples namely Kaundinya, Mahanam, Washp, Ashvajit and Bhadrakit received Mahatma Buddha with great honor. In Sarnath, Mahatma Buddha announced that he had no Guru; that he has achieved nirvana; that he has understood the religion fully; that he is Buddha; that he is at peace and free from sorrows; that leaving aside the paths of penance and indulgence, he has discovered the

middle path. He also announced that one should know the cause of sorrows and leave that aside. He told the groups of Bhikshus (Buddhist monks) that Samadhi adorned by morality, wisdom adorned by Samadhi and Chitta (thought) adorned by wisdom acquires the eligibility to be liberated from sorrows. To the house-holders he said in simple words that good family-men enjoy happiness while still alive; their fame reaches all around, they live happily and at the time of death they are not upset. After death they go to heavens or achieve salvation. Mahatma Buddha with his disciples then engaged in spreading their mission.

Mahatma Buddha visited Kaushal and Magadh and entered Rajgrih through Gayashirsh Mountain. Maharaja Bimbisar became his disciple. Sariputra and Maudgalayan were also initiated by him in Rajgrih. After spending sometime in Venuvan, Mahatma Buddha came to Kapilvastu and wearing the attires of monks started begging for alms in the capital city of his father's kingdom. King Shuddhodhan's eyes got filled with tears, people were thrilled, affluence and luxury bowed down before asceticism. King Shuddhodhan said that it was not appropriate for a Kshtriya (one belonging to the warrior caste) to beg for alms. Mahatma Buddha, however, replied that he now belonged to the family of monks, where it was customary to beg. Mahatma Buddha also said that the bliss of nirvana was the ultimate bliss and the internal spiritual pleasure is the real happiness. This world is mortal and it was the duty of every man to seek the eternal bliss, which is beyond life and death. Maharaja Shuddhodhan then took the begging-bowl of Mahatma Buddha in his own hands and entered the palace with Mahatma Buddha.

When Mahatma Buddha visited the palace of princess Yashodhara, she welcomed him and put the dust of his feet at her head. She addressed her son Rahul and asked him to ask his father Mahatma Buddha for the paternal inheritance. Mahatma Buddha initiated the young prince Rahul.

From Kapilvastu, Mahatma Buddha proceeded to Kaushal. Many incidences are related to Mahatma Buddha's life. Devdutt was his born-enemy. In connivance with king Ajatshatru, he confronted Mahatma Buddha with an elephant named Nilgiri, who was fed with nine mounds of wine. The elephant rushed with great speed towards Mahatma Buddha. People were scared. They requested Mahatma Buddha to get away, but Mahatma Buddha refused saying that the elephant was a friend. The elephant came near him and started putting the dust of Mahatma Buddha's feet on its head. Mahatma Buddha stroked him with love and the elephant went away.

Similar is the story of Angulimal. He was a dreaded dacoit living in the woods in the territory of king Prasenjit. After killing the passers-by, he used to cut off their little finger and used to wear them as a necklace. Once Buddha after taking meals in Avasti, was taking the route through the same jungle. People tried to persuade him not to go through that jungle but Buddha did not change his mind. Angulimal saw him and asked him to halt. Mahatma Buddha, however, continued to proceed ignoring Angulimal. Angulimal got annoyed and started running towards him. He, however, could not reach up to Buddha. He was surprised and asked Buddha to stop. Buddha kept on walking and

told Angulimal: 'I am steadfast'. Angulimal stopped and asked Mahatma Buddha-'how are you steadfast and I am not.' Buddha answered that by giving up the thought of cruelty towards all creatures he was unwavering. Angulimal was deeply impressed by the courage and brilliance of Mahatma Buddha. He fell at his feet and requested to initiate him.

While Mahatma Buddha was staying at Jetvan, king Prasenjit came to visit him. He said that he was going to catch and punish Angulimal. Buddha showed him the dreaded dacoit in the attires of a monk. The king was astonished. Angulimal used to visit the town for begging alms.

Once Anand, a disciple of Mahatma Buddha went to Shravasti and asked a young lady standing at a well for water. The young girl Prakriti, a *chandala* (low caste) by caste, expressed her inability owing to her lowly caste. Anand told her that he was asking her for water to drink and not enquiring about her caste. She gave him water. Mahatma Buddha then initiated her and included her in the *Sangha*. The people of higher strata complained about it to king Prasenjit. Mahatma Buddha explained to the king that the rich and the mighty had not descended from the heavens, nor the down-trodden are specially born. All men are equal. The king got the message.

Once Mahatma Buddha was out for begging that he saw a lady Kisa Gautami crying. Her son had died of snake bite. She fell at the feet of Mahatma Buddha and asked him to bring her son to life again. On her insistence, Tathagat (Mahatma Buddha) told her that he would give life to her son provided she brings one fist of mustard seeds from a house where no one would have ever died. She went from door to door but could not find any family where some one or the other had not died. She realized the transitory nature of life. She cremated her son and then entered the *Sangha* as a monk.

Once Mahatma Buddha was camping with his disciples in the garden of Ambapali in Vaishali. The famous *Ganika* (a lady earning her livelihood from singing and dancing) Ambapali on listening that Buddha was camping there was thrilled and came to visit him. Wearing white clothes she came to visit Mahatma Buddha on a chariot. She invited Mahatma Buddha along with his disciples, which he accepted. Mahatma Buddha exhorted her to accept the path of Dharma saying that her mind was unwavering as a result of her inner-conscious but it was rare to find keen inclination towards Dharma in a beautiful and young lady. Dharma is the supreme path. Ambapali was so impressed that she offered that garden at the feet of Buddha.

On realizing that his time for *Parinirvana* (complete annihilation of the self) was nearing, Mahatma Buddha expressed his desire to Anand to move to Kushinagar. Anand suggested him bigger places like Shravasti, Rajgrih and Kashi but Mahatma Buddha told him that Kushinagar was a renowned place and it was most suited for his nirvana. Anand was sad to listen that the end of Mahatma Buddha was nearing. Mahatma Buddha explained him that he was about eighty and consoled him asking him to be guided by the light of the Self and to follow the path of Dharma. On the way to Kushinagar they stayed at the mango grooves of Chund, a goldsmith, in Pava. Chund offered him sweet *Khira*

made of special rice, which did not suit Mahatma Buddha. It was his last meals. By sunset they reached Kushinagar. Mahatma Buddha told Anand that he would take Mahanirvana below the pair of *Sal* trees and told him how he should be cremated like a *Chakravarti Samrat* (a king of kings).

His last sermon was that salvation is the ultimate objective; forgiveness is the essence of good conduct; it is the highest penance. Desires are the root cause of all sorrows. Contentment gives the real happiness. Attachment gives rise to all pains. Everything in the universe is sure to perish. Anything obtained from association or disassociation is bound to be lost.

Mahatma Buddha took Parinirvana in the late hours of night. On the arrival of his disciple Mahakashyap on the seventh day, he was cremated in proper manner. It was 420 years before the commencement of the Vikram Samvat. Various *stoopas* were made in his memory.



Sant Tiruvalluvar

Sant Tiruvalluvar

Sant Tiruvalluvar is considered to be the *adi-sansakaran* of Sant Kabir (i.e. he was the Kabir of South much, who was born much before Kabir). His name in the history of Tamil literature is indelible. He was the author of “Kural”, which is considered to be the Tamil-Veda. He is the one who introduced Tamil culture and literature to the world at least three thousand years ago. The Tamil-Chol and Pandya kingdoms of that time had trading links with many big countries and people including royal-representatives visiting these kingdoms for trade were benefited by the presence of Sant Tiruvalluvar.

Sant Tiruvalluvar was born in a low-caste family in Mailapur of Madras. It is said that his father was a Brahmin but his mother belonged to a lowly caste. It is also believed that he was born in Madurai but later shifted to Madras. He was a poet-saint, who through his poetry described and glorified various aspects of human life.

He was a family man and had married a Vallal-lady named Vasuki. She was a noble person and a great devotee of the Lord. She contributed a lot in the spiritual progress of Sant Tiruvalluvar. It is said that she used to sit besides Tiruvalluvar with a needle in her hand when Sant Tiruvalluvar used to dine so that if any grain of rice fell on the ground, she may pick it up with the needle for feeding birds. Sant Tiruvalluvar was greatly impressed by her and used to praise her a lot for her divine qualities and for her love, obedience and etiquettes. After her death, Sant Tiruvalluvar got more inclined towards the divine. He started spending all his time in contemplation and in the pursuit of the Self. The Pandya king of Madurai had great respect for him. The entire kingdom venerated him.

Forbearance was the essence of the life of Sant Tiruvalluvar. He, like gold, all through purified his life in the fire of *tapa* (penance). He himself suffered all pain but never ever gave even the slightest trouble to any creature. At one place he has mentioned that a saint is tested in sufferings. He attached a lot of importance to truthfulness. He said that truth is the basis of the life of saints. He did not appreciate wealth acquired through illegal or unfair means and said that such a wealth should be discarded howsoever lucrative it may be. He established the dignity of human life in earning and spending life in accordance with Dharma. To be kind to others, in his eyes was the greatest earning; wealth could be acquired even by sinners and despondent. He laid a lot of stress on the righteousness, good conduct, doing well to others and tolerance.

Sant Tiruvalluvar also was a weaver like Kabir. An anecdote is related to him. He had woven a *chadar* (a sheet of cloth-shawl), which he wanted to sell. There was a boy, son of a rich man, who wanted to test the patience of Sant Tiruvalluvar and show-off his riches. He approached Sant Tiruvalluvar and asked him for the price of that *chadar*. Sant Tiruvalluvar informed that its price was two rupees. The boy took the *chadar* in his hands, torn it in two pieces and asked for the price of each of the pieces. Sant Tiruvalluvar told him that the price of each piece was now one rupee. The boy again torn the pieces in to halves and asked for the price. Sant Tiruvalluvar quietly told

him that the price of each piece was now half a rupee. The boy kept on tearing the pieces and Sant Tiruvalluvar kept on telling him the reduced price. Ultimately the *chadar* was converted into small ribbon-like pieces and the boy asked for the price of those pieces. Sant Tiruvalluvar said that the *chadar* had now lost all its value. The boy laughed and offered two rupees, the price of *chadar* to Sant Tiruvalluvar. Sant Tiruvalluvar, however, refused to accept the money and said to the boy that in the making of that *chadar* a lot of effort of lot of people had gone in. The farmer had tilled the land, some one had made thread out of the cotton and then the *chadar* was woven. All that effort would have been fruitful if someone had used that *chadar*, which had now become useless. The boy was embarrassed; he had learnt the lesson of his life. Humility had taken the place of pride. He was now a changed person.

In the literary world and especially in the devotional literature, Kural has an important place. Because of the low caste of Sant Tiruvalluvar, however, the Pundits were skeptical about it. Sant Tiruvalluvar was not perturbed and invited them to listen to the Kural. In the beautiful pond of the temple Kural was kept on one side of a small boat and on the other side Pundits were sitting. A strange incidence occurred at that moment. That portion of the boat where Pundits were sitting started to sink but the portion where Kural was kept remained untouched by the water of the pond. The Pundits recognized the importance of Kural. They accepted the greatness of Sant Tiruvalluvar and also understood that in the realm of divine-love, no one was higher or lower. They bowed down before the wisdom of Sant Tiruvalluvar. Each of the Pundits praised Sant Tiruvalluvar by reciting and dedicating a verse to him. The collection of these verses is known as 'Tiruvalluvar-Malika'. Sant Tiruvalluvar has filled Kural with the divine wisdom (esoteric knowledge).

Sant Tiruvalluvar talked in people's language for their benefit and made them appreciate the importance of self-belief and submission at the feet of the Lord. He lived a simple life with the fellow-feeling towards all. He was a strong supporter of non-violence and had firm faith in God. He realized the all-pervasiveness of God in all beings.

The essence of his preaching was *Sadachar* (righteousness or moral conduct). He considered it to be more important than life and stated that one should keep an eye on one's conduct, as there is no better friend than it. Mahatmas never deviate from *Sadachar* and they know the result of failing in keeping good conduct. It is the seed of excellence. One, who does not stick to righteousness is ignorant, howsoever educated he may be. Some of his sayings are:

Thinking about eternity of worldly things is futile; there is nothing eternal in the world. Birds leave their nest and fly in the open sky. Similarly, soul would leave the body one day. Death is like sleeping and birth is like waking up from the sleep.

The meekness in heart is the real meekness; it is not the absence of money.

To consider one as the most learned, is the greatest foolishness.

Sufferings should be undergone smilingly. There is no better way to overcome them. In the eyes of a *Gyani* (knower), on realizing the true nature of sorrows, their inflow stops. Those, who do not panic in difficulties, they become difficult for the difficulties. One, who does not look for pleasure in happy days, he alone does not get perturbed when confronted with sorrows.



Mahavir Swami

Mahavir Swami

Mahavir Swami and Mahatma Buddha both were great exponents of non-violence, compassion and pity for all creatures. Mahavir Swami was the twenty-fourth *Tirthankar* (highly placed spiritual leader) of Jains. The Jain religion was given by the first *Tirthankar* Rishabhdev but Mahavir Swami contributed a lot in its growth. He attached a lot of importance to *Tapa* (penance) and austerities in Jainism.

At the bank of river Gandaki on the outskirts of Vaishali kingdom was the town Kshatriyakundanpur, whose king was Siddharth. His queen was Trishla. She was the daughter of Chetak, the king of Vaishali in Videha area. Mahavir was born to them more than five hundred years before the beginning of Vikram Samvat. Before his birth, his mother saw fourteen strange dreams. In her dreams she had seen a white elephant with four teeth; a well built bull and a lion; the goddess Laxmi sitting on lotus flower; garlands made from *Mandar* flowers; full moon; bright sun; lotus flowers; deep ocean; royal throne; divine chariot; *Nagloka*; jewels and smokeless fire. King Siddharth appreciated her dreams a lot and told her that she would give birth to a majestic son and that it is the forecast of the advent of a great soul, who is a *Tirthankar* and would show the path for salvation to people.

As predicted by king Siddharth, queen Trishla was blessed with a son 542 years before the on-set of Vikram Samvat in the morning of the thirteenth day of moonlit-nights in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April), which was a Monday. He was radiating peace and glory and his body was shining like molten gold. He was named 'Vardhman'. It is said about him that soon after his birth Indra, the king of gods, took him to the Sumeru Mountain and there he gave him a bath with the water of *Ksheersagar* (mythol.-the ocean of milk, where rests the Lord Vishnu), performed the rituals and then kept him back in the royal palace.

Queen Trishla was a noble lady and both queen Trishla and king Siddharth were followers of Jainism. Their influence was deeply engraved on the personality of Vardhman. They brought up Vardhman with great care and love. Vardhman was very gentle, brilliant and well-mannered. His childhood was spent in luxury and affluence but he was inclined towards renunciation, *Tapa* and detachment and was un-interested in worldly affairs.

At the age of eight, Kumar Vardhman used to go out of the city and used to climb up and down on mango trees along with his friends. One, who was the fastest in doing so, was declared as the winner. The winner used to ride on the back of other boys as a token of reward. Once when Kumar Vardhman was busy playing with his friends, the king of gods, Indra praised him a lot for his vigor and strength. This made one of the gods named Sangam to come down to test Kumar Vardhman. He first appeared in the form of a black poisonous snake, having a very wide hood, which frightened the other boys but Kumar Vardhman caught hold of him and threw him away. Immediately he took the form of a boy and started playing with them. Gradually he started growing like a ghost and became

huge in size. Kumar Vardhman pushed him aside. He started crying and bowed at the feet of Kumar Vardhman. He accepted Kumar Vardhman as a divine being and brought water in a gold-vessel for Kumar Vardhman to take bath and gave him a new name 'Mahavir'.

Once two *Sanyasis* (ascetics) named Sanjay and Vijay visited the town. Just a glimpse of Mahavir Swami eliminated all their doubts. They named the prince Kumar Vardhman as "*Sanmati*" and left the town. Kumar Vardhman was growing in an environment of *Vairagya* (detachment). The righteous conduct of his parents acted as a catalyst for him to gain knowledge. He started realizing that the eternal bliss could be gained only through renunciation and that *Tapa* and self-restraint were extremely important in life.

On the insistence of his mother, he married princess Yashoda, daughter of Samarvir-the king of Vasantpur and his queen Padmavati. After some time he begot a daughter named Priyadarshna. Even while living a family life, he was a detached person, who had little interest in the worldly pleasures.

Once Kumar Vardhman got deeply attracted towards asceticism. He thought that he had spent twenty-eight years of his life but had not attained the state of *Kaivalya-Gyan* (complete knowledge of Truth). The death is approaching nearer and nearer everyday but he had not been able to attain the knowledge of eternal-life. All the worldly things are impermanent and nothing else except the *Atma* (Self) could help the *Atma*. He sought permission of his mother but she could never think of seeing her son in the attire of a recluse wandering in the jungles and begging for alms. In due course of time after the death of his parents, he firmly made up his mind to renounce the world but had to stay back for another two years on insistence of his younger brother prince Nandivardhan. At last that moment arrived when Kumar Vardhman renounced the world and left for spending his life in *Tapa* and sadhana. Before entering in to the life of an ascetic, in the twenty-ninth year of his life Mahavir Swami gave away all his wealth in charity. In the thirtieth year he left behind the palace. The bond of attachment had been broken but he was yet to be initiated as an ascetic. He was initiated in the grove of Gratyakhand of the capital city Kundanpur. He removed his black hair himself and gave up all clothes except that were necessary. He bowed before the Siddha-Bhagwan and resolved not to indulge in any sinful act from that day; not to cause any hurt to any creature; not to lie; not to accept anything without being given by the owner thereof; not to accumulate anything and to give up sensual pleasures. He further resolved to forebear all human and natural calamities for the next twelve years and to spend a life of severe *Tapa* and self-restraint. He kept his arms spread and did not fold them even when it was cold. He did not eat in night and was fully committed to his resolve of not causing hurt to others. Through self-realization he gained the knowledge of the impermanence of worldly things and thereby subjugated his mind, body and speech. Seeing the world burning in the fire of pain and sorrows, he found the path of salvation and peace.

In the thirteenth year of his ascetic life he attained the state of *Kaivlyagyan* (knowledge of Truth-the state of self-realization) under a Sal-tree. He became a *Tirthankar*. He had become weak and his body had shrunk but every cell of his body was

radiating divine glory. He walked through about twelve *Yojan* (a traditional measure of distance-reckoned variously as between about four and eighteen miles) in the night and reached Pawa from village Jamiya where great scholars and Pundits were performing *Yagya* (sacrificial act) at the residence of Somil-Brahman. When they learnt about Mahavir Swami's arrival, they including the chief priest Pundit Indrabhuti, Vayubhuti and other eleven scholars went to listen to the sermon of Jineshwar Mahavir. On finding that all their doubts had been resolved they became disciples of Mahavir Swami. He told them that it was not correct to say that the world was non-existent (*Shunya*), it is real; what is known directly through conscious knowledge is the *Atma*. The inert actions are different from *Atma* and they fructify through association with the qualities of *Atma*. *Punya* (virtue) and *Paap* (sins) result from the pleasant or sad outcome of the good or bad deeds.

Mahavir Swami established a *Sangha* (a group of people-his disciples), based on eight principles. These principles included *Atm-jay* (winning over one's own self); *Ahimsa* (not to hurt-non-violence); *Vrat* (fasting); *Vinay* (humility); *Sheel* (moral conduct); *Maitri* (fellow-feeling); *Sambhav* (treating everyone with equality) and *Pramod* (delight-happiness).

Mahavir Swami walked on foot from one village to another spreading the message of his *Kaivlyagyan*. The number of his disciples also started increasing, which included even kings and many other prominent persons. He visited many big cities including Ujjaini and Kaushambi. Once he reached the deadly burial ground of Ujjaini in night. Once a poisonous snake named Chand-Kausik bit him causing severe pain to him. This serpent was a yogi in his previous births but had not been able to win over his anger, as a result of which in this birth he was born as a serpent. Mahavir Swami gave sermon to the snake to understand his own self. The snake came out of his ignorance and gained the knowledge of Self. Large number of people used to visit him to benefit from his *Kaivlyagyan*.

At the age of seventy-two Mahavir Swami left this mortal world. His body had become very weak. He was spending his last *Chaturmasya* (the period of four months of rainy season during which the monks stop traveling and stay at one place) at Pawa when he started passing blood in stool. In the mid-night of the last day of the dark-fortnight of Kartik month, Mahavir Swami attained *Paramgati* (attained the highest state). His last words to his disciple Anand were that the cessation of attachment towards self is self-realization; following the path of self-restraint and *Tapa* is worthy and that the path of peace and *Ahimsa* was the real *Dharma-Marg* (the path of *Dharma*).



Acharya Shankar

Acharya Shankar

Shankaracharya is considered to be one of the most prominent spiritual leaders of India, who dislodged the '*Anatmavad*' (non-existence of soul) of Buddhism and propagated the theory of all-pervading soul of the Hindu philosophy. He was not a thinker alone but also a *Dharmacharya* (religious head) and a builder of the nation. His main disciple Padmpad had written a book titled 'Vijaydindim' in which he had described the character of Acharya Shankar but that book is now not available. Whatever information about him is available is based on the works titled 'Shankar Digvijay' by Anandgiri; 'Shankar Vijay' by Chidvilasyati; 'Sankshep Shankar Vijay' and 'Laghu Shankar Vijay' by Madhvacharya; 'Shankaramyudya' by Tirumalla Dixit and 'Shankar Vijay' by Purushottam Bharati.

There is a lot of controversy about the period of the birth of Acharya Shankar or Shankaracharya. Some scholars maintain that he was born about four hundred years before Christ drawing support from the sequence of establishment of various *Muths* (monasteries) by him. It, however, appears that Acharya Shankar was born on the fifth day of the moonlit night of Baishakh in Kerala in a village named Kalti-Kalandi or Kaldi situated at the bank of the river Poorna. His father was a renowned scholar named Shri Shivguru, a Brahmin and his mother was Shrimati Subhadra (also named as Vishishtha), both of whom were in advanced age and childless. They prayed and worshiped Lord Shankar with great reverence, as a result of which Acharya Shankar was born to them in about 845 Vikramiya Samvat, who was named after Lord Shankar, as Shankar.

Acharya Shankar was extraordinarily brilliant. At the age of three years he had learnt his mother-tongue Malayalam and soon at a very young age he memorized many episodes of Puranas and other scriptures. He lost his father at the age of three years. At the age of five years after *Yagyopavit Samsakara* (the Brahminical sacred thread ceremony) he was sent to his teacher's house for learning and acquiring knowledge. By the time he was seven, he had learnt the Vedas, Vedant and other scriptures and thereafter he returned home. His extraordinary brilliance had astonished his teacher. A strange incidence when he was studying is related to him. A poor Brahman once put an *Amla* (myrobalan) on his palm as a token of his poverty. Shankar's was moved and he prayed to the goddess Laxmi. Next day the poor Brahman spotted a lot of *Amlas* of gold in his house.

Having completed his studies, Shankar returned home. His mother used to go to the river Poorna to bathe. Once she fainted due to exertion and, therefore, did not return home for long. Shankar went in search for her and noticing that she had to travel far off to take her bath, he prayed to the Almighty to make the river Poorna flow close to their house. Soon thereafter the river changed its course and started flowing close to their house. Shankar thereafter desired to take *Sanyas* (renounce the world) and sought his mother's permission to do so but she did not agree. Shankar was a great devotee of his mother and, therefore, did not want to do anything that may upset her. One day he had gone to take a bath with his mother at the river. While he was taking a dip in the river a

crocodile caught hold of his foot. His mother was shocked and started crying for help. Shankar consoled her saying that if she permitted him to take *Sanyas*, the crocodile would leave him. The worried mother immediately gave her consent and the crocodile left Shankar. Thus at the age of eight, Shankar left his home and while leaving he promised his mother that he would be present at the time she breaths her last.

Having left the home Shankar arrived at the bank of the river Narmada and there he was initiated by Swami Govind Bhagvatpad. He was given a new name by his Guru 'Bhagvatpujyapadachrya'. He started his sadhana as directed by the Guru and in a short duration he became a *Yogasiddha* Mahatma (a Mahatma who has attained the desired state in yoga). Pleased with his achievement, his Guru asked him to go to Kashi and write a commentary on *Vedantasutra*. In Kashi he started gaining popularity and many people became his disciple. His first disciple was Sanandan, who later became famous as Padmacharya. In Kashi along with teaching his students, Shankar also used to write the commentary. It is said that once Lord Vishvanath appeared before him in the attires of a *Chandal* (a low caste man), who was surrounded by four dogs. He obstructed Shankar's path. Shankar asked him to move away. He politely replied, 'You are a preacher of *Advait* (non-duality), and you say that the entire world is pervaded by the Lord. It is, therefore, surprising that a person like you believes in untouchability.' Shankar appreciated the argument and stated that the *Chandal*, who perceived the presence of same Soul in all the creatures, is also my Guru. Shankar was then surprised to see Lord Vishvanath himself standing in place of the *Chandal*. Lord Vishvanath then showed him his divine appearance, asked him to write a commentary on the Brahmasutra and to proclaim '*Advait Brahmataiva*' (non-duality of all beings) in it and also asked him to preach the religion.

Shankar then traveled to various places including Kanchi, Ujjaiyani and Badrikashram and defeated many exponents of different schools of thought and wrote many books. He then reached Prayag and met Kumarilbhatt at the time when he was preparing for self-emollition and on his advice Shankar went to Mahishmati to hold a debate with Mandan Mishra. Bharti Mishra, the wife of Mandan Mishra acted as the mediator for the debate. Mandan Mishra lost the debate and became a disciple of Acharya Shankar. Bharti, the wife of Mandan Mishra was highly learned. She challenged Shankaracharya to defeat her in debate on *Kamshashtra* (in the knowledge of cohabitation). Shankaracharya was a *Bal-Brahmachari* (observing chastity right from the childhood) and had no knowledge of family-life. He, therefore, sought some time and transmigrated his soul in to the body of a dead person, king Amru, to acquire the requisite knowledge. Mandan Mishra changed his name to Sureshvaracharya after becoming a disciple of Shankaracharya.

Once a *Kapalik* (one engaged in *Tantra Vidya*) requested him to give his head for his *Tantrik Kriyas*, as he was in the look out of a realized person, who could offer his head. Shankaracharya agreed to offer his head and sat in Samadhi. Padmapad, the disciple of Shankaracharya on getting an inspiration appeared just when the *Kapalik* was about to severe Shankaracharya's head and killed him (*Kapalik*), thus saving Shankaracharya's life.

Shankaracharya then started spreading the message of Upanishads. He proclaimed that Brahm is Truth and the world is false. This was known as “*Kevaladvaitavad*” (the theory of absolute non-duality). He proclaimed the theory of non-differentiation of the creature and the Creator. He proclaimed that in spite of manifestation, the Brahm is ‘*Purna*’ (full, complete, whole), Truth and *Gyanandswaroop* (treasure of all Knowledge and Bliss), Eternal and all-Pervasive. According to him Brahm has no attributes or qualities and is inert. He, however, did not disapprove of *Sagun* Brahm (Brahm with all attributes and qualities), but stated that *Sagun* Brahm is *Mayik* (of Maya-illusion), and accepted the *Sagun* Brahm as the treasure of all attributes and qualities. He proclaimed that the Soul is infinite and full of knowledge but *Jeev* (an embodied soul or creature) does not possess this knowledge, as its knowledge is restricted to the body and that because of his *Karma* (actions-deeds) he moves up or down and feels pleasure or pain and undergoes the cycle of death and birth. On acquiring the knowledge of ‘*Tatvamasi*’ (on cessation of the sense of a different identity) alone one acquires the state of liberation. He laid lot of stress on inner purity through which alone one acquires the real knowledge. He considered devotion to be a means for acquiring the real knowledge and acquisition of real knowledge as the ultimate goal. He himself, however, was a devotee and had special inclination towards the *Leelas* of Lord Shri Krishna. He has described various *Leelas* of Lord Krishna at the banks of the river Yamuna in his work ‘Prabodhsagar’.

Shankaracharya brought many scriptures again into prominence and he himself wrote many treatises. He wrote all this during the period of four years between the age of 12 to 16 years. He defeated the Shaivites and Kapaliks of Maharashtra and also the Pundits of Kashmir. From Kashmir to Rameshwaram, scholars recognized his brilliance. He established various *Jyotirmuths* (Schools for philosophical learning), viz. Shungeri in South, Govardhan in Jaggannathpuri, Sharda in Dwarka and in Badrikashram. These *Jyotirmuths* became centers for promulgating Shankaracharya’s principles right from the beginning. With a view to spread the message of religion Shankaracharya started holding of Kumbha Mela (the famous Kumbha festivals) at the interval of every twelve years at Nasik, Ujjain, Prayag and Haridwar, which are continuing and gaining strength year after year. This is a great contribution of Shankaracharya to the Indian culture.

Having established various *Muths*, conquering various scholars and having completed his work of spreading the message of religion Shankaracharya visited his ailing mother in Kerala. She breathed her last in the presence of Shankaracharya. Seeing Shankaracharya a Sanyasi, coming forward to perform the last rights of his mother Pundits discarded him but Shankaracharya performed her last rights.

He remained alive only for thirty-two years. While proceeding towards Kedar, he left this mortal world near Kailash in Vikram Samvat 877.



Yamunacharya

Yamunacharya

Yamunacharya was a great scholar and philosopher, who, like Shri Shankaracharya, Shri Ramanujacharya, Acharya Shri Madhva, Shri Vallabhacharya and Shri Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, contributed a lot to the Indian culture and religion. South India is the fertile ground for bhakti to prosper and many great devotees were born here. Shri Yamunacharya was a great devotee, a great believer in the Divine and a great exponent of Vishishtha-advaitvad.

He was born in 1010 Vikram Samvat in Madurai. Ishwarmuni, son of Shri Nathmuni, an Acharya of Vaishnav-Sampraday, was his father. When Yamunacharya was about ten years old his father died. On his grand-father taking *Sanyas* (renouncing the world) he was brought up by his grand-mother and mother. From the very childhood he exhibited extra-ordinary brilliance. Bhashyacharya was his teacher. Yamunacharya was very polite, loving and kind. He defeated the Mahapundit Kolahal of *Pandya* kingdom in a scholarly debate as a result of which the queen gave him half of her kingdom and also conferred on him the title of 'Alvandar'. When Yamunacharya was about thirty-five, Nathmuni knowing that his death was nearing warned his (Nathmuni's) dear disciple Rammishra that it may not happen that Yamunacharya spends all his life in administering the kingdom and in enjoying the life. After the death of Nathmuni, Rammishra was going to meet Yamunacharya to hand over the rights of his parental property. On the way was the temple of Lord Srirang. Suddenly on visiting the temple Yamunacharya felt a strong current of bhakti in his heart and he decided to take *Sanyas*, leaving the kingdom and the luxuries of life behind. With a pure mind he prayed before the Lord—"O Param Purush! (The Greatest One) Reproach on me, impertinent, cruel and shameless, who though acts as he wishes, but wants to be Your councilor, which is beyond imagination not only for great yogis but even for Brahma, Shiv and Sanakadi." He then left the kingdom and became a staunch devotee of Lord Srirang.

He propagated Vishishtadvait. He accepted the Lord as the '*Purna-Purushottam*' (The Perfect and the Highest). He established *Jeev* as a part and the Lord as the One to whom *Jeev* belonged and that the world manifests from the Brahm and that the universe is the body of the Brahm and Brahm is the soul of the universe. Since the body and soul are inseparable, therefore, the world is manifestation of Brahm. He further propounded that Brahm is with all attributes, Complete, Benefactor, Auspicious and Lord of all. *Jeev* by nature is His servant and to serve is *Jeev's* dharma. He also said that '*Advait*' means 'Unity' and 'Inseparability' and stated that the Lord was the ultimate shelter for the *Jeev*.

All his life Yamunacharya sought for the bhakti of the Lord. He was one of the greatest philosophers, scholars and devotees of his time.

Acharya Ramanuj was his disciple. A strange incidence is related to his death. It is said that Yamunacharya kept on waiting for Ramanuj to arrive but died before his arrival. When he died three of his fingers were folded, indicating three of his wishes to be fulfilled by Ramanuj. When Ramanuj arrived and bowed before the dead body of

Yamunacharya and undertook to fulfill his desires, his fingers straightened. According to the wish of Yamunacharya, Ramanuj said that he would definitely write commentary on Brahasutra, Vishnu-Sahstranama, and 'Divya-Prabandhanam' and later fulfilled his desire.

Yamunacharya himself composed 'Strotraratna', 'Siddhitrya', 'Agampramanya' and 'Gitarthsangrah'. 'Aalvandarstrotra' composed by him is a very melodious and divine work.



Acharya Nimbark

Acharya Nimbark

Acharya Nimbark was a devout Vaishnav. He experienced the pure divine bliss in the beauty of Lord Krishna. There are various speculations about the time of his birth but it appears that he was born in the 11th or 12th century of Vikram Samvat in village Nimbapur of the Distt. Belari in South India. It is also believed that he was born in Vaidoorpattan, the Kashi of South and is considered to be an incarnation of the Sudarshan Chakra of Lord Krishna and, therefore, also known as Chakraraj and Sudarshan. His father's name was Arunimuni and mother's name was Jayanti and, therefore, he was also known by the name Aaruni. He promulgated the Dwaitadwait philosophy (duality cum non-duality).

The pious life of his parents had a deep impression on Acharya Nimbark's life. His formal education was also arranged according to his spiritual up-bringing. His childhood name was Niyamanand and it is believed that at the time of his sacred thread ceremony Devrishi Narad appeared to give him the 'Gopal Mantra'. Narad also taught him the way to worship Lord Krishna.

He chose a place near the 'Govardhan' hill in Brij (the land famous as the playground of Lord Krishna). He was a born-devotee and soon his fame reached far and wide. A strange incidence is related to him. Once a *Dandi-Swami* (a recluse keeping a stick with him) came to meet him and the discussions went on till evening. The *Dandi-Swami* did not accept alms after the sunset. Acharya Nimbark was upset that his guest may have to spend the night without food. He, therefore, staged a miracle and the sun was made to stay at one point behind the *neem*-tree in his Ashram, resulting in the day-light being visible again. The *Dandi-Swami* accepted the alms and thereafter the light and the sun disappeared. From that day he became famous as Acharya Nimbark.

Thereafter Acharya Nimbark totally devoted himself in preaching about bhakti. He laid special stress on adoration of Radha-Krishna and attached great importance to Srimadbhagwatmahapuram. He believed that it is through the Lord's grace that one gets inclined towards Him and through His Grace one gets His love. He propagated devotion towards Lord considering oneself as a servant, a friend, a child, with quietude (*shantbhav*) and with purity of mind.

Acharya Nimbark blessed Naimisharanya, Govardhan and Badrikashram with his presence. He specially chose these *Tirthasthalas* (pilgrimage-places), where he propagated his devotional-principles. He stated that the *Brahm* (the Creator) was separate from the '*Jeev*' and '*Jad*' (from the living beings and inert) as well as inseparable. *Jeev* and *Jagat* (the world) both are a consequence of the *Brahm*. *Jeev* is also separate as well as inseparable from the *Brahm* and so is the world. After having an understanding of the nature of *Karma* (action), one becomes eligible to proceed on the path of devotion and thereafter to understand the *Brahm*. Scriptures help one to understand *Brahm* and the pleasure of the Lord emancipates one from pain and difficulties. The *Sagun-bhav* (the form with attributes) of *Brahm* is important, which remains unaffected even after

manifesting in the form of the world. In the form beyond the world He is *Nirgun* (without attributes). The *Jeev* is an '*Ansh*' (a part of the whole) and He is *the 'Anshi'* (the Whole to whom the '*Ansh*' belongs). Both are separate, as well as inseparable. *Jeev* is having limited knowledge. Even on attaining liberation, he is an '*Anu*' (a particle) and not '*Vibhu*' (the Whole). In the liberated state *Jeev* sees himself and the world in the form of Brahm. Through bhakti and worship one realizes the Brahm. It is only through bhakti that one can attain liberation. Acharya Nimbark accepted Lord Krishna as the '*Param-Brahm*'.



Andal Rangnayaki

Aandal Rangnayaki

Aandal Rangnayaki was born in the eight century of Vikram Samvat. She was the Meera of South India and a devout lover of Lord Krishna. She was the one who established that love was indeed the God-personified in His most beautiful and charming form and that love is *Satya* (Truth) and *Shivam* (most auspicious). Her *Premabhakti* (love for the divine) was an expression of the bhakti of Vaishnav-Alawar saints of South India. Alawars were devotees of Lord Narayan and believed that He was full of Love. Aandal saw manifestation of love in all, Narayan as well as in the whole world. She had surrendered her entire being at the feet of Lord Ranganath. She was like a true *Gopi* as described in the Srimadbhagwat. She believed in the supremacy of the *Gopibhava*.

In the tradition of Alawars Vishnuchitt is considered to be the first, he is called Peri-Alawar. He lived in a village at the banks of river Kaveri and spent his time in bhakti. One day when he was giving water to *Tulsi* plants (the sacred basil plant), he saw a newly born baby girl lying over there. He picked up the baby in his arms and with great devotion took her at the feet of the Lord saying that she belonged to the Lord and prayed Him to accept her. The idol of Narayan (Lord Ranganath) appeared to ask Vishnuchitt very clearly that he should look after the girl child as his daughter and name her “Kodai” which means ‘attractive as a garland of flowers’. In due course she was well known as ‘Aandal’. As she grew up, her heart filled with the love for Lord Vishnu. She spent all her time in the remembrance of the Lord and devoted herself entirely to Lord Vishnu spending most of her time in bhakti and in picking up flowers and visiting the Lord. On growing a little older she started singing to please the Lord. Her songs used to be full of devotional love.

When her father had gone to the temple in the morning, she used to make a garland of flowers. She used to be so engrossed in the love for the Lord that she would first put on her own self the garland made with lot of effort and then send them to temple for the Lord. She used to stand before a mirror wearing the garland and used to ask herself whether her beauty is worth offering to her beloved-Lord Vishnu. She worshiped the Lord as her husband. A few times the *Pujari* (priest) had doubt whether the garland was worn by some one and then offered to Lord. He mentioned this to Peri-Alawar. He fully trusted his daughter and could never imagine that she could send used garland for the Lord. He, however, was not able to find an answer as to why the garland for the Lord did not look fresh. One day the priest returned the garland saying that it has a human hair entangled to it. Vishnuchitt felt very upset and he offered another garland made from freshly picked up flowers. Next day again the priest returned the garland saying that it was not fresh, it had already been worn by some one. Vishnuchitt thought that there must be some secret behind it, which must be related to his house and, therefore, he started to look for it. Suddenly he spotted Aandal standing behind a curtain in front of the mirror with the garland in her neck and talking to Srirang (Lord Vishnu) in her own thoughts. Vishnuchitt rushed to her and asked her about what she was doing. He said that she had rendered the garland unfit for the use for the Lord, as she had already worn it. Vishnuchitt then made a fresh garland for the Lord and gave it to the priest.

In the night Vishnuchitt had a dream. He saw the Lord in the dream saying him that He should be offered the same garland, which was worn by Aandal. The offering to the beloved is fruitful only when the beloved accepts it. In the case of Aandal she was a devout lover of the Lord and the Lord had accepted her as His. Vishnuchitt now had realized the true love of Aandal for the Lord and Lord's acceptance for her. Thereafter Aandal started devoting all her time in the remembrance of Lord and the garlands worn by her were offered to the Lord.

Aandal remained grossly engaged in the remembrance of her beloved all the time. Once she asked her father about the scared and pilgrim places. Vishnuchitt described various places and told her that 'in the South Lord Sri Rangnath resides at the bank of river Kaveri'. She was thrilled and tears started rolling out of her eyes. On further query Vishnuchitt told her that when after conquering Lanka Lord Ram returned to Ayodhya, Vibhishan was also with him. When Vibhishan was returning to Lanka, he said that he could not live without him and requested Lord Ram to give him some souvenir that may console him. Lord Ram then gave him the idol of Sri Rangnathji and asked him not to keep it on down before reaching Lanka. When Vibhishan reached the banks of river Kaveri, he started performing some *Yagya* and kept down the idol of Lord Rangnath. Lord Rangnath thereafter refused to accompany Vibhishan to Lanka. Vibhishan, therefore, erected a temple of Lord Rangnath over there and used to visit the temple daily from Lanka.

Aandal was getting more and more pulled towards Lord Rangnath and now she could not bear her separation from Him even for a moment. She used to cry and ask her beloved to accept her at His feet. She had risen above the physical existence. For her both inside and outside, everywhere in each particle, it was her Lord, who alone existed for her. Though physically she lived in the house of Vishnuchitt but mentally she used to be present in Vrindavan playing with *Gopis* and Lord Krishna. She would make earthen hutment, Lord Krishna would come and dismantle it. She would be bathing in the river Yamuna along with other *Gopis* and Lord Krishna would take away their clothes. She used to get message of her beloved in the singing of cuckoo.

Once she got so frenzied in the anguish of separation that Lord Rangnath appeared in the dream of the priests and asked them to bring His beloved Aandal for her marriage with Him immediately. Simultaneously He appeared in the dream of Vishnuchitt Peri-Alawar and asked him to adorn Aandal as a bride and to bring her to the temple. Aandal at the same time saw in her dream that she was being married to the Lord with great ostentation. Next day very early in the morning devotees and priests reached the house of Vishnuchitt with a palanquin to take Lord's bride to the temple. Conches were being blown loudly with uproar of musical instruments and ecstasy all around. Aandal, devotion personified, was welcomed in the temple amidst the enchanting of Veda-mantras and feeling of divinity all around. A divine light engulfed the temple. Aandal immediately rode over the *Sheshshaiyya* (couch of *Sesa*-the divine serpent) of Lord Rangnath. The lover and beloved united. A divine light embraced Aandal, Lord Sri Rangnath and Aandal became one. In a moment and in the presence of all Aandal left

behind her physical body and forever slept in the lap of her beloved. Her soul had wedded Lord Rangnath and became one with Him. Aandal was the culmination of the love of Gopis for Lord Sri Krishna.

Aandal is considered as an incarnation of *Bhoodevi* (goddess earth). Every year the anniversary of her wedding with Lord Rangnath is celebrated with great ostentation in the temples of South India. Her songs in the remembrance of Lord Rangnath are a great contribution of her in promoting Krishna-bhakti in the South. The great King of Vijaynagar Maharaj Krishnadevrai wrote a play “Aamuktmalyadam” based on Aandal.



Mahayogi Gorakhnath

Mahayogi Gorakhnath

Gorakhnath was a great Yogi, who established 'Shivekya' in the soul (unity of soul with Shiv). As in the field of philosophy Acharya Shankar is considered to have revealed the secrets of Vedanta after Mahrishi Vyasa, similarly in the field of yoga Mahayogi Gorakhnath is considered to have revealed the secrets of *Hathyoga* and the *Shivrupa* of Truth after Patanjali. After Acharya Shankar, Mahayogi Gorakhnath is accepted as a highly accomplished and self-realized person. Gorakhnath was a *Shiva-yogi*. He influenced the entire area from Nepal to Sinhal and from Kamrupa to Punjab by his achievements in the field of yoga. He followed the path of yoga lead by Shiva. He is one of the "Chourasi Yogis" (one of the great eighty-four Yogis). He was the founder of *Nathpantha* (the Order of *Nath* Yogis) and was influenced by the Buddhist yoga practices. Many of the Buddhist yogic practices were adopted by him in the *Shiva* yoga. This is considered as one of his great achievements. It is difficult to stipulate about the exact period of his advent but it appears that he was present in the First Century of the Vikram Samvat. From historical perspective his presence appears more appropriately to be in between 9th and 11th century, as it was the period when a lot of Buddhist groups had surfaced and *Yavans* had started to enter India. It was this period in which Gorakhnath played an important role in protecting the sanctity of the Hindu ideology. It is possible that he lived in the 11th century of the Vikrami Samvat. In the chain of the Masters of Sant Gyaneshwar, the name of Gorakhnath figures and the names of Nivratinath and Gaininath figure before Gyaneshwar and name of Gorakhnath figures before Gaininath. This leads to a difference of about two hundred fifty years between Sant Gyaneshwar and Gorakhnath. Sant Gyaneshwar was born in 1352 Vikram Samvat and, therefore, it appears more logical that Gorakhnath was present in the eleventh century of Vikram Samvat. There is also uncertainty about his birth-place. It is said that he was born in Chandragiri in Godavari-Ganga belt and a mention about this is also found in the book 'Yogisampradayavishkrati'. It, however, appears on a deeper scrutiny that he may have been born in a place named 'Jayasri' or 'Jayas' at the banks of river Bhagwati near Ayoddhya. The great poet Jyasi has mentioned that Jayas was a religious place in his famous work 'Padmavat'.

Gorakhnath was born with the grace of Yogi Shri Matsyendranath, who was his spiritual Master as well and with his grace Gorakhnath attained *Parampad* (the abode of Truth). It is a common belief that Matsyendranath entered the city of Jayas in Avadh area asking for alms and alerting the people towards the divine. He gave the *Bhabhut* (scared ashes) to an issueless Brahmin lady and said that she would be blessed with a son. Being afraid of what people would comment about her, she put that *Bhabhut* on a pile of cow-dung. After twelve years when Matsyendranath revisited that place and asked that lady about the *Bhabhut*, she stated everything truthfully. Matsyendranath then went near the pile of cow-dung and on his asking a twelve year old boy emerged from the pile of cow-dung. Matsyendranath took the boy with him and named him Gorakhnath.

Matsyendranath initiated Gorakhnath in the yoga. Gorakhnath took to severe penance. Matsyendranath told him that one should observe oneself and should ponder

over the eternal Shivatva, which is full of *Aishvarya*, *Madhurya* and *Saundarya* (full of grandeur, charm and beauty). It is only by acquiring *Gyan* that one could realize the Self. Jeev always rests in the *Param-Jyoti* (the Divine Light). To receive the grace of Shiva and Shakti is the ultimate goal of a Yogi. Gorakhnath lived his life in accordance with the instructions of Matsyendranath. He rose above the field of *Maya* (illusion), left the household and took to celibacy. He conquered over desires and expectations and started practicing yoga in caves and dense forests. He spent his time seeking after the Self. He explored the *Pran*-Purush (the secrets of *Pran* i.e. breathing) and understood the path of getting over the cycle of birth and death. He stated that *Gyan* is the greatest Guru and *Chitta* (the mind) is the greatest follower and, therefore, one should seek the unity of *Gyan* and *Chitta* and live alone in the world.

Gorakhnath liked solitude. He felt the presence of Self in all beings. With the grace of Matsyendranath, he attained the *Kaivalyapad*. He rose above praise and criticism. He was entirely focused on the Self. In the language of Self-realization he stated that by realizing the universe in the self, he had attained all *Siddhis* (miraculous powers or the goal). Gods and temples, all pilgrimage, everything is within the body. He stated that he has realized the Supreme within the body and that only a brave man can win over the *Kaya* (physical body). He also said that by the grace of his Guru Matsyendranath that by remaining focused on the *Sushumna*, which lies between *Ida*-*Pingla*-*Ganga*, and *Yamuna* (various nerves which are considered to be the path for spiritual ascendance) he remains absorbed in *Brahmgyan* (knowledge of the Brahm). He propagated the yoga system of Patanjali. Uniting the life-force with Shiva is the essence of the method propagated by Gorakhnath. He laid special stress on *Dhouti*, *Vasti*, *Neti*, *Nauli*, *Tratak* and *Kapalbhati*-these six parts of the Patanjali yoga and simplified the practice of *Hathyoga*. He threw light on the relationship between Naths, Jeev, Guru and Shiva and stated that Guru is the source of all auspiciousness. To attain the state of 'Nath' is to attain liberation; the state of non-duality gives eternal happiness; Shakti (power or energy) creates the universe; Shiva sustains the same; *Kaal* (time) dissolves everything and Naths grant liberation. Only Naths are pure soul, others are shackled. Naths are beyond 'Sagun' (with attributes) and 'Nirgun' (with no attributes). Gorakhnath realized the causeless, self-illuminated and auspicious Brahm. He became one with Shiva and stated that the soul (or the Self) itself is the divine element-Shiva. He also stated that the nine gates of the body are guarded by Navnaths; at the Triveni is Jagannath Ishwar and at the tenth gate Brahmrandhra is Kedarnath Shiva Himself. He stated that on attaining the state of 'Shunya' (non-beingness) duality disappeared and he attained unity with the Shunya or the Brahm. Gorakhnath realized that Shiva transforms in the form of Jeev and from Jeev emanates the world and cessation of duality between Shiva, Jeev and world is *Shieikya* (unity with Shiva).

Gorakhnath was a Hathyogi par-excellence, who propagated *Hathyoga*. He said that one should unite the sun located at the Mooladhar chakra (located at the base) with the moon located at the Sahsradhar chakra (located at the vertex). The 'Anahat Nad' is reverberating at Trikuti. One should open the gate of Brahmrandhra to taste the nectar of life; remove the impurities of the Jeevatma, purify the breath in the impure nerves and fill the Sushumna Nadi (nerve) with the breath to attain liberation. On drinking the nectar at

the Brahmrandhra one attains the status of 'Yogindra' (a great Yogi). According to Gorakhnath on restricting breath from Ida and Pingla (the two nerves)-the sun and the moon-and passing it through Sushumna is the *Hathyoga*. This confers Siddhi (perfection). *Hathyoga* removes inertness or the ignorance and makes one to realize the unity of the Atma and the Parmatma. To harmonize 'Kundalini Shakti' (the power one attains on awakening of Kundalini) with Shiva is the real Siddhi. According to him control over breath, mind or *Bindu* is the starting point for attaining Siddhi. The *Hathyoga* of Gorakhnath enriched the Indian spirituality by establishing harmony between *Gyan*, Karma and bhakti, *Yagya*, *Tapa* and Japa.

Gorakhnath was the principal disciple of Matsyendranath and was a firm believer in the Guru-Shishya (Master-disciple) link. Matsyendranath went to Sinhal in order to attain yoga-Siddhi (perfection in yoga). To conquer 'Padmini-Ramni' in Sinhal is an indicator of yoga-Siddhi. According to Nepalese belief Matsyendranath was an incarnation of Avalokiteshwar. He was a Kaul and Brahman. He was also known as 'Meenpad', 'Machendrapad' and 'Machchindranath'. It is said that Shiva Himself taught him yoga in the Mahapeeth of Kamarupa (in the great Tantrik school of Kamarupa). Jalandharpad, Krishnapad, Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath played an important role in the spiritual field in India during ninth to eleventh century AD.

It is related to Matsyendranath that once he happened to arrive in Sinhal in the kingdom of queen Mangla and Kamla, which was an 'all ladies kingdom' and owing to a curse by Lord Shiva and His consort Parvati, he forgot the knowledge acquired by him and started roaming in that kingdom. It was Gorakhnath, who made him recollect his knowledge of Self and took him out of that ladies' kingdom. It is said that once Gorakhnath was sitting under a tree in meditation that he saw Krishnapad going somewhere through the sky. Gorakhnath threw up his *Khadaun* (wooden slipper) and pulled Krishnapad down through his yogic powers. Krishnapad told him that his Guru Matsyendranath, having forgotten the knowledge acquired by him, was spending his time in enjoying worldly pleasures in *Kadli Van* in the kingdom of queen Mangla and Kamla and that he is left with only three days of his life. Gorakhnath told him that his Guru (Krishnapad's Guru) had been buried in mud by Gopichand, the king of Gaur-Bengal. Both of them then rushed to rescue their Gurus. Gorakhnath took two of his disciples Lung and Mahalung with him and putting on the attires of Brahman they went to Kadli Van. People asked him to bless them. His blessings started coming true for them. A lady sitting near a pond of Kadli Van got enchanted with the beauty of Gorakhnath. She informed him the whereabouts of Matsyendranath and told him that only ladies could enter the kingdom of Mangla and Kamla, entry of yogis is prohibited. Gorakhnath put on the attires of a dancer and started playing a *Mardal* (a musical instrument) at the royal gate. The musical instrument started making a sound which alerted Matsyendranath that he should not fall in such a trap, which would put him to disgrace and ruin him. Popularly it is said "*Jag Machchinder Gorakh Aaya*" (Wake up O Matsyendranath! Gorakhnath has come to take you with him). Matsyendranath recollected his lost *Gyan* and accompanied Gorakhnath.

In Nepal Gorakhnath is considered as an incarnation of Lord Shiva. The Gorkha kingdom is a sign of devotion towards him. Once the king ill-treated followers of Matsyendranath. It is said that annoyed by this Gorakhnath caused famine to cast its shadow on Nepal for twelve years continuously. When the king realized his mistake and arranged for a festival in the honor of Matsyendranath, Gorakhnath rescued Nepal from the grip of famine.

Once Gorakhnath was roaming in Sinhal located at the foot of Himalaya. Maharaja Bhrutrhari, son of king Chandrasen of Ujjain was also out for hunting together with his queen Pingla. Maharaja Bhrutrhari had killed a deer and was returning. The doe was crying pathetically. Maharaja Bhrutrhari already had seeds of *Vairagya* (detachment) in him, his heart was moved seeing the condition of that doe. Gorakhnath using his yogic powers resurrected (gave life to) the dead deer. Maharaja Bhrutrhari became a disciple of Mahayogi Gorakhnath.

The mother of Gopichand-the king of Gaur Bengal was Maharani Mainamati, who was the sister of Bhrutrhari. When Gopichand was initiated in the yoga Gorakhnath had come riding on a chariot laden with flowers and he had blessed Gopichand.

The king of Syalkot, Pooran was a disciple of Gorakhnath. His capital city was named Gajvani or Gajpur. He was the son of Salivahan. He had a step-mother, who was a young lady and wanted to beget a son like him, so she proposed him to sleep with her, which Pooran refused, as a result of which he was mutilated and thrown in a well. The real mother of Pooran had become blind weeping for his son. Gorakhnath rescued Pooran and initiated him in yoga. Later he became famous as Yogi Chauranginath.

In the Punjabi love-story names of Heer and Ranjha are famous. At the banks of river Jhelum, Gorakh-tila is well known as the place where Ranjha did his yoga-sadhana. He was initiated by Gorakhnath himself. Ranjha and Heer were in love but Heer was married to someone else. Ranjha took *Sanyas*. Gorakhnath asked him to beg for alms for the rest of his life and to spend his time in the remembrance of his Guru. He was asked to call all young ladies as sisters and the elderly ladies as mothers. Ranjha passed this test. He used to live on the other bank of the river in the attires of a yogi. Heer and Ranjha used to meet. One night Heer drowned in the mid-stream. Ranjha attempted to save her, but he also was drowned.

The founder of Mewar, Bapa Rawal also had met Gorakhnath, who had given him a sword with the help of which Bapa Rawal founded the Chittor or Mewar kingdom.

Various Siddha-Peethas (centers for yogic sadhana) are established after the name of Gorakhnath in India. At the bank of river Rapti in Gorakhpur an old temple of Gorakhnath is erected. It is said that Gorakhnath had spent his time in performing yogic sadhana at Mansarovar situated in the adjoining forests.

In the book 'Vallabhdigvijay' written by Yadunath, there is a reference of sudden appearance of Gorakhnath at the Gorakhya Peak of Girinar Mountain.

Gorakhnath was not only a yogi of high order but also a great scholar and poet, who composed many works, which include: Goraksh-Kalp, Goraksh-Sahmita, Goraksh-Sahsranam, Goraksh-Shatak, Goraksh-Gita, Goraksh-Shashtra, Gyanprakash-Shatak, Gyanamrit-yoga, Yog-Chintamani, Yog-Martand, Hathyoga, Hath-Samhita and Atmabodh.

Yogiraj Bhrutrhari

Yogiraj Bhrutrhari was a symbol of renunciation. His name arouses a feeling of detachment towards the world. He renounced the heaven like royal luxuries that were available to him and surrendered his self at the feet of Lord Shiva. He attained the Ultimate Goal of life-the *Amar Pad* through yoga and *Vairagya*. The story of his life is sung right from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari by ascetics in various languages.

He had taken to the life of a recluse after having fully enjoyed the luxuries of a royal life. His words and actions did not differ and whatever he said, he said on the basis of his own experience. He followed the path of yoga led by Guru Gorakhnath. He was present during the tenth or the eleventh century of Vikram Samvat. There have been some other great persons by the name Bhrutrhari, one amongst whom was present in the first century of the Vikram Samvat or before that and the other in the seventh-eighth century of the Vikram Samvat but the king of Ujjain Bhrutrhari was present in the tenth or the eleventh century of Vikram Samvat. He was initiated in yoga by Gorakhnath.

Bhrutrhari was born in Ujjain at the banks of the river Shipra. His father's name was Gandharvasen or Chandrasen, who had two wives, first of whom gave birth to Bhrutrhari and the other to Maharaja Vikrmatitya. Maharaja Bhrutrhari was a mighty king, who had conquered one hundred and eight kings. His younger brother Vikrmatitya rendered him great support in ruling the kingdom. Leaving the administration of the kingdom on the shoulders of Vikrmatitya, Bhrutrhari spent his time in enjoying the royal pleasures. He was greatly charmed by the beauty of his main queen Samdevi or Pingla, who was from Sinhal and extremely beautiful and spent lot of his time with her. He loved queen Pingla more than himself.

His younger brother Vikrmatitya did not want that Maharaja Bhrutrhari should ignore the royal responsibilities. He tried to persuade Maharaja Bhrutrhari but could not succeed. Vikrmatitya even opposed his gross engagements in pleasures. In between he came across a strange fact that queen Pingla was attracted towards the chief of stable. On warning Maharaja Bhrutrhari, he under the influence of queen Pingla expelled Vikrmatitya out of the kingdom.

With the passing of time Maharaja Bhrutrhari was getting more and more attached to Pingla but at times he used to get disturbed by the thought that this world is mortal, impermanent, full of miseries, attachment to it leads to bondage and that there is some power beyond it, which is eternal, full of peace and bliss and which is the ultimate goal of all creatures. His life, however, took a complete turn with an incidence related to a fruit-*Amarfal*- given to him by a yogi. This yogi was blessed with the *Amarfal* as a result of his *Tapa*. This fruit could give eternal youth to the person, who ate it. The yogi thought that the right candidate for eating this fruit is Maharaja Bhrutrhari, whose eternal life would benefit the entire kingdom. He entered the palace and came to the royal court with the fruit in his hand. The face of the yogi was shining. The king was astonished to see him. The moment of his awakening was nearing. The yogi gave him the *Amarfal*. After the

yogi had left Maharaja Bhrutrhari thought that Pingla was dearer to him than his life. He, therefore, decided to give the fruit to her. On receiving that fruit Pingla thought that the chief of stable loves her a lot and if the fruit is given to him, he would take more care of her. She secretly gave the fruit to the chief of stable. The chief of stable was fascinated by a prostitute and gave away the fruit to her. She thought that her life had no meaning, as she had spent all her life in entertaining others for money and if she eats the fruit it would only lead others to fall for her. She, therefore, decided to give away the fruit to the king, who was worthy to eat it and who could add to the peace and happiness of people of the entire kingdom.

When she entered the royal court with the *Amarfal* in her hands, the royal court was shocked. Maharaja Bhrutrhari immediately recognized that it was the same fruit. He found out what actually had happened and how the fruit had reached her. Maharaja Bhrutrhari was totally shaken; the glaring treachery of life was before him. His attachment to Pingla was gone in a moment for ever. He realized that the true path for real peace and happiness is *Vairagya*. He also realized that so far he had wasted his time after Pingla and in enjoying life without doing anything towards the real purpose of life. He decided to leave the palace and to take on the life of a recluse. Many people tried to dissuade him from taking *Vairagya* but Maharaja Bhrutrhari was firm in his resolve.

On the other side Pingla had also realized her mistake, she was shivering with shame and guilt. She said to Maharaja Bhrutrhari that she would not be able to live without him but Maharaja Bhrutrhari consoled her and requested her to help him in attaining the real goal of life. Maharaja Bhrutrhari had reached the conclusion that attachment was the biggest hindrance in attaining the goal.

Maharaja Bhrutrhari left the palace. He bowed before the Mahakal (the famous Mahakal temple of Ujjain) and reciting the name of Lord Shiva, crossed the border of his kingdom. He got initiated by Mahayogi Siddha Gorakhnath and became a Shivayogi. He started roaming in pious places and in deep caves and dense forests reciting the name of Lord Shiva. He realized the divine in his Self. He felt remorse that the worldly pleasures had enjoyed him rather than him enjoying the pleasures; that he has not done the *Tapa* (penance) but the *Tapa* had assayed him; that *Kaal* (time) has not passed but it has brought his end. One becomes weak and old but desires do not end. He attained *Shivatva* (Unity with Shiva). Through *Vairagya* he gave a new dimension to the spiritual consciousness. He was also a Master of the *Shabdvidya* (a yogi who has mastered the path of inner vibrations). He was a *shabd-brahm* yogi.

His Samadhi is situated in a dense forest in Alwar (in Rajasthan). A lamp keeps on lighting at the seventh door of the Samadhi and is considered as the 'Jyoti of Bhrutrhari'.



Acharya Ramanuja

Acharya Ramanuja

Acharya Ramanuja was born in the year 1017 A.D. in Tirukudur area of South India. His father was Kesavabhata Somayaji and his mother was Kantimati, a very pious and virtuous lady. His father was a great scholar and the then Pandya kings had conferred on him the title of 'Sarvakretu'. Once he had gone to visit the temple of Lord Partha-Sarathi with his wife. In the night he saw the Lord in his dream. The Lord told him that 'He was pleased with his devotion and that soon he would beget a son, who would be a great devotee.' This blessing of the Lord fructified in the form of Ramanuja. His Tamil name was Ilaya Perumal.

Ramanuja had great interest in mythology and in satsang. Once the famous saint Kanchipurna (Kanchi) visited their house. Ramanuja served him whole-heartedly and comforted him. Kanchipurna told Ramanuja that he (Ramanuja) was a Brahman and, therefore, he should not touch his feet, as he (Kanchipurna) belonged to a lower caste. Ramanuja replied that in his understanding a devotee of the Lord is a true Brahman and that one does not acquire eligibility to be called a Brahman merely by putting on the Yagyopavit (the sacred thread). Kanchipurna was deeply impressed and blessed Ramanujacharya.

Ramanuja lost his father at an early age. He started learning Vedas in Kanchipuram under Yadavaprakasha, a teacher of Advait-philosophy. Ramanuja was a very brilliant student. At times when Yadavaprakasha got stuck, Ramanuja used to give his own interpretations, which were appreciated by his co-disciples. During this period once the king of Kanchi called for Yadavaprakasha to cure his daughter, who was possessed by an evil spirit. The evil spirit agreed to leave the princess only after Ramanuja touched his feet to the evil spirit's head. As soon as Ramanuja did so the evil spirit left the princess.

Ramanuja's erudition and his fame made Yadavaprakasha very jealous of him. Yadavaprakasha made a plan to take away the life of Ramanuja. One day Yadavaprakasha proceeded to take bath in the river Ganges and included Ramanuja also in his group. He thought of killing Ramanuja on the way in some dense forest. By God's grace Ramanuja's cousin Govind Bhatt, who was a fellow student, somehow sensed the evil design of Yadavaprakasha. He alerted Ramanuja in the evening, as soon as he got an opportunity and insisted upon him to return to Kanchi. Ramanuja took the way to Kanchi through forest. On the other hand when the group did not find Ramanuja with them they looked for him and when they could not trace him, it was presumed that he would have been killed and eaten away by some wild animals.

Ramanuja was walking through deep forest. He got tired without food and water. At one place he fell unconscious. When he regained senses, he saw a hunter-couple taking care of him. Ramanuja then took the couple with him to Kanchi, taking care of their needs on the way. In the night they all stayed together and in the morning Ramanuja fetched water for both of them from a nearby well. Next time when he left them for

fetching water for them, he did not find them there on return. Ramanuja then enquired with the people around about the way to Kanchi. People were surprised that he was in Kanchi but still asking for the way to Kanchi. Thus Ramanuja was saved by the grace of Lord Vishnu and His consort Laxmi, who had appeared as the hunter-couple to save his life. Ramanuja, however, continued attending the school of Yadavaprakasha and continued to respect him in the same way without having any ill-feeling towards him in his mind.

Ramanuja got married but his family life was not pleasant. The thought of taking *Sanyas* had entered his mind. He wanted to renounce the world. Just then a strange incident took place. About the end of the tenth century, the Vishishtha-advaitvad (qualified non-dualism) was well established in Southern India and the followers of this creed were in charge of important Vaishnav temples at Kanchipuram, Srirangam, Tirupathi and other important places. Yamunacharya, a great sage, profound scholar and an exponent of Vishishtha-advaitvad was the head of the *Muth* (Ashram) at Srirangam. Knowing that his end was nearing, Yamunacharya, who was on the look-out for a young person of good ability and character to take his place as the head of the *Muth* at Srirangam asked Mahapurna, one of his disciples, to bring Ramanuja with him. By the time Ramanuja reached Srirangam, Yamunacharya had left for his heavenly abode but three fingers of his hand were folded. Ramanuja felt that three wishes of Yamunacharya were left unfulfilled. He was informed that Yamunacharya, before his death, had left instructions that he had three wishes which Ramanuja was to be requested to fulfill, viz., that he would write commentary on the Brahma-Sutra, Vishnu-Shastranaam and Divya Prabandham which hitherto had been taught orally and that the names of Parasara, the author of Vishnu Purana, and saint Sadagopa should be perpetuated. Ramanuja made a solemn promise before the dead body of Yamunacharya that, God willing, he would fulfill all the three wishes of Yamunacharya. Strangely the folded fingers got straightened.

Ramanuja took *Sanyas* at the hands of Yatiraj Sanyasi of Srirangam. He lived for 120 years, and in the course of his long life, fully redeemed his promise by fulfilling all the three wishes of Yamunacharya.

After Yamunacharya Tiruvarang became the head of the *Muth*. One day he expressed his desire to appoint Ramanuja as the head of the *Muth* and all others supported him. On his direction Mahapurna with his wife left for Kanchi. On the other side Ramanuja also had started for Srirangam. Both of them met near the Vishnu temple of Madurantak. Ramanuja was then duly installed with all the attendant ceremonies and celebrations as the head of the Visishtadvaita *Muth* at Srirangam.

Ramanuja now proceeded to Thirukottiyar and took Deeksha in the Vaishnav tradition at the hands of Periyambadi, who was the chief disciple of Aalwandar (Yamunacharya) and adopted the path of bhakti. Somehow, Nambi was not willing to initiate Ramanuja easily. He made Ramanuja travel all the way from Srirangam to Madurai nearly eighteen times before he made up his mind to initiate him and that too, only after taking a promise to keep the eight letter Mantra 'Om Namō Narayanaya' a

secret saying that this Mantra is extremely powerful as the one who keeps on reciting this Mantra will attain salvation. It is to be given only to a worthy disciple. Ramanuja was, however, extremely compassionate and for him all creatures were worthy of reciting this Mantra and attaining salvation. He, therefore, climbed up the tower on the front gate of the temple and started reciting the Mantra loudly. Nambi, his Guru, came to know of this. He became furious and told Ramanuja that he would have to undergo severe punishment for this breach of the promise of secrecy. Ramanuja, however, said that he would gladly suffer the tortures of hell for the sake of millions, who would attain salvation by reciting the sacred Mantra. His Guru Nambi was extremely pleased with Ramanuja, looking at his large heartedness and that he was full of compassion for others. He embraced Ramanuja and blessed him. Rooted deeply in bhakti, Ramanuja then succeeded Yamunacharya.

By now Ramanuja's fame had reached far and wide. Many people got jealous of him. Once even the priest of the Srirangam temple thought of giving him poison but his wife came to know of it and alerted Ramanuja and saved his life. Ramanuja now wrote 'Sribhashya' (commentary) on Brahm-Sutra and got the commentary on Vishnu-Sahstranaam and Divya-Prabhandham written by Parashar and Pillan, sons of his main disciple Kuresa. Ramanuja wrote three other books-Vedanta Sara (essence of Vedanta), Vedanta Sangraha (a resume of Vedanta) and Vedanta Deepa (the light of Vedanta).

Ramanuja then traveled extensively throughout the country to disseminate the path of devotion. He visited all the sacred places throughout India including Kashi, Kashmir and Badrinath. On his way back during his visit to Tirupati he found the Shaivites (followers of Lord Shiva) and the Vaishnavites (followers of Lord Vishnu) quarrelling with each other over the resemblance of the idol to the Shaivite or the Vaishnavite tradition. Ramanuja asked them to leave it to the Lord Himself to decide the dispute. They, therefore, left the emblems of both Shiva and Vishnu at the feet of the Lord and locked the door of the temple. In the morning, when they opened the doors, it was found that the Lord was wearing the emblems of Vishnu and the emblems of Shiva were lying where they were left. This decided that the temple was a Vaishnavite one.

Ramanuja then visited all the Vaishnavite shrines in South India and finally reached Srirangam where he settled permanently and continued propagating the Vishishtha-advait philosophy and writing books. Thousands of people visited him every day. He guided lakhs of people to the path of bhakti. He was now seventy years old, but was destined to live many more years, establish more *Muths*, construct more temples and guide many more people.

A renowned scholar of Advait doctrine for seventeen days argued with Ramanuja and then accepted the doctrine of qualified non-dualism and took shelter at the feet of Ramanuja. Later he was known as Devraj Muni.

Once a young man, a wrestler, was standing with a beautiful girl, his beloved, towards whom he was looking very attentively. This man was Dhanurdas and the girl was Hemamba. Acharya Ramanuja spotted them. He asked Dhanurdas laughingly whether he would look at someone equally lovingly if he showed him some one more enchanting

then this girl. Dhanurdas told him that he would be sold at his hands if he could show him some one more beautiful than her. Ramanuja called him in the evening at the time of Arati (the evening ritual of Pooja). Dhanurdas looked at the deity and was spell-bound by the charm of the Lord. He immediately became a disciple of Acharya Ramanuja.

The Chola king of the Srirangam area about this time was Kulothunga, who was a staunch Shaivite. He had a flag hosted at the Srirang temple that there was none superior to Lord Shiva. Vaishnavs were facing a lot of harassment at his hands. He asked Ramanuja to subscribe to his faith in Shiva and acknowledge Shiva as the Supreme Lord. Two of Ramanuja's disciples Kuresa and Mahapurna, donned their saffron robes of Sanyasis and visited the court of Kulothunga in place of Ramanuja. They argued for the superiority of Lord Vishnu but the king refused to listen to them and had their eyes pulled out.

Ramanuja, with a few followers, started living in Shalgram in Mysore state. The king Bhatti Deva of the Hoysala dynasty had a daughter, who was possessed by some evil spirit. Ramanuja succeeded in exorcizing the evil spirit. The king was very much pleased with Ramanuja and readily became his disciple and a Vaishnavite. Thereafter Ramanuja firmly established himself in the Mysore king's dominion, constructed a temple at Melkote and established a strong Vaishnavite community there. The Pariahs or the lower strata of the society of the place were granted the right of entry in to the temple which he constructed at Melkote, on some fixed days and with some limited privileges, which they enjoy to this day. Ramanuja spent about twelve years in Mysore state propagating Vishishtha-advaitvad doctrine.

Meanwhile Kulothunga, who persecuted Ramanuja, died. The followers of Ramanuja immediately communicated the news to Ramanuja and requested him to come back to Srirangam. Ramanuja was welcomed by his friends and disciples at Srirangam. The successor of Kulothunga was a pro-Vaishnavite. Ramanuja was left undisturbed. He lived there for another thirty years till he breathed his last at the age of 120 years.

Ramanuja was the exponent of the Vishishtha-advait doctrine or qualified non-dualism. Ramanuja's Brahman is Sa-visesha Brahman, i.e., Brahman with attributes. According to Ramanuja's teachings, Lord Narayana or Bhagavan is the Supreme Being; the individual soul is Chit, matter is Achit. Ramanuja regards the attributes as real and permanent but under the control of Brahman. The attributes are called Prakaras or modes. Lord Narayana is the Ruler and Lord of the universe. The Jeev is His servant and worshipper. The Jeev should completely surrender himself to the Lord. The oneness of God is quite consistent with the existence of attributes, as the attributes or *Shaktis* (powers) depend upon God for their existence.



Baba Farid

Baba Farid

Baba Farid was a great Sufi saint belonging to the Chishti Order of Sufis. He was present in the second half of the thirteenth century of Vikram Samvat. He lived a very pious life. Saints and scholars of that time used to consider it their fortune to visit him. He was popularly known as Baba Farid.

The ancestors of Shah or Sant Farid resided in Kabul. They were well known for living a spiritual life and for their pious thinking. They were soldiers. In 1187 Vikram Samvat they migrated to Punjab in India and took it as their permanent home. The political situation those days was very disturbing. All around people were afraid of being attacked and looted by foreign invaders. They had lost faith in foreigners. In such circumstances there was a strong need of such saints, who could restore mutual faith and trust in people and bring them together. Sant Farid was a need of that time and he met this requirement by spreading the message of love and peace. Sant Farid was born in 1230 Vikram Samvat in Kothiwal near Dipalpur. His parents were leading an upright life and they used to visit saints and Mahatmas from time to time and used to invite them home for food. Their faith in God and pious life had its impact on the upbringing and character of Sant Farid.

Once when Farid was yet a child, he asked his mother as to what does one get by praying before God. His mother was surprised that a child was asking her this question. She very fondly took him in her lap and told him that God is very kind, loving and beautiful with great qualities; one who recites His name fears none in the world. One should love God; He gives all happiness to one, who remembers Him. Farid was listening to his mother very attentively. He said that he would definitely worship God and that by reciting His name he would make all creatures fearless; He alone is his Beloved and he would love Him alone; he would try to acquire His attributes. While he was saying this, a divine glow started to shine on his face and he was overpowered by a flux of love. His mother was astonished to see the child in such a state. She was a great devotee herself. She prayed that Farid's words may come true. It is related to him that his mother used to keep some *Shakkar* (raw sugar) under his bed and used to say him that God provides Shakkar to those who pray before Him. This made Farid even more inclined towards the Divine. He started worshipping God daily with a pure heart and with great devotion. In due course of time people started addressing him as 'Shakar-Ganj', which meant a mine of sweetness. He was very sweet, loving, polite and kind in nature.

In the beginning Farid was taught Qur'an. This strengthened his spiritual inclination but his quest could not be confined to Qur'an. He visited Makka and Medina together with his teacher. This journey helped him in his devotion to God. On returning from Makka and Medina, he met the famous Sufi saint Qutubuddin. He was greatly influenced by the pious life of Qutubuddin and started attending to his satsang (spiritual assemblies). He then became Qutubuddin's disciple and showed great respect and devotion towards him. Farid then went to Bukhara for a few days. When he returned, Qutubuddin instructed him to sleep less, eat less, speak less and to spend lesser time in

meeting people, as these things obstructed the flow of divine grace. The spiritual progress can be best attained in solitude. Sant Farid molded his life accordingly. For twelve years he lived in dense forest. His fame reached far and wide and people started thronging to see him. He became famous as a loving Sufi saint and people felt attracted towards him.

He spent some time in Hansi and then came to Delhi, where the famous saint Nizamuddin Auliya met him and became his disciple. The daughter of the then emperor of Delhi was so fascinated and impressed by his divine personality that she used to wander after him. Nizamuddin Auliya once in ecstasy had remarked- 'My Pir is pious Maulana Farid. No one is there like him in the entire creation.'

Sant Farid used to say that the relation between Jivatma and Parmatma is that of wife and husband. Jeevatma can not find the real bliss without Parmatma and, therefore, God alone is love worthy.

Many of his sayings have been included in the 'Guru Granth Sahab', some of which are given here:

Fall in love with God; this physical body would die one day and rest in graveyard;
 Speak truth, never speak a lie;
 One who hits you, don't hit him back but treat him with respect and go your home peacefully;

Jeevatma is the bride, who has to marry the bridegroom-the death and has to go with him;

I am afraid that the turban on my head may not get dirty but my heart knows not that not only the turban but even my head would be sunk in dust one day;

Such people are rare, who choose the path of spirituality;

Do not speak harshly with anyone, as the divine resides in every heart;

Don't insult even the dust; there is none else as tolerant as the dust. Till one is alive the dust remains under the foot but climbs up the head as soon as one is dead;

Eyes, which do not see the divine, it is better for the to be blinded; tongue, which does not recite the name of God, it is better that it becomes speechless; ears, which do not listen to the praise of the Lord, it is better that they become deaf;

My body is heated like *Tandoor* (earthly-oven), my bones are burning like wood for fuel' I am tired but even then I would go on my head to meet my Beloved.

Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya

Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya is popularly known as 'Mehboob-e-Ilahi' i.e. the Beloved of God. One of the most renowned and revered Sufi saints, Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya was a disciple and the chief vicegerent of Baba Farid. Credit to a great extent goes to Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya and his disciple Amir Khusro to take Sufism to every nook and corner of India.

Nizamuddin was born in Badaun in 1236 AD. At a very early age of five years he lost his father. His mother, who was a very pious lady, therefore, brought him up. It is said that at times they did not have any food to eat. On such occasions she used to say to her son that 'today we are the guests of the God'. Her trust in God was extraordinary. The young Nizamuddin was greatly influenced by this saintly character of his mother.

At the age of twenty years, Nizamuddin heard from some one about Baba Farid, who had then taken Ayodhya as his abode. So impressed was Nizamuddin that he immediately set for Ayodhya and on reaching there he surrendered himself at the pious feet of Baba Farid, who took Nizamuddin immediately as his disciple. In due course, Baba Farid appointed Shaikh Nizamuddin as his vicegerent and asked him to go to Delhi.

On coming back to Delhi the fame of Hajrat Nizamuddin started reaching far and wide. Lots of people started visiting him to seek his blessings. This made the King Mubarak Khilji somewhat apprehensive of his influence over the people and especially so as Hajrat Nizamuddin made it a point not to pay ceremonial visits to the King.

Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya was very generous. He used to serve excellent food to all visitors daily. His compassion was reflected in the rules of the Khanqah (the teaching place or the Ashram), which preserved the dignity of all who dined there. The visiting Dervishes were advised, "First greet, then eat, then talk". He ensured that those who needed food would be able to get it as soon as possible. Although lot of food was needed to feed the visiting guests thronging over there but Hazrat Nizamuddin had full trust in God. He, therefore, distributed food almost as soon as it arrived without worrying for tomorrow and the stores were swept and cleared out every Friday morning. This generosity and apparent extravagance made Sultan Khilji suspicious of Hazrat Nizamuddin. He sent his servants to the Khanqah to find out the secret. When Hazrat Nizamuddin learnt about their visit, he teasingly asked for more dishes to be served including desert.

Hazrat Nizamuddin, however, often fasted himself and always ate sparingly. He would normally not eat more than a small loaf or portion of bread with some vegetables or rice but never touched meat. When asked whether he was satisfied by the little food he ate, he answered, "Well! I could eat one more bread, but I do not." He taught that one should remember God while eating and would often join Dervishes at their evening meal, where both serious and casual matters were discussed.

King Mubarak Khilji used to hold a special court on the appearance of new moon when all the leading personalities of the city used to pay courtesy visit to him. Hajrat Nizamuddin, however, never visited the King even on these occasions. Once King Mubarak Khilji threatened to severely punish Hajrat Nizamuddin, if he failed to visit him on the next new moon. Hajrat Nizamuddin who used to frequently visit his mother's tomb, prayed before her for the death of the King before the appearance of the next new moon. It so happened that at the appearance of the next new moon, a person named Khusru Khan killed King Mubarak Khilji. Later, Giyasuddin Tuglak in turn killed Khusru Khan. The new King also was apprehensive of Hajrat Nizamuddin, like his predecessor. He ordered Hajrat Nizamuddin to leave Delhi. It is reported that in 1325 AD, Giyasuddin Tuglak on returning from a successful expedition in Bengal, sent word to Hajrat Nizamuddin to quit Delhi. When the royal command was announced to Hajrat Nizamuddin he uttered, '*Hanoz Dilli Dur Ast*' meaning Delhi is still far off. Giyasuddin Tughlak could not make to Delhi. At Tughlakabad, a pavilion erected in his honor fell over him and he was killed in this accident.

Amir Khusro was a devoted disciple of Hajrat Nizamuddin. He was a poet who used Urdu for the first time to compose songs, riddles, rhymes and enigmas in common man's language to reach their hearts. An incidence is related to Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusro. Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya, knowing his end was nearing (d. 3 April 1325) had gifted away all his belongings to the poor. When he was left with nothing, an old Brahman came to him and begged for help for the marriage of his daughter. Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya had already given away everything he had with him. He said to the Brahman that he was late in coming to him. Nevertheless, Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya gave him his shoes, which he was wearing. The Brahman was very upset, but he could not say anything to Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya. He was going on the way with a heavy heart. From the other side Amir Khusro was coming. He had gone on a business trip and had earned lot of wealth, which was laden on forty mules. Amir Khusro started smelling the fragrance of his Master-Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya and started looking for him. Soon he spotted the Brahman as the source of that fragrance. He asked him whether he had met Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya. The Brahman narrated the entire incidence to him saying that he could not get any monetary help from Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya and instead has received his shoes. Amir Khusro requested the Brahman to give those shoes to him and in return to take away all the forty mules laden with wealth. The Brahman was more than pleased, so was Amir Khusro. Amir Khusro put the shoes with great reverence on his head and marched towards the abode of his Master. In the meanwhile Hajrat Nizamuddin Auliya had left this mortal world for his heavenly abode. He had instructed his disciples not to let Amir Khusro enter that premise where his body was buried, lest Amir Khusro will also sacrifice his life at his grave. Amir Khusro was, therefore, stopped from entering that premise. He obeyed his Master's orders and did not go inside. However, he sacrificed his life in the grief of his Master outside the premises. His Samadhi is also situated in the same compound. There is a famous couplet:

GAURI SOI SEJ PAR, MUKH PAR DALE KESH,

CHAL KHUSRO GHAR APNE, RAIN BHAJ CHAHO DESH



Acharya Madhva

Acharya Madhva

Acharya Madhva or Madhvacharya was born in 1295 Vikram Samvat on the seventh day of the moon-lit fortnight in the month of Magha (January-February). His father was Narayan Bhatt and mother was Vedvati, who were desirous of begetting a child and had performed great Yagyas and other ceremonies for the same. He was born in Velali village near Uddipi in South India. His father was a great scholar and devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Although his parents tried to arrange for the best of education for their son Madhva, he was hardly interested in learning and was more interested in playing and wrestling etc. He used to wander around with friends. His childhood name was Vasudev but owing to some miraculous powers possessed by him, people used to address him by the name 'Bheem' (the strongest of the Pandva brothers). It is believed that he was an incarnation of the Lord of Vayu (air) and, therefore, the name 'Bheem' appears to suit him, as well. After spending a few days in the school, he started learning the scriptures at home. As he was getting acquainted with the scriptures, his intelligence was growing and he was becoming aware of the mortal nature of worldly things. At the age of eleven, he had finished the scriptures and had started feeling restless at home. The feeling of *Vairagya* and detachment was growing in his heart day by day. One day he asked his parents to permit him to take *Sanyas*. They were not prepared for it and tried to dissuade him in various ways but Acharya Madhva exhibited some miraculous powers and convinced them to allow him to take *Sanyas*.

He was initiated by Sanyasi Achyutpakshacharya of the Advait School (the school of thought believing in non-duality of existence). His name was changed to 'Poornapragya'. Poornapragya learnt Vedanta from his Guru. At times he used to give innovative interpretations of the scriptures. Gradually his fame in South India started reaching far and wide and he became famous in the name of 'Anandtirtha'.

One day he sought permission of his Guru for taking a bath in the holy Ganges and for conquering scholars in discussion over scriptures. Achyutpakshacharya loved him more than his life. He got upset by the thought of separation from Poornapragya. He wanted that Poornapragya should always remain present before his eyes. Seeing him worried Mahatma Ananteshwarji, who was present over there said that after a day the holy Ganges would itself appear in the pond over there, which would enable Poornapragya to take a dip in the holy Ganges there itself and he would not need to go anywhere else. On the third day the green water of the pond turned white in color and, therefore, Poornapragya's journey was avoided. This made Achyutpakshacharya very happy. Even now every twelfth year the holy Ganges is believed to appear there. A temple has also been erected there.

Acharya Madhva was a proponent of the *dvait-mata* (the school of thought believing in duality). He was a great scholar of *dvait-mata*, a great devotee and *Atma-nishtha* (absorbed in the Self) Mahatma. He undertook journeys to various places of

pilgrimage for propagating Bhagvat-dharma' (the dharma of devotion to Lord) and on the way defeated many scholars in discussion over the scriptures in favor of *dvait-mata*. He promoted devotion to the Lord and established the authority of the Vedas refuting '*Mayavad*' (the view that the world is illusionary and not real). In Badrinath Acharya Madhva met Mahrishi Ved-Vyas and showed him the commentary written by him on Vedanta. Mahrishi Ved-Vyas gave him three idols of Shalgram, which Acharya Madhva erected at Subrhamanya, Uddipi and Madhyatal.

Acharya Madhva was an accomplished Mahatma, whose miraculous powers astonished people. Once a ship belonging to a trader was sailing from Dwarka to Malabar. It sank near Tulub. On the ship there was an idol of Lord Shri Krishna covered with *Gopichandan*. Acharya Madhva saved the idol and erected it in Uddipi. Similarly, once a ship of another trader was sinking. Acharya Madhva took pity on him and saved his ship. The trader desired to give half of his wealth to Acharya Madhva but he refused to accept the same. Acharya Madhva was a staunch devotee, who considered the Lord as his all in all. Many people started feeling jealous of him because of his fame. They stole the books written by him and tried to harm him in various ways but Acharya Madhva pardoned them on being caught. He used to remain engrossed in the remembrance of the Lord, in contemplation and meditation. All his activities were directed towards strengthening his link with the Lord. He erected many temples of Sita-Ram, Dwibhuj-Kaliyadaman, Chaturbhuj-Kaliyadaman and Vitthal in Uddipi.

One of the greatest contributions of Acharya Madhva was to put a stop to the practice of animal-sacrifice in *Yagyas*. In place of animals, he introduced sacrifice of rice.

Acharya Madhva considered Brahm to be with attributes and *Savishesh* (especially distinguishable). He also pronounced Vedas to be divine. Acharya Madhva said that the Jeev was a particle and a servant of God, who could attain liberation only by serving the Lord. He strongly advocated in favor of following the *dvait-mata* and attached great importance to Panchratra-Shashtra. He said that Jeev should never try to equate himself with Brahm and that he has no right to say "I am the Brahm"; it is unpardonable, which causes down fall of Jeev.

Acharya Madhva considered *Gyan* to be *Savikalp* (with options or alternatives). He did not accept distinction between truth and visible world. He established that they were non-distinguishable. Acharya Madhva said that without the knowledge of truth, one can not acquire the knowledge of that which is not truth and that non-truth is not a subject matter of *Gyan*. Objects are related and connected with each-other and because of this they are distinguishable. Acharya Madhva's *dvait-mata* is based on this distinction. He considered Lord Vishnu to be the Cause and completely free whereas Jeev is dependant. He said that Jeev is *Chetan* (conscious) and the material world is *Achetan* (inert); both being dependant upon the Lord. He considered bhakti as the path of liberation for Jeev. According to him speaking truth, causing no hurt to others, reading of scriptures, charity, helping the needy etc. was in fact the real *Bhajan* (singing in the praise of the Lord). He put actions in three categories, first which were obligatory, second which were prohibited and the third which were neutral. Unfettered love for the Lord was the real bhakti for

him. In relation to Jeev, Jagat (world) and Ishwar (God), he propagated a unique principle that Jeev was ever distinct from God and God was ever distinct from Jeev; inert is distinct from God and God is distinct from inert; inert is distinct from Jeev and Jeev is distinct from inert; and that one Jeev is distinct from the other and similarly the inert things are distinct from each other. He considered liberation of four kinds: Salokya (to be in the loka-or abode of the Lord), Samipya (nearness to the God), Sarupya (attaining the same form as God) and Sayujya (attaining unity with God).

His most cherished proclamation is that when there is no one even equal to God, how could there be anyone greater than Him. He is the Most Supreme. If He was not the Supreme, how the entire creation could be under Him and if the entire creation was not under Him, all the creatures should have been ever blissful.

He spent his last days in a place called Saridantar, where he breathed his last in Vikram Samvat 1374, while proceeding to take a bath in sea. He gave an idol of Lord Ram and Shalgram given by Maharishi Ved Vyas to Padmanabhtirth asking him to propagate his *dvait-mata*.

Some of his works are: commentary on Gita and on Vedantsutra; Poorna-Pragyadarshan; Mayavad-Khandan; Upadhi-Khandan; Madhvamantraratnakar; Rigbhashya; commentary on Kathkopenishad and on Brahmasutra.

Rasik Sant Jaydev

Nearly eight hundred years back, in the fourth quarter of the twelfth century, during the rule of Maharaja Gaureshwar Laxmansen, the great poet and devotee of Lord Krishna, Jaydev, immersed the populace in the flood of Krishna-bhakti, with his unique, extraordinary and the most auspicious poetry. He is the author of the famous 'Geet-Govind'. About three hundred years before the advent of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, it was he, who propagated the Vaishnav tradition of bhakti imbedded in the love of Radha-Krishna. Saint Mahipati, the author of 'Bhakti-Vijay, believed him to be an incarnation of Mahrishi Ved-Vyas, who gave 'Srimadbhagvat' to the world. The 'Sahaj-Sampraday' has accepted him as the *Adi-Guru* of '*Rasa*' (the first one to present love of Radha-Krishna in the mold of bhakti). He was the royal poet in the court of Maharaja Laxmansen but later he started living in Puri (the famous Jaggannath-Puri).

The Geet-Govind of Jaydev is definitely an authentic treatise of bhakti in Vaishnav sadhana. He showed the path of bhakti to people who were confused by the theory of 'Atma and Mayavad' propounded by Acharya Shankar. He tilted their hearts towards the tenderness of bhakti through the love of Radha-Krishna.

Jaydev was born in a village named Kendubilva. Jaydev's father was Bhojdev and his mother was Radhadevi. Both of them died when Jaydev was still very young. From the very childhood he was very studious and inclined towards Lord Shri Krishna. He was detached and indifferent towards worldly matters. After the death of his father, he started getting more attracted towards Radha-Krishna bhakti. His father had taken a loan from a Brahman named Niranjan, which he could not repay. After the death of Jaydev's father, this Brahman prepared a false document showing greater amount of loan and asked Jaydev to repay the loan taken by his father. Jaydev gave him whatever he had with him saying that I know only Lord Radha-Krishna; They are my all in all and signed the loan-document permitting the Brahman to take over his house and whatever else he desired to meet the amount of the loan. The Brahman Niranjan was feeling happy that he had succeeded in getting Jaydev's property. Just then his younger daughter came there and informed him that fire had caught their house. Niranjan started running towards his house. Not touched by attachment or jealousy, Jaydev also ran after him to help him. Hardly had Jaydev entered the house of Niranjan that the fire extinguished instantly. Niranjan's house was saved and all the things were left intact. This miracle opened the eyes of Niranjan; he felt ashamed, destroyed the loan document and fell on the feet of Jaydev.

Jaggannath-Puri is like Vrindavan for Bengal and Utkal. Jaydev was very eager to visit Jaggannath-Puri. He took a Brahman named Parashar with him and started his journey for Jaggannath-Puri. On the way he was doing *Kirtan* (singing in the praise of the Lord). One day he felt very thirsty but could not find water even after walking quite a distance. He prayed the Lord and the Lord Himself appeared to quench the thirst of Jaydev and Parashar. While he was still on the way he had a mental vision of Vrindavan. He saw a series of blue-mountains with the *Kadamb* tree on top and the river Yamuna

flowing with a sweet melodious sound. It set the background for him for his 'Geet-Govind'. The divinity of his Geet-Govind is based on this vision. On reaching Jaggannath-Puri, he had a Darshan of the Lord and thereafter he started living in the Jaggannath-Puri under a tree like a recluse. He used to beg alms for a living and used to spend his time in Bhajan-Kirtan. For him all the worldly pleasures had lost their meaning in front of the divine beauty of the Lord. He also had a glimpse of the *Dasha-avtar* (the mythological ten incarnations of God) during his journey to Jaggannath-Puri.

His fame soon reached far and wide. Great *Rasik* Mahatmas (those following the path of love of Radha-Krishna) and saints used to consider themselves fortunate to attend to his satsang and Kirtan.

A Brahman named Sudev used to live in Puri. He had a daughter named Padmavati, who was beautiful like a second Laxmi (the consort of Lord Vishnu). Sudev was a great devotee and had no worldly desires. He believed that the beauty of Padmavati was meant only for the Lord Jaggannath and, therefore, he had thought of submitting her at the feet of Lord Jaggannath. One day Lord Jaggannath appeared in his dream and asked him to marry Padmavati with Jaydev. At first Jaydev refused to marry her but later considering that it would please the Lord, he married with Padmavati. Both of them were great devotees, their love at the feet of Lord kept on growing day-by-day and they used to spend their time in Bhajan and Kirtan of the Lord.

After some time Jaydev came back to his birth place Kendubilva along with Padmavati where they erected a temple of Lord Radha-Krishna. On the insistence of one of his devout disciples, he agreed to visit him in his village. This disciple was very rich and generous. He received and treated Jaydev ostentatiously and with great reverence. He knew that Jaydev would not accept anything from him. He, therefore, insisted that Jaydev should accept something at least for his wife and kept a lot of money on the cart of Jaydev. Jaydev started back for home doing Bhajan and Kirtan on the way. His disciple had sent two guards with him to protect him from any untoward incidence on the way. Jaydev, however, persuaded the servants to return. On the way Jaydev passed through a dense forest where some dacoits followed him and looted him; they also wounded him and threw him in a well. Jaydev accepted this also taking it to be divine will and grace and started singing in praise of the Lord in the well. It was a strange incidence that Maharaja Gaureshwar Laxmansen was also arriving through the same route. When he heard the name of Radha-Krishna coming out of a well, he was surprised. He looked into the well and asked Jaydev, who he was and how had he reached inside the well. Jaydev replied that he was there by the will of the God and that he is happy to live in accordance with the will of the God. Maharaja Laxmansen got impressed with his eloquent answer; he got Jaydev pulled out of the well and took him to his capital where he was treated for his wounds. Maharaja Laxmansen was deeply impressed by the Krishna-bhakti of Jaydev and accepted him as his Guru. He also made him the head of the poets of his royal court. Jaydev started living in the capital city taking it in the fold of Krishna-bhakti. In the royal palace saints and Mahatmas started thronging in large numbers. The king took good care of all visitors, as that was his Master's desire. Once a feast for saints and Mahatmas was organized in the royal palace. Lots of them were coming from various places to

participate singing and dancing in the praise of Lord. This crowd included those two thieves also, who had wounded Jaydev and had thrown him in the well. Jaydev recognized both of them but he had risen over the feeling of taking revenge or enmity. He, therefore, welcomed those thieves and showed a lot of respect to them. He also asked the king to give them lot of money. For their protection, Jaydev sent four guards with them. On the way these guards enquired with the thieves as to why Jaydev had shown so much respect and concern for them. It is well known that saints always think good of others but the wicked always try to put blame on others. Similarly here the thieves told the guards that Jaydev was a minister in a king's court a few days ago. The king got annoyed with him and ordered him to be executed. We, however, did not kill him but amputated him and threw him in a well. Jaydev's life was thus saved and because of this he is obliged to us and that is why he gave us all this money. Hardly had they said this that in the ground below their feet a crack appeared and both of them were buried under the ground. When the guards told about the entire incidence to king Laxmansen, on being asked Jaydev narrated the real story and then Jaydev said that he, in fact, is the real culprit, as because of him the two thieves had to lose their lives and repented that all this had happened only because of acceptance of some money from his disciple. King Laxmansen had never come across such a person, whose heart was so full of compassion. Jaydev told the king that in this world full of illusions only love for Krishna is the real essence of living. Those, who, in spite of getting born as a human being, do not make an effort to garner this love in their hearts, their lives are wasted.

On the insistence of king Laxmansen, Jaydev called his wife Padmavati to join him in the capital city of the king. Padmavati was a noble lady and her company benefited the ladies of the royal family. In her talks once she said that a Sati is not the one, who sacrifices her life at the funeral of her husband, but the one, who immediately on listening about the death of her husband sacrifices her life. After a few days, the queen falsely informed Padmavati about the death of her husband Jaydev. Padmavati died on the spot. The queen did not know what to do. When the message reached the ears of the king, Jaydev assured all of them and asked them not to worry and started doing the Kirtan, enchanting from his own composed "Radha-Vinod". Padmavati came to life. Their devotion to the Lord was unprecedented. They were fully immersed in the love for Radha-Krishna. After spending some time with the king both of them returned to Kendubilva with the idols of Radha-Madhav (another name of Lord Krishna). They started spending their lives in Bhajan-Kirtan and in the remembrance of the Lord. Their life was full of *Vairagya*, purity and unfettered love for the Divine. His fame reached far and wide and saints and Mahatmas from various places started to visit them.

Many miracles are associated with him. Once he was repairing the roof of his hut that he felt tired. Radha-Madhav appeared and started helping him in fetching the dried grass for the repair of the roof. Jaydev was engrossed in the love for Lord Krishna and, therefore, was not aware what was happening. He presumed it to be his wife Padmavati, who was helping him. After the job was over and when Jaydev entered the temple of Radha-Madhav, he saw the idols with their hands smeared with dried grass and mud. He started staring at his Lord and was thrilled to realize that it was the Lord, who had taken

pains for him. Considering such a divine grace showering on him, he was overwhelmed, which made him sing in the praise of his Lord.

Jaydev used to take a dip in the holy Ganges daily, which was a little far away from his village. One day he could not go, which made him restless and he started thinking that how unfortunate he was that he could not go to take a dip in the holy Ganges. It so happened that thereafter the holy Ganges started flowing near his village Kendubilva.

“Geet-Govind” is his greatest contribution in the field of bhakti. It is entirely a divine creation. Jaydev was well acquainted and a scholar of Vedas, Puranas and other scriptures. His knowledge was so synthesized with bhakti that it became an extraordinary gift for people.

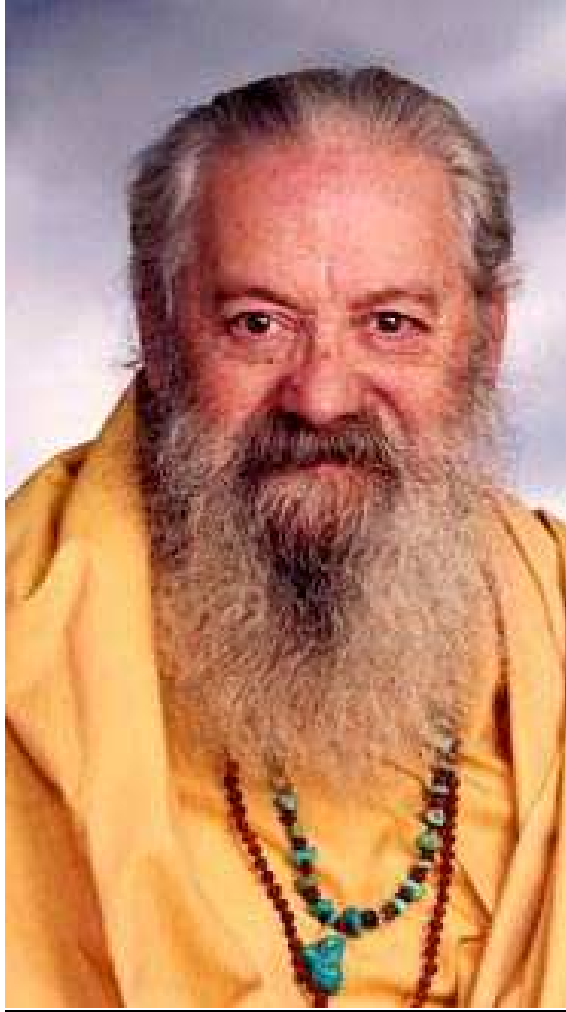
Jaydev was especially inclined towards the Shringar-bhakti (the devotion towards the Lord focused mainly on love between Radha and Krishna). Jaydev depicted the love and the pangs of separation of his Lord Krishna and Radha, based mainly on the contents of Shrimadbhagvat, Padmapuran, Brahmvaivart Puran and Harivansha and Garg Samhita. The love between Jaydev’s Radha and Krishna is eternal and by all means divine and an expression of the Beauty of the Eternal Consciousness. He spoke about their outwardly *Leelas* (playful activities of the divine), as well as the hidden *Leelas*. The description of passionate Prakriti (Nature) in the Geet-Govind of Jaydev is entirely transcendental and *Chinmay* (embodiment of knowledge or consciousness). It is mentioned about Geet-Govind that Lord Krishna himself helped Jaydev to complete it. Once Jaydev was busy completing a verse of Geet-Govind, but before he could complete the last stanza his wife Padmavati reminded him to go for taking a bath. He left it at that and proceeded to take bath in the holy Ganges. After a little while Lord Krishna arrived in the form of Jaydev and completed the unfinished stanza of the verse by adding the words “DEHI ME PADPALLAVAMUDARAMA” and asked Padmavati to bring water for him to take a bath. He then took meals and lied down on a cot. After this when Padmavati just set for taking her meals, the real Jaydev returned after taking bath in the Ganges. He was surprised to see Padmavati eating before him and taunted lightly about it. When Padmavati narrated what had happened, he realized that it was the Lord, who had appeared in his guise. He was overwhelmed by the love for his Lord. He asked Padmavati to bring Geet-Govind and when he saw that the Lord had completed the verse with those words, he said these words expressed exactly what he was thinking in his mind about that stanza. This is the divinity and greatness of Geet-Govind.

It is said that there was a king by the name Satvik in Jaggannath-Puri, who composed poetry on the pattern of Geet-Govind and asked Pundits to recite his poetry in place of Geet-Govind. On their refusal to do so, both the works were kept before Lord Jaggannath, who accepted Geet-Govind and discarded the poetry of Satvik. On the insistence of king Satvik Jaydev included twenty-five of his verses in Geet-Govind.

There is another strange story related to Geet-Govind. Once a *Malin* (lady-gardener) was singing Geet-Govind in a sweet melodious voice with complete

absorption. The lord of *Purushottam Ksetra*, i.e. the Lord Jaggannath Himself appeared to listen to her and when He returned to the temple the priests saw thorns entangled in the clothes of the Lord. Thereafter for the pleasure of the Lord special arrangement was made for the recital of Geet-Govind before Him, by the order of the king.

The sadhana of Jaydev is reflected in the form of Krishna-bhakti in Geet-Govind. Jaydev used to recite Geet-Govind delightedly. It is said that towards his last, absorbed deeply in the love for Radha-Krishna, Jaydev moved to Vrindavan along with his wife, Brahman Niranjan and Parashar. He spent the rest of his life in Vrindavan and both of them proceeded for their heavenly abode in Vrindavan. It is also believed that they spent their later life in Kendubilva itself.



Swami Ramanand

Mahatma Ramanand Swami

Mahatma Ramanand Swami was a historical necessity for the advent of bhakti era in medieval India. He was a great saint, scholar and religious leader par-excellence. He led a spiritual revolution by preaching people to do bhakti of Ram, Who resided in the heart of every creature. He was the one, who synthesized the Nirgun (the form-less God) and Sagun bhakti (God with attributes) and also *Gyan* and bhakti and thus made the God venerable by all. Harrased by the rule of foreigners, people found great relief in his message.

His advent announced the beginning of the era of the *Sant-yuga* in India. Sant Raidas, Pipa, Anantanand, Sen, Kabir and Tulsidas all were influenced by the principles of his Bhakti-Marg. Ramanand protected the cultural, social, religious and spiritual heritage of India from the bigotry rule of Yavan ruler Gayasuddin Tughlaq and others. The contemporary India had also witnessed the barbaric invasion by Tamur, but it survived the same under the protection of Ramanand's Bhaktimat.

Ramanand was born in Prayag in 1356 Vikram Samvat in the family of a Kanyakubj Brahman. His father Punyasadan was a noble and religious person. His mother's name was Sushila. His childhood is associated with many strange incidences. The family priest had advised Ramanand's father to confine Ramanand within the house for the first three years and not to show him a mirror and to feed him milk alone. His parents followed this advice with great care.

Once, when Ramanand was four years, his father was reciting Ramayan. Ramanand was sitting near his father and listening to him with rapt attention. He memorized the Ramayan and started singing the same. People were surprised and started believing that a great soul had taken birth in the form of Ramanand. By the age of eight he had memorized a lot of scriptures.

After his Yagyopavit (the sacred thread ceremony), Ramanand was sent to Kashi for further learning. There he got so detached with family and worldly affairs that even after a lot of persuasion by his teachers and family members, he did not return from Kashi and, therefore, his parents had to go to Kashi to look after him. By the age of twelve he had learnt all the scriptures thoroughly.

He refused to marry since he was an ascetic by birth and wanted to spend his life in the search of Truth and the Eternal Bliss. He came in contact with a *Tridandi* swami, who was *Vedanti* and was influenced by the philosophy of Shankaracharya. Ramanand's quest for knowledge of the Self grew stronger in his company.

A Vaishnav Sanyasi by the name Raghavanand used to live in Kashi. He was the fourth successor of Ramanujacharya. He was a devotee of Lord Ram and his fame was wide spread. One day he incidentally met Ramanand and told him that only three days of his life were remaining and that he (Ramanand) has not so far totally surrendered to the

Lord. The words of the saint pierced the heart of Ramanand and immediately he felt strange warmth in his heart. He narrated this incidence to the *Tridandi* swami and on his direction he visited Raghavanand with a request to take him as his disciple. Raghavanand took Ramanand as his disciple, after which Ramanand engaged in doing *Tapa* (penance) in a hut on the Panchganga Ghat. People including saints and mahatmas from distant places used to come to visit him and used to benefit from his discourses. Ramanand also resolved their doubts.

Once many people gathered in Kashi, who requested Ramanand to protect them from the atrocities committed on followers of religions other than Islam. They were asked to pay a religion-related tax; there was ban on erecting temples and on blowing conch. Ramanand consoled them saying that no one can harass a person, who has faith in God; devotees are never destroyed and that God's grace always takes care of the devotees.

It is said that after this at the time of *Ajan* (call to prayer), the muezzins used to feel that their throats get choked and they were unable to call people for prayers. They were surprised that this happens only at the time of *Ajan*. Ibannur and Mir Taqi came to the conclusion that this was an act of some great and accomplished saint. They, therefore, along with some others took Kabir with them and went to Ramanand Swami. It is said that when they reached there, Swami Ramanand blew his conch, as a result of which many of them entered into a trance in which they saw Hajrat Paigamber (the Prophet), who asked them to listen to Swami Ramanand. When they met him, Swami Ramanand told them that the God is one and the same for all, Who resides in everyone's heart. He asked them when the Creator, Sustainer and Dissoluter is the same God, Who is worshipped by different people in different names, is it proper to discriminate between followers of different religions and to impose on them '*Jajia*' (a religious tax collected from the Hindus)? He also interalia asked for immediate withdrawal of restrictions on construction of temples; withdrawal of the order, which required Hindu bridegrooms to get down while passing through a mosque; stopping forceful conversions and for imposing prohibition on cow slaughter. The then emperor of Delhi, Gayassuddin Tughlaq was very much impressed by Ramanand Swami. When the matter reached him, he ordered the rulers of various regions not to resort to bigotry, especially against Hindus and for complying with the demands put forth by Swami Ramanand.

Swami Ramanand explained to the people that God is one and the same for both Hindus and Muslims. One, who attentively worships God, belongs to God. Such a declaration was a great foundation of a spiritual revolution in the time of Ramanand. The then ruler of Ayyodhya, Maharaja Gajsingh was afraid of Gayassuddin Tughlaq and, therefore, he had left Ayodhya for spending his time in the remembrance of God. The people of Ayodhya were facing a lot of difficulties and, therefore, the younger brother of Maharaja Gajsingh, Harisigh Devji requested Swami Ramanand to help the people of Ayodhya. Ramanand went to Ayodhya and assured safety of people of Ayodhya. They vehemently welcomed him.

For propagating the pure bhakti of Lord Ram, Ramanand went to various places. He went to Jaggannath-Puri and thereafter to Vijaynagar, which then was a great cultural,

social and religious center of India. Shri Bukkarai was the then king of Vijaynagar, who was a protector of the Vedic culture. Swami Ramanand stayed there for nine days and advised the king that king is a divine representative, who must take care of the needs of people. One, who forgets to discharge his duties faithfully and starts spending his life in enjoying worldly pleasures alone, his kingdom is soon destroyed. He advised the king to emulate the principles of *Ramrajya* in his kingdom. Bukkarai left no stone unturned in welcoming Ramanand and it appeared that Vijaynagar had become the spiritual capital of India. From Vijaynagar, Swami Ramanand proceeded to Rameshwar and then to Kanchi, Srirangshetra, Janardan, Dwarka, Mathura, Vrindavan, Chitrakoot and Prayag etcetera before returning to Kashi. Swami Ramanand thus awakened the whole of India to Ram-bhakti. He stated that everyone irrespective of his caste or status was entitled to worship God.

After this journey, due to some special reasons, Swami Ramanand had to give up Shree-Sampraday on the direction of his Guru Raghavanand. The followers of Shree-Sampraday worship Lord Vishnu and Laxmiji. Ramanand established a new sect in the name of 'Ramavat' or 'Ramat' Sampraday, which recognized Lord Ram and Sita in place of Lord Vishnu and Laxmiji. Although the followers of this sect worship all the four, i.e. Ram, Sita, Laxman and Hanuman, the *Ishta* of this sect is Lord Ram. Ramanand removed a lot of restrictions of the Vishishta-advaitvad of Ramanuj and made the bhakti of Ram simple for the benefit of people at large. He laid special emphasis on humility and stated that without being humble, one cannot serve the Almighty. He also stated that unfettered love for the Divine is bhakti and that all those who are seeking the God are equal. He termed his followers as 'Avdhut', as they were supposed to rise above the caste and creed and to take refuge in God. It was his belief that one, who takes shelter of Lord Ram, the hero of Ramayan, earns eligibility to be liberated. This was his *Mahamantra*. He spread his message amongst all including Brahmans and non-Brahmans. He believed in the equality of all creatures and stated that only divine is worth seeking, being the Creator and Sustainer of all creatures and that His service leads one to the state of bliss.

Swami Ramanand was a yogi and an accepted Acharya of the Vaishnavas. He had acquired the knowledge of the Truth. He had innumerable disciples, out of which twelve-Anantanand, Sukhanand, Sursuranand, Narhariyanand, Yoganand, Pipa, Raidas, Kabir, Sen, Dhanna, Padmavati and Sursari were prominent.

Swami Ramanand lived for about 148 years. He was born on the seventh day of dark nights in the month of *Magh* and on the day of Ram-navami in 1505 Vikram Samvat he left this mortal world in his hut. On the previous day, he had told to his disciples that tomorrow is Ram-navami and I would go to Ayodhya and that you would not see me thereafter.



Sant Namdev

Sant Namdev

Sant Namdev is recognized as one of the five great saints of Maharashtra, which include Gyaneshwar, Eknath, Sant Ramdas and Tukaram. He was a great devotee and an accomplished saint. His entire life was devoted to Vitthal (Lord Krishna).

Namdev's period is from 1327 to 1407 Vikram Samvat. During this period he propagated Santmat (the path followed by saints) in the North and the South India. Many of his compositions have been included in the 'Adi-Granth' of Sikhs, which points out towards his popularity and wide acceptance as a great saint.

He was born in a Vaishnav family. His ancestors were deeply rooted in bhakti, one of whom, Yadu Seth, was a great devotee of Vitthal. He lived in a village called Narsi-Brahmani near Kanhad in the Satara district of Hyderabad. Namdev was born in this family in 1327 Vikram Samvat. His father was Dama Seth and mother was Gonaai. At the outskirts of the village, there was a Shiva temple. Namdev's father visited this temple daily to offer water to the Lord. Once in a year he used to visit Pandharpur for the Darshan of Lord Vitthal. Later Dama Seth settled at Pandharpur itself. From his early childhood Namdev acquired the habit of worshipping and reciting the name of Vitthal, as was the tradition in the family. His parents took care that the child Namdev is brought up in the company of saints and scholars so that he acquires the qualities of devotees.

A strange incidence is related to Namdev's childhood. There was a Vitthal idol in their house. Dama Seth used to perform *Pooja* daily observing all rituals. Once Dama Seth was required to go to another village. He, therefore, entrusted the *Pooja* to Namdev. Dama Seth used to offer milk to the deity. He asked Namdev to do so in his absence. Namdev was happy that he had got a chance to serve Vitthal. In the absence of his father, Namdev took milk in a bowl and offered the milk to Vitthal sitting with eyes closed in front of Vitthal. His anxiety was growing to find whether Vitthal has drunk the milk or not. He opened his eyes and got frightened to see that Vitthal had not drunk the milk. He thought that there was definitely some thing wrong in his offering the milk to Vitthal because of which Vitthal had not drunk the same. He thought that his father must be offering milk maintaining purity but as he was yet a child he must have committed some mistake. He, therefore, thought that until Vitthal drinks the milk, he would also not eat or drink any thing. As the time passed, Namdev was getting restless. God looks at the intention and not on the act. So Vitthal appeared before Namdev and drank milk from the bowl. This went on for a few days till Dama Seth returned. When he learnt what had happened, he was thrilled. He embraced Namdev and said that he had made not only their own house but the entire village auspicious.

Namdev's bhakti for Vitthal kept on taking deeper roots. At the age of eight, Namdev was married to a girl named Rajai, who was daughter of Govind Seth. After some time his father died as a result of which the entire responsibility of the family fell on his shoulders. His mother and wife wanted that Namdev should take on to some business but Namdev had already entered the arena of bhakti with all his might. For him

there was nothing greater than getting engrossed in reciting the name of Vitthal, taking a dip in the river Chandrabhaga and visiting Pundalik. The worldly affairs had no meaning for him. Living in Pandharpur he used to spend his time in the remembrance of Vitthal. He started composing melodious '*Abhangas*' (poetry) to please Lord Krishna and His consort Rukmaniji. Satsang (company) with saints like Gora Kumhar and Sanvata Mali was easily available to him in Pandharpur. In their company he completely got absorbed in the bhakti of Vitthal.

Namdev's bhakti in Vitthal had grown so much that the Lord could not remain away from him even for a moment. The Lord used to appear before him in human form and used to do all his work. On the other hand Namdev also could not live for a moment without his Lord. The way of love is strange; both the lover and beloved become restless for each other.

Amongst his contemporary saints, Sant Gyaneshwar was very famous. He came to Pandharpur to meet Namdev. Sant Gyaneshwar was going on a pilgrimage and wanted Namdev to accompany him. Both of them were deeply impressed with each other. When Namdev asked him to accompany, Namdev was very happy that he would have the benefit of the satsang of Sant Gyaneshwar but at the same time he could not leave Vitthal even for a moment. He, therefore, said to Sant Gyaneshwar that as he is a great saint and thus the God personified, he (Namdev) would be happy to accompany him, if the Lord so permits. These were the words of a Bhakt (devotee), recommendation of a saint like Gyaneshwar and the matter was in the court of the Lord Pandurang. Sant Gyaneshwar pleaded before the Lord and the Lord agreed saying that Namdev is very dear to Him and if Sant Gyaneshwar wanted to take Namdev with him, he must take care of him (Namdev) on the way. Such was His Grace on Namdev.

With the permission of the Lord, Namdev accompanied Sant Gyaneshwar on the pilgrimage. On the way Sant Gyaneshwar explained him that God is omnipresent and all pervading but Namdev was deeply rooted in Sagun bhakti (in the bhakti of Lord in the form of Vitthal). He told Sant Gyaneshwar that Lord Vitthal alone is worth the worship; one should engage in reciting his name and in His remembrance; the love for Lord Krishna is the essence of life and that Lord Pandurang is the essence of his life. The Nirgun *Gyan* of Sant Gyaneshwar was of no interest to Namdev. All along he was rooted in the remembrance of Vitthal. After visiting Prabhas and Dwarka etcetera when they were returning, a strange incidence occurred with them near Bikaner. Both of them were very thirsty. They spotted a well in the village named Kaulavat. Gyaneshwar was a Siddha-yogi (an accomplished yogi, who had acquired various Siddhis). He used Laghima-Siddhi by which he became small, entered the well, drank water and brought some water for Namdev, as well. Namdev was a Bhakt; he refused to drink the water saying humbly that his Lord Vitthal would definitely take care of his thirst. Hardly had he uttered these words that the water in the well rose up to the brim of the well and Namdev quenched his thirst. This is how the Lord serves his Bhakt and takes care of even their slightest needs.

While returning from Kashi to Pandharpur, they stayed with Gora-Kumhar, a family man and a great saint. Gyaneshwar and his sister Muktabai held him in very high esteem. Muktabai was accompanying Gyaneshwar on this pilgrimage tour. During their stay there, once during satsang spotting a *Thapi* (a wooden instrument used by potters for patting pots) she asked him in a lighter vein as to what it was. Gora-Kumhar replied that it is a *Thapi*, which helps in judging whether a pot is *Kachcha* (half baked) or *Pakka* (fully baked-ready). She said-‘We are also like mud-pots. Are we *Kachcha* or *Pakka*’? Gora-Kumhar said okay, we shall find out and then he started patting their heads with the *Thapi*. When Namdev’s turn came, Gora-Kumhar said that he was *Kachcha*. On his asking Gora-Kumhar explained that Namdev had not yet taken the shelter of a Guru and, therefore, he was not *Pakka*.

Namdev after returning to Pandharpur put this matter before Vitthal, Who supported Gora-Kumhar. It was revealed to Namdev that though he was very dear to the Lord but still he was required to take shelter of a Guru at whose feet he must surrender his ego; till he did so he would remain *Kachcha*. Namdev then took Visova Khechar as his Guru on the direction of the Lord. Visova Khechar was an accomplished saint through whom Namdev acquired the knowledge of Truth. A strange incidence in this regard is related to Namdev. Vitthal had directed Namdev in his dream to take Visova Khechar as his Guru. Namdev went out looking for him. He was informed that Visova Khechar was resting in a Shiva temple. There Namdev saw an old man resting with his feet on the Shivalinga. When Namdev objected, he asked him to shift his feet to another place away from Shivalinga. Namdev pulled his feet to another place but to his surprise a new Shivalinga suddenly appeared at that place. Namdev then understood that this old man himself was Visova Khechar and took initiation from him. In his *Abhangas* Namdev has written a lot in the praise of his Guru Visova Khechar. In one *Abhang* he has written that ‘my mind is like a needle and my body is like thread. I have fallen at the feet of my Guru Visova Khechar, who has made my life auspicious. I have forgotten about all my afflictions and my heart is now full of bliss. My Guru has applied the collyrium (lampblack-*Kajal*) of true wisdom in my eyes, without which my life was like a snake without the *Mani* (a precious stone believed to be hidden in the hood of snake). With the grace of my Guru I remembered the Lord and it got me absorbed in the Lord’. Thus the journey of Namdev with Gyaneshwar fructified in Namdev taking the shelter of Visova Khechar and getting completely immersed in the love of Lord Pandurang.

For some time Namdev also lived in Dhomangaon of District Gurudaspura in the Punjab state, where he composed many verses in the Hindi language while spreading the message of Krishna-bhakti. Many of these verses have been included in the Guru-Granth Sahib. The early part of his life he spent in Pandharpur and the later part he spent in the North India. He was one of the early saints of the Varkari sect. In Maharashtra he propagated a mix of Vishnu bhakti and Sant-mat. He saw the Lord everywhere in the form of Vitthal. He had surrendered himself completely to the Lord and had risen above the caste and creed considerations. He has stated that ‘I bow before that Supreme, Whom my Guru had shown to me.’ He also said that the Lord was his all-in-all and that he had no argument with any one; his only goal was the lotus feet of his Lord.

Many miracles are associated with Namdev. Once he went to a place named Alavati. There he sat in front of a temple and engrossed deeply in the love for the Lord started singing a Bhajan. The priests took him as one of the beggars and pushed him towards the back of the temple. To their surprise the front door of the temple also shifted from the east to the west.

Once his hut caught fire. Seeing that things lying on that side of the hut were gutted in fire, he started throwing the remaining things also in the fire. In the red-hot flames he had a glimpse of his Lord Vitthal. He stated, 'O my Lord! I am sacrificing all my belongings in this *Agni-Yagya*. Due to my ignorance I had taken all these things as belonging to me. Now by accepting them, shower Your grace on me.' The fire turned more severe and burnt the entire hut. Namdev was not even the least bothered about it but then his Lord appeared in the form of a laborer and reerected his hut.

Once Namdev stayed in a deserted house in a village. The villagers told him not to stay there, as that house was haunted by a Brahm-Rakshas (a powerful ghost of a dead Brahman). For Namdev, however, the entire world was the abode of his Lord and Vitthal alone existed in the form of all creatures. For him even that Brahm-Rakshas was also Vitthal. At mid-night that Brahm-Rakshas appeared before Namdev. His body was very long and dreadful. Namdev started singing in the praise of Vitthal stating that 'My Lord Vitthal You have appeared in an elongated form of Brahm-Rakshas today. Your head is touching the heavens and Your feet are on the earth. No one can describe Your this form fully. You are my Lord; shower Your grace on me.' Instantly Namdev saw the Lord Pandurang showing His glimpse with conch, chakra, mace and lotus flower in His hands.

Once Namdev cooked some pan-cakes (*Roti*) for himself in a jungle. As he got up to relieve himself, he saw a dog running with the pan-cakes in its mouth. Namdev picked up the bowl containing ghee (butter-oil) and started following the dog saying 'O My Lord! Let me apply some ghee on these pan-cakes. Without ghee you would not like them.' The Lord cares for the feelings. Instantly He showed His glimpse in the form of Vitthal in place of the dog. Namdev fell at the feet of his Lord, Who embraced him.

Once a person named Shamnath visited Namdev along with his son named Tatyaa. Shamnath was a devotee and used to attend satsang regularly but his son did not do so in spite of his father telling him repeatedly. Shamnath mentioned this to sant Namdev. While they were talking, it got a little dark in the evening. Namdev took both of them in the rear of the temple, which was a big area and a lamp was lighting in one corner. Namdev purposely took them to the other side where the light was very dim. Tatyaa asked Namdev as to why were they not sitting near the lamp. Namdev remarked, 'this is what your father is telling you all along. You can acquire the purity of mind only by attending satsang, as it lightens up the mind.' Tatyaa got the message and started attending satsang.

Chokha Mahar (Chokha Mela) was a contemporary saint of Namdev in Maharashtra. Once Namdev went to the village Vedha with his associates for Kirtan and stayed in the village. People requested him to take food at their house but Namdev said that he would take food at the house of the most pious man of the village and went to

Chokha Mahar for food along with people accompanying him. The villagers were surprised as Chokha Mahar belonged to a low caste and he used to peel off skin of dead animals. Namdev explained to them that although Chokha Mahar was engaged in that job, which was his family tradition, his heart was pure as he was always immersed in the thought of the Lord. When he saw that people did not believe this, he took them to the temple of Vitthal. Chokha Mahar, however, did not enter inside the temple and stood outside the gate. There was no end to the astonishment of people when they saw that the flower garland from the neck of the Lord flew on its own and landed in the neck of Chokha Mahar. His Samadhi is situated at the gate of Vitthal temple.

At the age of eighty years Namdev left this mortal world at the main gate of the Vitthal temple in front of his Lord Pandurang in 1407 Vikram Samvat. His Samadhi is located in Pandharpur.



Sant Gyaneshwar

Sant Gyaneshwar

Sant Gyaneshwar was one of the most renowned saints of India. He was a contemporary of Sant Namdev. Sant Tukaram showered a lot of praise on him and accepted him as the fountainhead of all saints.

The ancestors of Sant Gyaneshwar were Yajurvediya Brahman of the Madyandin branch and they used to live in Aapegaon at the bank of the river Godawari, near Paithan. They were Kulkarni (keeping accounts for the village). His grandfather Govind Pant was an influential person. Govind Pant had a son by the name Vitthal Pant, who was a great scholar, recluse and devotee. Right from his early childhood, he was attracted towards the divine and, therefore, at an early age he sat out on pilgrimage. When he reached Alandi, which is about twelve miles from Pune (the place where Samadhi of Gyaneshwar is located), he stayed there in the Siddheshwar temple. Vitthal Pant looked very knowledgeable and his demeanor was pure and simple. Siddho Pant of Alandi, a Kulkarni of Alandi, therefore, married Rukminibai, his daughter to Vitthal Pant. Vitthal Pant although got married with Rukminibai but was not attracted towards family life. Rukminibai was completely devoted to her husband Vitthal Pant but still she could not change his mind. As the time was passing, Vitthal Pant was getting more and more detached with worldly affairs. He wanted to spend the rest of his life in Kashi. One day, therefore, in the guise of taking a dip in the holy Ganges, he went away to Kashi and there he took *Sanyas* under the tutelage of Swami Ramanand. On the other hand for twelve years Rukminibai spent her life in austerity and praying fervently before the Lord for reunion with her husband. At last her prayers were answered. It so happened that Swami Ramanand happened to pass through Alandi on his way to Rameshwaram. Rukminibai visited him and prostrated before him. Swami Ramanand blessed her "*Putravati Bhav*" (be the mother of a son). Rukminibai, however, smiled considering the improbability of this blessing coming true. Ramanand then came to know that her husband had taken *Sanyas* in Kashi. On further enquiry about the age and looks of her husband, he could guess that it was Vitthal Pant, who had taken *Sanyas* and now was known as 'Chetnyashram Swami'. It made him worry, as according to scriptures, one who leaves behind an issueless wife, he, as well as his Guru is considered to have committed a sin. Swami Ramanand, therefore, gave up the idea of going to Rameshwaram; instead he returned to Kashi and asked Chetnyashram Swami, i.e. Vitthal Pant to return to Grihastha Ashram and to live family life with his wife. Vitthal Pant followed the orders of Swami Ramanand, his Guru, and came back to Alandi to live with his wife.

A Sanyasi returning to Grihstha Ashram was unheard of and unacceptable to the society those days. This was considered as bringing disrepute both to the Sanyas Ashram as well as to the Grihstha Ashram. As a result, Vitthal Pant was subjected to social criticism and harassment in various ways. Not only this, the Brahmans boycotted them from their society. Vitthal Pant, however, became more and more serious, quiet and

studious, as the society kept on discarding them. He started spending all his time in bhakti, studying the scriptures and in contemplation. He was not concerned with the criticism by the society. Rukminibai also spent her time in serving her husband.

In due course this couple was blessed with three sons and a daughter; Nivratinath was the eldest of the siblings, Gyandev (Gyaneshwar) was second, Sopandev the youngest son and Muktabai their only daughter. In those circumstances this posed a great problem before Vitthal Pant to look after his family. At times he did not even get alms and survived on water alone. Even then they lived with satisfaction without ever complaining to the Lord. By the grace of the God all their children were extremely sharp and the father, Vitthal Pant himself was a devout scholar. The children, therefore, started learning the scriptures from a very young age.

When Nivratinath was seven years of age, his father requested the Brahmans of Paithan to perform his sacred thread ceremony but they refused. A dejected Vitthal Pant lived in Tryambakeshwar for six months, where Shri Gahaninath, an Acharya of Nath-Sampraday initiated Nivratinath. Vitthal Pant and Rukminibai left Alandi and sacrificed their lives at the confluence of the rivers Ganges and the Yamuna at Prayag by taking Jal-Samadhi (immersing oneself in water) leaving their children in the shelter of Lord Vitthal. They thought that the Brahmans would take pity on their sons at least then and perform the sacred thread ceremony. Gyaneshwar was very keen on wearing the sacred thread in order to fulfill the desire of his parents, who had sacrificed their lives for this purpose. This had a great impact on the Brahmans of Alandi. They became sympathetic towards the children and advised them to go to Paithan telling them that if they, i.e. the Brahmans of Paithan, agree to their thread ceremony, they shall abide by it. The children sat out on a journey to Paithan doing Kirtan on the way. In Paithan the Brahmans called for a meeting, where it was decided that these children can not be purified except that they prostrate before everyone including cows, be it a dog, a *Chandal* (a wretch), or anyone else, without caring for their laughing at them and thus devote themselves to the 'Ananya (undivided, single-pointedly) bhakti of the Lord'. All the four siblings were satisfied with this decision of the Brahmans.

While they were about to return to Alandi, some mischievous persons started teasing them. They asked Gyaneshwar about his name and when he replied that his name was 'Gyandev', one of them pointed out towards a buffalo standing nearby and taunted, 'Here this buffalo is the Gyandev, who carries the load of all wisdom through out the day. Tell us whether you are also like him'. Gyaneshwar replied, 'Yes, there is no difference between us. It is the same soul that is there in him and me.' On hearing his answer one of them whipped the buffalo twice and taunted Gyaneshwar that he would have borne the pain of those whips. Gyaneshwar said yes and showed his back where the whip-marks were clearly visible. Not satisfied, one of them remarked, if this buffalo and you are one, ask this buffalo to recite scriptures like you. Gyaneshwar put his hand on the back of the buffalo and the buffalo uttering "AUM" started reciting Veda-mantras. Seeing this miracle taking place in front of their eyes, the scholars and Brahmans of Paithan were flabbergasted. They realized that they were not standing before some ordinary persons but before Mahatmas. Similarly, once at the house of a Brahman in Paithan, on the

occasion of *sraddh* ceremony (ceremony in honor and for the benefit of a deceased relative) on invocation by Gyaneshwar, the deceased relatives of that Brahman appeared bodily and accepted the food.

Such miracles and extraordinary powers of Gyaneshwar attracted a lot of people towards Gyaneshwar.. The Brahmans of Paithan also vouched for their purity and gave them the letter of authorization for their thread ceremony. After this for some time they stayed in Paithan, where they used to bathe in the river Godavari, talk about Vedanta, recite the name of God, study the scriptures and show the path of bhakti to the people of Paithan. In Paithan itself Gyaneshwar studied many scriptures. From Paithan they proceeded to Nevase via Arley. While in Nevase, for a few days they visited Alandi. This time people of Alandi received them with great respect and honor. From Alandi they returned to Nevase. “Gyaneshwari”, the most famous work of Gyaneshwar, which is a commentary on Srimadbhagvad Gita, was composed here in Nevase. As told by Gyaneshwar, it was jotted down in writing by Sacchidanand, who was given life by Gyaneshwar after he was declared dead. He had completed Gyaneshwari in 1347 Vikram Samvat at the age of fifteen.

Chang Dev was a famous yogi who had managed to defy death by his yogic powers for four hundred years. He used to live in Khandesh at the bank of river Tapi. He was proud of his yogic attainments. He had acquired occult powers and used to ride a tiger with a serpent as a whip. Chang Dev had heard of Gyaneshwar making a buffalo recite Veda-mantras. He, therefore, had curiosity to see Gyaneshwar. He sent a letter to Gyaneshwar, who agreed to meet him. In the evening Chang Dev rode on his favorite tiger and drove it towards Gyaneshwar. Gyaneshwar was sitting on a wall, with his elder brother Nivratinath. When Gyaneshwar saw Chang Dev riding a tiger, he asked the wall to move towards Chang Dev. Chang Dev was astonished to see this miracle. He was humbled. Muktabai said to Chang Dev that for attaining salvation, the first step is sincere devotion. Devotion will lead to *Vairagya*, which in turn would lead to Gyana.

After completing Gyaneshwari, Gyaneshwar with his brothers and sister went on pilgrimage. Nivratinath, Sopandev, Muktabai and famous saints like Narharisonar and Chokhamela accompanied him on this pilgrimage. They went to Pandharpur and with the permission of Lord Vitthal took Namdev along with them. Lord Vitthal had given the hand of Namdev in Gyaneshwar’s hand asking him to take care of Namdev, saying that Namdev is extremely dear to Him. With this group of saints, Gyaneshwar visited Ujjain, Prayag, Kashi, Ayodhya, Gaya, Gokul, Vrindavan and Girnar. On the way they propagated Hari-bhakti, asking people to wake up from slumber and to devote their time in attaining the goal of life. This historical pilgrimage had a lot of importance in the life of Gyaneshwar. In the entire country the fame of Sant Gyaneshwar and his companions reached to every nook and corner. They also had passed through Marwar and Punjab. On returning from the pilgrimage, Sant Namdev had organized a big festival in token of the completion of this pilgrimage. Gyaneshwar returned to Alandi from Pandharpur. At the time of his departure, Namdev fell at the feet of Sant Gyaneshwar, who embraced him and said that ‘you (Namdev) are the crown of all the devotees and you have made this place auspicious by your presence’.

Gyaneshwar accepted his elder brother Nivratinath, as his Guru. His Guru-bhakti (devotion to his Guru) was of the highest order. He has stated at one place that 'I shall lay my body as dust at the feet of my Guru'. Nivratinath was initiated in the yoga-tradition of Gorakhnath. Gyaneshwar's sadhana, therefore, was influenced by the principles of Nath-Sampraday.

The most important contribution of Gyaneshwar was to promote and propagate Narayani bhakti-Vishnu Upasana through Nirgun Gyanadhara (dedication to formless God). He said scriptures state that 'Narayan' is the essence of all Japa (recitations) and the Truth. He showed the royal path of the recital of the name of Narayan. Together with this, he also propagated the yoga tradition. He considered all creatures to be one and that they all have a right to achieve salvation. He encouraged people to develop a feeling of amicability amongst all creatures. He pulled people out of darkness to have a glimpse of the Self in the light of Gyana.

Gyaneshwar lived for twenty-one years three months and five days and took live-Samadhi in Vikram Samvat 1353 in the month of Margshirsh on the Krishna-Trayodashi day. Within one year thereof all his three siblings also left this mortal world for their heavenly abode. Sant Gyaneshwar had taken Samadhi in Alandi. Sant Namdev was present at that time. He has described this incidence in 250 Abhangas (verses). These are the words of a saint and, therefore, to disbelieve them would be a great sin. Namdev has stated that before taking live-Samadhi, Sant Gyaneshwar went to Pandharpur on Ekadashi (the eleventh day of the fortnight); Nivratinath, Sopandev and Muktabai and others accompanied him. Gyaneshwar took bath in the river Chandrabhaga, visited Bhakt Pundalik and then visited the Vitthal temple. He expressed his desire to take Samadhi before the saints present over there. They were saddened; Namdev got very upset. Lord Vitthal appeared before Gyaneshwar and said to him 'You are Gyana personified' and then embraced him. ...All the saints accompanied Gyaneshwar to Alandi. Pandharinath (Lord Vitthal) also accompanied them and initiated the process of Samadhi. Saints and Bhakt present over there took bath in the river Indrayani and then worshipped the Lord. They started doing the Kirtan. The atmosphere all around got filled with the name of the divine. The Lord in person took all the saints and devotees with him to the temple of Siddheshwar-Shankar. Sopandev caught hold of the feet of the Lord. Nivratinath was in a supra-conscious state of mind and Gyaneshwar holding the feet of his Guru Nivratinath was engrossed in the contemplation of Self. Namdev and the saints were in a state of shock. Namdev's body had become numb due to crying. Nivratinath got out of trance for a little while. He stroked the face of Gyaneshwar, embraced him and then blessed him for his auspicious departure. Lord Vitthal put sandal mixed with saffron on the forehead of Gyaneshwar, put a garland on his neck and took Gyaneshwar in a cave under the shadow of Ajan-tree by the side of the Siddheshwar temple. One hand of Gyaneshwar was held by Nivratinath and the other by the Lord Pandharinath. It was a divine and heart-piercing scene. Nivratinath and Lord Pandharinath came out of the cave and the mouth of the cave was covered with a piece of stone.

Sant Gyaneshwar established a holy harmony between Gyana, bhakti, Tapa and Karma. He was a great saint, yogi and *Atm-gyani* (a great exponent of esoteric knowledge).

Some of his sayings are:

All the four Vedas, Six Shashtras (Scriptures) and Eighteen Puranas, all of them sing in praise of the Lord alone;

Certainly Gita is not meant for the exercise of the brain, it is an instrument to win over the self;

Remembrance of the name of the Lord destroys all sins in a moment;

All the effort made in Japa or Tapa etcetera is a waste without bhakti;

This world has no meaning without the Lord;

Pleased with my Gyaneshwari *Yagya*, the Lord may give me only this much that the wicked may give up their ill-feelings and be inclined to do good to others; all creatures develop amicability towards each-other; the darkness of sins may end and the world be enlightened with the knowledge of the Self and every creature be blessed with what it craves for.



Yogini Lalleshwari

Yogini Laleshwari

Yogini Laleshwari has her name engraved in golden letters in the Kashmiri Shaivite literature. She worshipped Lord Shiva as Beloved and equated the soul with the beauty of Lord Shiva. She was an 'Avdhut' (a person who is totally absorbed in Beloved and unmindful of the world around) and Param-Hans (highly accomplished saint). She used to sing and dance in the praise of Lord Shiva and thus glorify her Beloved. Her songs are sang in every nook and corner of Kashmir. She propagated the concept of unity and opened the doors of Shiva-bhakti for everyone, be it a Brahman or a Chandal, a rich man or a poor, a noble person or a sinner. She was a contemporary of the famous Sufi saint Sayyed Ali Hamdani, who had visited Kashmir to propagate the message of love of Islam and had spent about six years in Kashmir. During this stay he met Yogini Laleshwari. Both of them were greatly influenced by each other. It was around the same time when Sant Namdev enjoyed the nearness of Lord Vitthal in Maharashtra and Kabir propagated the message of Nirgun *Gyan*-dhara in the North that Yogini Laleshwari established Kailashpati Mahadev at the seat of the soul in Kashmir.

Yogini Laleshwari was an ardent lover of the beauty of Shiva-the Truth. By worshipping Shiva in the form of the Self, she impacted not only the Northern parts of India but also influenced Arab and Persia. She had established an extraordinary harmony of brilliance and tender love in her words and spent all her life in exploring the depths of Divine Love.

Laleshwari was born in Pampur village in Kashmir in a pious Brahman family around the year 1347, i.e. Vikram Samvat 1400. Kashmir and North India during that time was facing political disturbances and anarchy. In her childhood, at times she used to get overwhelmed with a flux of love for the Divine. She spent a simple and pious life devoid of any ostentation. She was married at an early age of twelve in a family in Kashmir. Her married life, however, was not pleasant. She faced a lot of problems in her marital home. Her mother-in-law was especially unhappy with her and started posing various problems to her right from the day she entered her nuptial home. Laleshwari, however, showed no resentment and lived with it all. Her mother-in-law used to ask her to attend to all the domestic chores and yet gave her very scantily to eat. She was given only a bowl of rice and even in that bowl her mother-in-law used to keep a stone so that the quantity of rice was reduced further. Laleshwari, however, never objected or protested against this and kept on passing her time peacefully. Gradually she developed a totally indifferent attitude and got completely detached from the worldly affairs.

Once Laleshwari was cleaning utensils at the bank of river, her neighbor also was there. She said to Laleshwari that today she would have good time as a guest is there in their house, for whom good food would be cooked. Laleshwari replied, 'whether a goat is cooked or a sheep, I would get only a bowl of rice with a stone in it'. Her father-in-law was standing nearby. He heard this conversation. He was annoyed with his wife for the treatment meted out to Laleshwari. He, therefore, rebuked his wife, i.e. the mother-in-law of Laleshwari, as a result of which her situation became more pathetic. Her mother-

in-law provoked her son i.e. the husband of Laleshwari, who also started misbehaving with her. They started false propaganda against her that she was a witch and that she goes out in the mid-night riding on the back of a lion to eat human flesh. Laleshwari was deeply hurt by this false propaganda. She, therefore, decided to leave the house and to spend her time in the remembrance of Lord Shiva.

She left the house and started roaming about in the streets, in jungles and in villages singing in the praise of her Lord. Impressed by her divine songs, thousands of people started following her. She used to get so absorbed in it that she often forgot to care for her self; she started roaming about as an Avdhut, at times with no clothes to cover her body. Unaware of this, she used to dance and sing for the pleasure of her Lord. Some used to call her mad, some others used to throw stones at her, some used to abuse her and some used to torture her, but for her everyone was pervaded by Lord Shiva. She had no ill-feeling or hatred towards anyone of them as she saw her Lord in each one of them. Her feeling of duality had disappeared; she realized that it was her Beloved Lord Shiva, Who was appearing in all forms. She had attained the state of 'Unity of all existence'. She got initiated by a famous Shaivite-saint. In her verses she has said that 'my Guru has asked me to be introspective rather than focusing outside, as that is the way to auspiciousness. This sermon is the basis of my life and now I dance and sing to please my Lord without caring for the people'.

Laleshwari was also in touch with the famous Sufi saint Sayyed Ali Hamdani, who had come to Kashmir to spread the message of love of Islam. In the eyes of Yogini Laleshwari no one was 'man'; she took everyone as the '*Upasika*' (beloved-worshippers-consorts) of Lord Shiva. One day she saw Shah Hamdani walking across. She uttered '*Purush*' (man) and started running. A *Tandur* (a large earthen oven used for cooking in the Punjab and Kashmir) was alighted nearby, she jumped into that. Sant Hamdani followed her and asked the owner of *Tandur* about her. He informed him that Laleshwari had jumped into the *Tandur* and by now she would have been burnt to ashes. Sant Hamdani appealed her to come out of the *Tandur* and she came out wearing divine clothes of green color. Both of them were deeply impressed and had discourses with each other, resulting in a synthesis of *Vedanta*, bhakti and Islam.

Yogini Laleshwari sang many songs in praise of her Beloved, Lord Shiva. Her songs greatly reflect upon the Kashmiri Shaive-yoga. In one of her songs she has stated: 'Yes, it is right that I have drunk the water of river Sindhu many times; I have spent many lives in Kashmir; I have been born as a human being many a times but I remained a mere Laleshwari alone. All these births have not helped me'. She propagated selfless devotion and complete surrender to Shiva. She has stated that mere recital of the name of Shiva is enough to please him and to receive His grace. In one of her songs she states that whatever one may keep on doing, by constant recital of the name of Shiva and by directing one's mind towards Shiva, one certainly receives the grace of Shiva. She was completely devoted to the attribute-less Shiva-*Tatva* (the essence of Shiva). She used to pray before Lord Shiva: 'Whatever you may be-Shiva, Keshav or Brahm, liberate me from the cycle of birth and death. I have become blissful by seeing Your glimpse in me'. She also stated that to realize Shiva, one has to seek the grace of one's Guru. Shiva is

Omnipresent; to find Him at any particular place is impossible, as He has laid the trap for the soul (Jeevatma) at every step. Shiva is within all creatures. He feeds in the form of mother; makes one feel happy in the form of spouse; allures creatures in the form of Maya and it is only the Guru, who gives the knowledge of Shiva. It was her firm belief that only Shiva-bhakti is the source of eternal peace.

Sant Pipa

Sant Pipa was one, who discarded a great kingdom at his command and chose to follow the path of devotees. He was related to the Sisodiya king Maharana Kumbha of Mewar. Maharana Kumbha's sister was married to one of the ancestors of Pipa. He was born in the year 1442 Vikram Samvat and from his childhood he had an inclination towards bhakti. He was always ready to serve Sadhu-Mahatmas. He had twelve queens but was a detached person.

Once a group of Sadhus came to Gagron Gadh. King Pipa made all the arrangements for them but did not go personally to visit them. The Sadhus were surprised that the King himself did not come to see them and prayed the Lord to guide him to the right path. King Pipa in the night had a glimpse of the goddess, who asked him to go to Kashi and get initiated by Swami Ramanand. Immediately the King sat for the journey to Kashi. Swami Ramanand put him to tough test. When Pipa went to meet him, Swami Ramanand asked his disciples to inform Pipa that he does not see kings. Pipa immediately changed his royal clothes and put on ordinary clothes. In a moment he turned into an urchin from a king. Swami Ramanand was pleased with his conduct but still he was to pass through another test. Swami Ramanand asked him to jump in a well. Pipa was about to jump in a well that Swami Ramanand asked his disciples to stop him from doing so. Swami Ramanand then gave him *deeksha* (initiated him) and asked him to return to his palace. Pipa returned to his palace as an ascetic.

After a few days Pipa became desperate to see his Guru Swami Ramanand. He requested Swami Ramanand to come to Gagron. Swami Ramanand visited him with forty of his disciples including Kabir and Raidas. Pipa received Swami Ramanand with gaiety and carried the palanquin of Swami Ramanand on his shoulder. Swami Ramanand lived in Gagron for some time and then expressed a desire to go to Dwarka. Pipa also wanted to accompany Swami Ramanand. His twelve queens also sought his permission to accompany him. Pipa told them that they can accompany him but for that they would have to give up their royal attires and would have to live like an ordinary person without worrying for the food or shelter. While the other queens gave up their idea, the youngest queen Sita gave up her royal status and accompanied Pipa with the permission of Swami Ramanand. Sant Pipa liked Dwarka and started residing there. Swami Ramanand returned to Kashi along with his disciples.

In Dwarka Sant Pipa used to visit the temple of the Lord daily. It was his routine. He took shelter in a cave at the confluence of rivers Ahu and Kali Sindh. After taking bath in the river Sant Pipa used to go to the temple through the cave. Once he got so desperate to have a glimpse of the Lord that in a fit of emotions he jumped into the sea. By the grace of God both of them, Sant Pipa and Sita were saved and in the sea they had the glimpse of Lord Krishna and His consort Devi Rukmini. They lived with the Lord in Lord's divine abode for seven days. Sant Pipa expressed a desire to live with the Lord eternally. Lord Krishna told him that though his desire was right but if he did not return

to Dwarka people would think that a devotee lost his life while seeking the Lord. Lord Krishna then gave him His seal. Sant Pipa along with Sita emerged from the sea after seven days and appeared before people, who started shouting in his praise. Sant Pipa gave that seal of the Lord to the priest of the temple and told him that those who would be fortunate to touch this seal would cross the ocean of life effortlessly. Sant Pipa became very popular and lots of people started visiting him.

In order to live in solitude Sant Pipa along with Sita started to live in a forest. One day some Pathans kidnapped Sita. Sant Pipa had complete faith in the Lord. The Lord rescued Sita and returned her back to Sant Pipa. Similarly, once when he was passing through a forest a lion came across. Sant Pipa looked at the lion, which fell at his feet. Sant Pipa gave *deeksha* to the lion.

Bhakt Sridhar was a contemporary of Sant Pipa. Once Sant Pipa visited him. At the time of food four leaf-plates were laid but Sridhar's wife was not present. Sant Pipa asked his wife Sita to find out what the matter was. Bhakt Sridhar was keeping quiet. Sita went inside the house to find that Sridhar's wife had sold of her clothes to arrange for their food. Sita gave half of her Saree to her. Sant Pipa and Sita decided to help them. They started singing and dancing on the street in order to gather some money to help the Sridhar couple.

From there Sant Pipa went to Tode, where the king of Tode became his disciple. The king offered all his wealth to Sant Pipa, but Sant Pipa returned it asking him to use all that wealth for good cause.

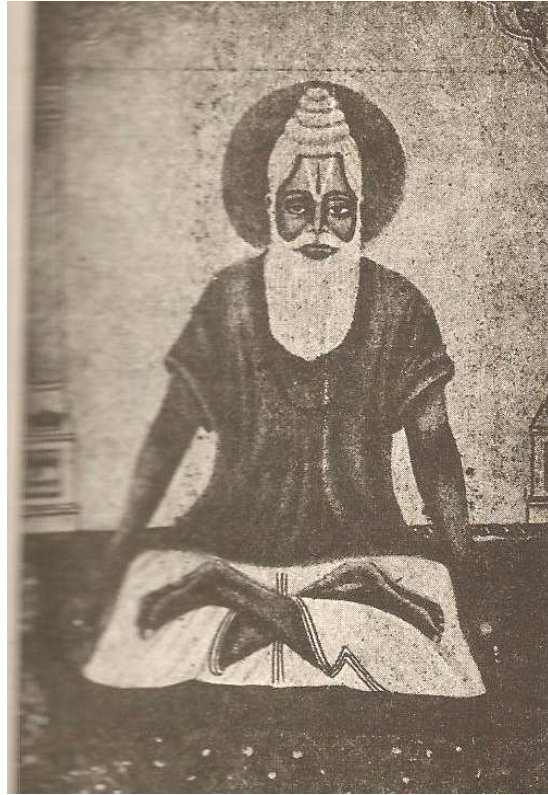
Once some miscreants misled a villager, who wanted to buy bullocks, to go to Sant Pipa. Sant Pipa kept the money and asked him to come the next day. The next day Sant Pipa used that money in feeding Sadhus. When this villager came and asked for the bullocks, Sant Pipa pointed towards the Sadhus and asked him to pick up the 'bullocks', who would take him across the ocean of life. This villager fell at the feet of Sant Pipa and got *deeksha* from him.

Sant Pipa attached a lot of importance to serving the saints. One day while he was away, some saints visited his place. Sita went to a merchant to fetch food for the saints, who agreed to help her only on the condition that she visits him in the night. When Sant Pipa came to know of it, he took Sita on his shoulders to the house of that merchant. It was raining but the merchant was astonished to see that not even her feet were wet. It jolted his mind. He fell at her feet and asked her to accept him as her child. Sant Pipa gave him *deeksha*.

Once *Ekadashi-Kirtan* was going on in Sant Pipa's hut. King Surajsen also was present. Suddenly Sant Pipa got up and started rubbing his hands. On asking he said that in the Dwarka temple fire had caught Lord's *Chandova* (a piece of cloth used to cover the top of the idol), which he was extinguishing. King Surajsen sent people to the temple where the priest told them that Sant Pipa remains present in the temple on all *Ekadashis* and that he had put off the fire.

Once a *Telin* (seller of oil) was selling oil saying 'Tel lo' (buy oil). Sant Pipa told her that 'Sita-Ram' would be more appropriate for her to say. She replied that the name of Sita-Ram is uttered by widows. When she reached home, her husband had died. Sant Pipa, however, gave life to her husband; both of them then started reciting the name of the Lord.

Sant Pipa was a great beneficent. Once some thieves stole his buffalo-cow. Sant Pipa ran after them with the calf asking them to take the calf as well without which the buffalo-cow would not give milk. The thieves fell at his feet, took initiation and started living a pious life.



Sant Raidas

Sant Raidas

Sant Raidas is one of the most famous saints of India. He was a great devotee and an exponent of unity and equality of all human beings in the field of spirituality. He was a great historical need of the medieval India. He preceded Sant Kabir and the grace of God lifted him very high in spiritual attainments. Though born in a low-caste, his devotion made him one of the most revered saints. He is considered as one of the twelve prominent disciples of Swami Ramanand. He is the one who provided some relief to the masses from the dry Mayavad of Acharya Shankar; Anatmavad (non-existence of soul) of Buddhism and from the sufferings caused due to invasion by Yavans by agitating their conscience and establishing the roots of Sant-mat. He was the savior of the spiritual current of the Indian culture from the bigotry of the foreign rulers. Both he and Sant Kabir removed the darkness of ignorance from the minds of people by igniting the flame of Nirgun *Gyan* in their hearts and propagating a harmonious mix of *Gyan* and bhakti, which they considered as the basis of the Sant-mat. He lived in the 14th-15th Century of Vikram Samvat and provided the nectar of bhakti to people, who were disappointed due to extant political disturbances. He propagated bhakti as a means to promote people's welfare. The statement of Kabir about him- '*Santan Mein Raidas Sant Hai*, meaning thereby that Raidas is a saint of saints, is absolutely correct.

Sant Raidas was born in Kashi, in a family of cobblers. His father was Ragghu and mother was Dhurbinia. Both of them were noble persons and devotees. People were surprised to see that the newly-born child did not accept mother feed. Swami Ramanand happened to visit their house and asked the child Raidas to take the feed. It is said that Raidas was a Brahman and a disciple of Swami Ramanand in his previous birth and that he had to take birth in a cobbler's family due to some mistake on his part in serving his Guru. Ramanand praised Raidas's parents for giving birth to a devotee-son and came back to his Ashram.

Raidas was brought up with great care and as he was growing, he was acquiring more and more noble qualities. He was attracted towards saints and Mahatmas and used to feel delighted on seeing them. He used to feel happy in serving them and in obeying his parents. Seeing his inclination, his parents were worried that Raidas may not be interested in marrying and living a family life. They, therefore, thought of getting him married with a suitable girl. On the other hand Raidas while mending shoes used to sing Bhajans (singing in the praise of the Lord). Whatever he used to earn by mending the shoes, he used to spend in the service of saints. Sant Raidas had firm belief that whosoever seeks anyone else except the Lord, he definitely undergoes the cycle of death and re-birth. Experiencing the grace of God in everything, in all actions, was the essence of his life.

He was married as soon as he reached adolescence. His wife was a very pious and noble lady. She used to look after the needs of the entire family and her husband. She fully followed Sant Raidas, as a result of which the marriage of Sant Raidas instead of

becoming an obstacle to his bhakti, proved to be a boon. Although his parents were very happy with both of them but they used to get upset seeing Raidas spending all the money earned through hard labor in serving saints. As both Raidas and his wife did not change their way, Raidas's parents asked them to live separately, away from them. Raidas erected a hut behind their house under a tree and started living there along with his wife. They did not oppose the parents even slightly and started spending their time in Bhajan.

Gradually their fame started reaching far and wide and Sadhus and Saints started visiting them. Sant Kabir was his contemporary and highly regarded Sant Raidas. Sant Raidas was worried not even in the least about the scarcity of money. He had firmly established himself in Hari-bhakti. The disciples of Swami Ramanand had a special place and very high regards for him. Raidas was not getting even a paisa from his parents. He used to be satisfied with whatever little he earned in the day. He used to offer shoes for free to saints and Vaishnavs (devotees of Lord Vishnu). At times they had to sleep empty stomach. They had that small hut in which they had kept the idol of the Lord and for them the shadow of the tree was the lone shelter. He considered it to be a great blessing that he was spending time in the company of saints. He spent his time in the bhakti of Nirgun-Ram. He used to say that he had nothing to offer to the Lord except his heart. It was his belief that his Lord would definitely liberate him. Riadas was also influenced by Sant Gani Mamur. He had acquired a state of complete surrender. He has stated:

“BEGUMPUR SHAHR KA NAAM, FIKAR ANDESH NAHI TEHI GRAM;
KAH RAIDAS KHALAS CHAMARA, JO US SHAHR SO MEET HAMARA”

(Meaning thereby that I reside in such a place where there are no worries or anxieties. Raidas, a cobbler, says that one, who lives there is my friend.)

Once he was stitching shoes under the tree. Many saints had gathered and satsang was on. Sant Raidas saw a stranger in the attires of a Sadhu walking across. He welcomed the stranger, offered him food and took care of his comfort. While departing, the stranger offered him a 'Parasmani' (the Philosopher's stone-the one that converts iron in to gold by mere touching), but Sant Raidas showed no interest in it. The stranger tried to lure him by converting iron into gold in front of him, but for Raidas his Parasmani was the name of Lord Ram. The stranger then tucked in the Parasmani in the hut and told Raidas that he could use it if he so desired. Raidas, however, could not be lured by the Parasmani and soon he forgot about it. After a few days this stranger visited him again and asked Raidas about the Parasmani. Raidas told him that he had forgotten about the Parasmani and it was good that he (the Stranger) had come again to take it back. The stranger picked up the Parasmani and in a moment disappeared from the scene. Raidas was surprised as to where had he eloped. He did not know that it was the Mayapati Bhagwan Himself (the Lord Himself), Who had come to test him. Raidas was, however, not won over by His Maya.

Strange are the ways of God, Who always remains ready to take care of the needs of His devotees. Raidas now started finding five gold coins everyday in the morning in the Pitari (box), which he used for Puja (worship). Raidas prayed before the Lord that he

did not want the gold coins, as for him the name of the Lord was his treasure but the Lord appeared in his dream and told him that He knew what was there in his (Raidas) mind and that he wanted nothing but then this is what He (God) liked and that His pleasure was in Raidas accepting those gold coins. Raidas, therefore, accepted the coins and started using them for the construction of a temple. Raidas himself used to stand outside the temple and considered himself fortunate to have a glimpse of the flag and the peak of the temple.

Once Sant Kabir visited Sant Raidas. During the conversation Kabir asked him for some water. Raidas in the process of making shoes used to wet the leather in a vessel. Raidas took some water from that vessel and offered it to Kabir. Kabir did not want to take this water but he could not refuse him either. He, therefore, did not drink the water and instead channeled it to the sleeve of his jacket made of cotton. Since the water was used to wet leather, it left its Color on the jacket. Kamali, the daughter of Kabir, later worked on this jacket to remove the spot from the sleeve of the jacket but could not succeed. She, therefore, chewed that portion of the jacket in an effort to remove the spot. In the process some of that water found way into her stomach. This water made her a seer. In due course she was married and taken to Multan by her husband. One-day Kabir and Swami Ramanand were passing over Multan in their subtle bodies. Suddenly, they found themselves pulled down at the residence of Kamali, who had kept food ready for them. Both of them were astonished as to how Kamali had acquired this power. When Kabir enquired about it, she narrated the incidence of cleaning his jacket and mentioned that the entire credit was to that water offered by Sant Raidas. Kabir repented on his missed opportunity. He went back after some time to Sant Raidas and asked him to give some water. Sant Raidas knew about the whole matter. He told him:

PAYA THA TAB PIYA NAHI, MAN MEIN ABHIMAN KIYA,
AB MAANGE HOT KYA, WOH PANI MULTAN GAYA.

A similar incidence is related to a rich man, who was offered Charnamrit (the sacred water) by Sant Raidas. He took it in his hand but threw it away so as to avoid it being the water from the house of a cobbler. A few drops of this Charnamrit fell on his clothes, which he later gave to a sweeper. The body of this sweeper started glowing day-by-day but this rich man fell pray to leprosy. When he again visited Sant Raidas and asked for Charnamrit, he was told that the Charnamrit that you would get now would only be mere water. The rich man realized his mistake and fell at the feet of Sant Raidas. Gradually with the blessings of Sant Raidas he was cured.

Mirabai was greatly influenced by Sant Raidas and accepted him as her Guru. In her verses she has mentioned about the glory of Sant Raidas and in one of her verses she has stated-‘GURU RAIDAS MILE MOHI PURE’. Similarly the Jhali queen of Chittor was also influenced by Sant Raidas. She had invited him to visit Chittor and Sant Raidas had visited Chittor.

There was a Brahman, who used to go to worship the Holy Ganges daily. Once Sant Raidas offered him a pair of shoes and requested him to offer a betel-nut on his

behalf to the Holy Ganges. The Brahman duly worshipped the Holy Ganges and while returning just threw the betel-nut towards the river. He was, however, surprised that the Holy Ganges in person extended her hand to accept the betel-nut. He was so impressed by the bhakti of Sant Raidas that he narrated this incidence to many people and the fame of Sant Raidas got spread in the whole of Kashi. The Holy Ganges, however, appeared in person before Sant Raidas. It so happened that while Sant Raidas was engaged in satsang with saints, they saw that the Holy Ganges appearing in person in the water of the vessel that he used for wetting leather and offering him a bracelet. Raidas kept the divine bracelet with him as a symbol of divine grace.

Raidas was not only a saint of high order but also a great poet. He described the Nirgun, Alakh and Niranjan Tatva (the formless, omnipresent and eternal aspects) of the Lord in his verses. He through spiritual and intellectual awakening of people contributed towards social revolution. He considered the Lord residing in the heart of all creatures as the Supreme. He has stated that he was a totally worthless person but by the grace of God, he has become an honored man.

He lived for about 125 years.

One of his most famous verses is:

AB KAISE CHUTE NAAM RAT LAGI!!
 PRABHUJI, TUM CHANDAN, HUM PANI! JAAKI ANG ANG BAAS SAMANI!!
 PRABHUJI, TUM GHAN BAN, HUM MORA! JAISE CHITVAT CHAND
 CHAKORA!!
 PRABHUJI, TUM DEEPAK, HUM BATI! JAKI JYOTI BARAI DIN RATI!!
 PRABHUJI, TUM MOTI, HUM DHAGA! JAISE SONAHI MILAT SUHAGA!!
 PRABHUJI, TUM SWAMI, HUM DASA! AISII BHAKTI KARAI RAIDASA!!



Sant Kabir

Sant Kabir

Sant Kabir is one of the most prominent saints of India. He was a contemporary of Sant Raidas and a pillar of bhakti movement of the medieval India. He is the one, who vociferously opposed blind following of customs and rituals and reprimanded both the Hindus and Muslims for doing so. He pronounced the omnipresence of the Lord stating Him to be residing in the heart of all creatures. He saw the entire universe being pervaded by Ram. It was the period of the rule by Sikandar Lodi and there was unrest all around. In these circumstances he gave the message that only by remembering the Lord, one could think of well-being. He re-strengthened the faith of people in God.

There are many myths related to the birth of Kabir. Some say that he was an incarnation of Bhakt Prahlad and was born by the union of a great sage and a *Devangana* (a divine damsel) named Pratichi, who protected him till he was picked up by Neeru and Neema. He was, however, born in Kashi. During those days Swami Ramanand was widely recognized, not in Kashi alone but in the whole of India. He was a great saint. It is said that once in Kashi he unknowingly blessed a widowed daughter of one of his Brahman disciples to be blessed with a son. The blessings of Swami Ramanand fructified and in 1455 Vikram Samvat she gave birth to a male-child. Afraid of the society that a widowed woman had given birth to a child and out of shame, she threw away the child in the Lahartara pond of Kashi. The pond was covered with lotus plants and the new born child started playing with lotus flowers. The sky was clouded and it was thundering and lightening. Neeru and Neema were passing through the pond and as Neema felt thirsty, she got down into the pond to quench her thirst. On seeing the new born child, her heart got filled with love and affection for the child. She picked up the child and brought him with her.

Kabir was a promising child and of helping nature. As a result people started loving him. Neeru was a weaver, who used to weave clothes in the traditional method using *Tana* and *Bana* (warp and woof). Kabir used to assist him and also used to assist his mother in the household chores. He also liked to serve saints and Mahatmas. Kabir at times used to go to the nearby market for selling clothes. Once a Sadhu asked him for some cloth and Kabir gave him the whole of the bundle without taking any money. On return his father rebuked him but Kabir started reciting the name of the Lord. Right from an early age Kabir used to ask people around to spend their time in Bhajan. As a result people started calling him 'Nigura' (worthless) and started avoiding him. Kabir used to think that without a Guru, one cannot acquire the true *Gyan* and was upset about it. He had heard of Swami Ramanand and wanted to take him as his Guru.

Swami Ramanand did not use to accept people of low-caste as his disciple. Kabir, however, found a way out. Swami Ramanand used to go to the holy river Ganges for taking a bath early in the morning every day. One day Kabir laid himself on the path usually followed by Swami Ramanand on one of the steps leading from the river bank down to the river. Swami Ramanand when came to take bath early in the morning,

without spotting him touched Kabir's head by foot and on realizing that there was some one lying over there uttered 'Ram'. Kabir immediately got up, caught hold of Swami Ramanand's feet and expressed great happiness that Swami Ramanand had given him the Guru-Mantra. In this context Kabir himself says: 'HUM KASHI MEIN PRAGAT BHAYE HAIN, RAMANAND CHETAYE'. Swami Ramanand was also impressed by his devotion. Kabir now started spending most of his time in Bhajan.

Some people, however, believe that Kabir by birth was a Muslim but under the influence of Swami Ramanand he gained knowledge of the Hindu religion. It is also claimed by Muslim followers of Kabir that Kabir was initiated by a Sufi saint named Sheikh Taki but Kabir has not spoken so much about him as he spoke about Swami Ramanand. Besides, Kabir has also spoken about 'Pir-Pitambar', which goes to indicate that Kabir benefited from the satsang of many great saints.

Kabir used to spend his time in satsang and Bhajan, people from various places used to visit him. Gradually his fame reached all around. Sadhus and saints of high order also started visiting him and the number of his followers kept on increasing. Kabir and 'Loi' were also connected. It is said that Loi was a disciple of Kabir. She observed celibacy throughout her life. Kabir once went across the river Ganges. He was passing through a forest with some saints where he saw a lady living in a hut. In her early childhood, she had been left in the Ganges by her family. A Sadhu took her out of the river, looked after her and named her as 'Loi'. After the death of that Sadhu she was living alone in the hut. This Sadhu had told her that her Guru is Kabir, who would come and visit her in this hut. She offered something to drink in bowls. Kabir kept one of the bowls and told her that one more Sadhu is coming over there. When Loi asked about the name of that Sadhu, he answered 'Kabir' and on asking his own name Kabir replied 'Kabir'. Loi was surprised and then she remembered what had been told to her about Kabir being her Guru. She accepted Kabir as her Guru.

The verses of Sant Kabir started finding their way in the court of the then emperor, who visited Kashi and when he appeared before Kabir he felt so refreshed, as if his body was smeared with sandal-paste.

Kabir attracted the attention of people towards the meaningless customs and rituals of the society. He openly criticized both Hindus and Muslims for their superstitions and blind-imitation. He has said:

PATTHAR PUJE HARI MILEN, TO MEIN POOJOO PAHAR,
TATE TO CHAKI BHALI, PEES KHAY SANSAR;
(If by bowing before a stone one can reach the God then I shall bow before the mountain; but I consider the grinding stone better as that makes the flour for food)

KANKAR PATTHAR JOD KE, MASJID LEYI CHUNAY,
TA CHAD MULLA BANG DE, KYA BAHARA HUA KHUDAY
(The muezzin is calling loudly from the turret of Mosque; I wonder whether the God has gone deaf?)

This enraged the Qazi (judge or magistrate), who provoked Emperor Sikandar Lodhi against Kabir. It is said that the emperor was a bigot and staunch Muslim and Sufi Sheikh Taki also added fuel to the fire. In order to teach him a lesson, false allegations were made against Kabir that he criticizes Islam and encourages people towards idol-worship and that he moves in the company of whores. The emperor asked him to be present in his court. Kabir appeared in the court but did not bow before the emperor. On being asked about it, he replied that he bowed only before the God. The emperor ordered him to be shackled and thrown in the river, but Kabir came out intact. In one of his verses Kabir has stated about his throwing into the river and breaking of the shackles by the waves of the river Ganges.

The emperor was a sensitive and emotional person. He requested Kabir to forgive him. He was also deeply impressed by the miracles of Kabir. Sheikh Taki, however, was not happy with Kabir. It so happened that once the dead body of a boy was flowing in the river. Sheikh Taki said to the emperor that if Kabir was a true saint, he should bring life into the dead body. Kabir asked the dead body to come to life and immediately it came to life. Spontaneously Kabir uttered 'Kamal' (it is wonderful) and thereafter the boy came to be known as Kamal. Kabir took the boy with him. Similarly a dead girl was also given life by Kabir, who came to be known as Kamali. Kabir took her also with him. Both of them came to be known as children of Kabir. Later Kabir started living in Maghar.

Guru Nanak was a contemporary of Kabir. It is said that he had met Sant Kabir and was impressed by his Satya-sadhana (devotion to Truth), *Ektavad* (belief in unity of existence) and his commitment to Sant-mat. It is said that later Sheikh Taki also was impressed by Kabir and Kabir also interacted with him. Dharamdas is considered as one of the main disciples of Kabir. It is said that Dharamdas had met Kabir at the bank of river Yamuna.

Kabir lived a long life. He left this world at the age of 119 years. Towards the later part of his life it had become difficult for him to live in Kashi owing to his popularity. He, therefore, had moved to Maghar, where he breathed his last. It is said that his Hindu followers wanted to cremate him whereas his Muslim followers wanted to bury him. This dispute went on for some time. When people, however, lifted the shroud from his body, they found flowers instead of dead body, which were divided by them for performing the last rites according to their own traditions.

Kabir, though was not formally educated, he composed many verses using the language flowing from his heart, which included various local dialects as well. His disciples collected them in the form of 'Sakhi', 'Shabd', 'Ramaini' and 'Bijak'. He was the first person to speak about the spiritual chakras beyond the seven chakras (from Mooladhar chakra to Sahsradalkamal) and talked of the process of manifestation and spiritual ascent in terms of 'Nirat', 'Surat' (consciousness) and 'Shabda' (vibration or 'word'), which is dealt with in detail in the 'Granth Adibhed'.

Nirat is a misnomer for ‘Nriya’, which means dance or movement. By Nirat Sant Kabir meant the power of the soul that produces movement in the consciousness, i.e. which awakens the consciousness and leads it to move on higher planes. This is the power of the thought, the resolution, which awakens the consciousness. Surat means consciousness and the power that guides the consciousness is Nirat. Unless Nirat is activated, Surat cannot move ahead. All creatures manifest as a result of combination of ‘Surat’ with ‘Shabda’. In the higher spiritual realms, Surat and Shabda exist in unison but in the lower spiritual realms, they co-exist but separately. For spiritual ascent Surat needs to follow the Shabda and become one with it in order to reach the Origin of the Shabda, i.e. the God. In this context Sant Kabir has said:

‘JAPA MITE AJAPA MITE, ANHAD BHI MIT JAYE,
SURAT SAMANI SHABDA MEIN, TAHIN KAAL NAHI KHAYE’

To understand the meaning of activating the Nirat, example of a child would be appropriate. The child has consciousness and he utters some words, which do not carry any meaning. His Nirat has not been activated so far. He is now gradually trained to utter meaningful words such as milk or water etc. The child at this stage does not know what these words mean. He is then trained to understand the meaning of these words. This is activation of the Nirat. Once the Nirat is activated, it guides the consciousness to understand the true meaning of words. It is important to note that the mother uses the words to activate the Nirat of the child. It is thus through the transmission of word that Nirat is activated and then the consciousness is guided to understand the word. The ‘Nirat’ awakens the ‘Surat’ to the essential remembrance of its Origin (Saarshabda) in order that it can lead back to the Origin. Once the ‘Surat’ gets turned to the ‘Shabda’ it gradually becomes one with it and effortlessly traces back its Origin, the Truth.

In the spiritual realm, it is the Satguru (the true spiritual Master), who activates the Nirat for the seeker in order that he can engage the ‘Surat’ with the ‘Shabda’. The scriptures mention it in no uncertain terms that it is the Satguru who arouses the determination and lights the lamp in the heart of the disciple and keeps it burning. Consider the couplet below:

‘GURU SAMAN DATA NAHI, YACHAK SHISHYA SAMAN,
TIN LOK KI SAMAPDA, PAL MAIN DINHI DAAN’

(There is no greater giver than the Master, who gives away all the treasures of the world to his disciple in a moment. The master gives this treasure in the form of Shabda by transmitting the Shabda from his heart to the heart of the disciple. The Shabda is invaluable, as the entire world has been created from the Shabda.)

One of his famous compositions relating to reaching the God is:

MOKO KAHAN DHUNDHE RE BANDE
MAIN TO TERE PAAS MEIN
NA TEERATH MEIN, NA MOORAT MEIN

NA EKANT NIWAS MEIN
 NA MANDIR MEIN, NA MASJID MEIN
 NA KASHI KAILAS MEIN
 NA MAIN JAP MEIN, NA MAIN TAP MEIN
 NA MAIN BARAT UPAAS MEIN
 NA MAIN KIRIYA KARAM MEIN REHTA
 NAHI JOG SANYAS MEIN
 NAHI PRAN MEIN NAHI PIND MEIN
 NA BRAHMAND AKAS MEIN
 NA MAIN PRAKURTI PRAWAT GUFA MEIN
 NAHI SWASAN KI SWANS MEIN
 KHOJI HOYE TURAT MIL JAOON
 EK PAL KI TALAS MEIN
 KAHAT KABIR SUNO BHAI SADHO
 MAIN TO HOON VISWAS MEIN

(Meaning thereby-where are you looking for Me? I am with you. I am neither in pilgrimage nor in idols, nor in solitude. I am neither in temples nor in mosques, nor in Kaba or in Kailash. I am neither in Japa nor in *Tapa*, nor in resolutions or in fasts. I am neither in observing rituals nor in yoga or in *Sanyas*, nor am I in breathing or in the body. I am neither in the skies nor in the universe, nor in the caves or in Pranayam. Yes, if there is a true seeker, I can be reached in a moment. Kabir says listen O Sadhu! I can be reached only through faith.)

Here are some important quotes of Kabir to contemplate:

"All know that the drop merges into the ocean, but few know that the ocean merges into the drop."

"Love doesn't grow on trees nor bought in the market, but if one wants to be 'loved', one must first know how to give (unconditional) love."

"Many have died; you also will die. The drum of death is being beaten. The world has fallen in love with a dream. Only sayings of the wise will remain. "

"Admire the diamond that can bear the hits of a hammer. Many deceptive preachers, when critically examined, turn out to be false."

"Don't go to the garden of flowers! O friend! Go not there; in your body is the garden of flowers. Take your seat on the thousand petal lotus and gaze there the infinite beauty."

"Now I have no caste, no creed, I am no more what I am!"



Narsi Mehta

Param Vaishnav Narsi Mehta

Narsi Mehta was a family man and a great devotee. He was a poet-saint and is considered to be the Jaydev of Gujarat. He was born in Junagarh in Gujarat. Ravmandalik was the ruler of Junagarh those days, who was under Humayun, the Emperor of Delhi. The central rule of Humayun was facing many problems, as there was unrest, disruptions and instability all-around. Narsi Mehta was born in a reputed Nagar-Brahman family. His elder brother Vanshidhar Mehta was the Kotwal of Junagarh city and people respected their family. At such a time Narsi Mehta propagated the message of devotion. He stated:

‘BHARATKHAND BHOOTAL MAN JANMI JENE GOVINDANA GUN GAYA RE;
DHAN DHAN RE ENA MATA PITA NE, SAFAL KARI ENE KAYA RE.’

He announced that for human beings bhakti is the greatest objective to achieve as bhakti is not possible even for gods. Those, who reach the heavens due to their *Punyas* (good-deeds), have also to fall back after they have exhausted their quota. On the other hand the devotees ask for birth as human beings again and again in order that they could do bhakti. He said the parents of those people are fortunate, who devote themselves to bhakti. Those, who are not devotees, their mothers bear their burden unnecessarily. Narsi Mehta led people from darkness to the light of bhakti.

Narsi Mehta was born in Junagarh in 1470 Vikram Samvat. His father Krishna Damodar and mother Laxmigauri, both were great devotees and highly religious. They, however, left this mortal world when Narsi Mehta was only five. The responsibility of looking after Narsi Mehta fell on the shoulders of his grandmother Jayakunwari, whose pious life had a great influence on the life of Narsi Mehta. Narsi Mehta was dumb by birth. When he was about eight, one day he was going with his grandmother to visit the Shiva temple that he started speaking by the grace of a Sadhu. Jayakunwari requested the Sadhu to visit their house but he instead went away to Girnar. It is believed that in the form of that Sadhu it was Lord Krishna who had graced Narsi Mehta. While departing the Sadhu had asked Narsi Mehta to recite “Radha-Krishna” as the mantra.

At the age of nine, Narsi Mehta was married to Manikgauri, who was about seven then. She was extremely beautiful and a noble person, who acted according to the wish of her husband. Narsi Mehta spent his time in reciting the Radha-Krishna mantra and their time was passing peacefully. His elder brother Vanshidhar was kind to him but his wife Duritgauri was not well disposed towards him. She used to behave harshly with them and used to torture the Narsi-couple.

Narsi Mehta was now fifteen. He used to fetch grass for the horse in the evening and the remaining time he used to spend in Bhajan. His grandmother was still alive. In due course Narsi Mehta was blessed with a daughter and a son. His daughter was named Kunwaribai and son was named Shamaldas. Narsi Mehta’s grandmother persuaded Vanshidhar to get Kunwari Bai married to Vasantraai, son of Shrirangdhar Mehta of village Una. After the death of Jayakunwari, Narsi Mehta’s sister-in-law Duritgauri

started torturing them openly. She could not see them eating on the money of her husband. One day she threw them out of the house. Narsi Mehta took shelter in a Shiva temple and after severe *Tapa* (penance) for seven days Lord Shiva appeared before him. Lord Shiva took him to Dwarka for giving him a divine glimpse of Lord Krishna. Narsi Mehta has described this divine place very vividly. He said that the land there was of gold; in the palace the pillars were made of jewels and every particle was charged with divinity. Lord Shri Krishna welcomed him and he started living there with the Lord. On the day of Sharad-Poornima (full moon night in the beginning of the winter season) Lord commenced '*Raslila*' (the divine dance of the Lord Krishna with Gopis). Narsi Mehta filled with the feeling of a Gopi started playing music. He was holding a torch-light. Lord Shri Krishna put his '*Pitambar*' (the yellow robe worn by Lord Krishna) on Narsi Mehta. Narsi Mehta was so engrossed in the Raslila that he did not notice that the torch-light was burning his hand. After the Raslila the Lord and others noticed it. The Lord pleased with his devotion embraced him. Rukmaniji (the consort of the Lord) gave her necklace to him. A month thus passed. Then by the order of the Lord he returned in the attires of a Vaishnav to discharge his responsibilities and to propagate Lord's bhakti. Lord Shri Krishna gave him His idol, *Kartal*, peacock feather and Pitambar, as souvenir.

People were surprised to see Narsi Mehta in the attires of a Vaishnav. No one believed him that he was with the Lord. On provoking by Duritgauri, Vanshidhar expelled Narsi Mehta and his family out of the house. Their only belonging was the idol given by the Lord. They took shelter in a *Dharmshala* (a low-fare inn used by pilgrims etc.). He had the firm faith that whatever was taking place was Lord's grace. He then had a Darshan of Akroorji (a courtesan of Lord Krishna), who told him that by the order of the Lord, he had made all arrangements for his food and living. Narsi Mehta was overwhelmed, he and his family, who were all devotees of the Lord now had no worry. They all started spending their time in Bhajan. The Lord took upon him all the responsibilities of Narsi Mehta and his family.

There are numerous miraculous incidences related to Narsi Mehta. Once the family-priest of Shrirangdhar Mehta came to take Kunwari Bai along with him to her in-laws' house. Narsi Mehta had no money with him and the very next day he had to send his daughter with the family-priest. In the night he started doing Kirtan before the Lord along with the entire family. The Lord arranged for the requisite jewelry etcetera, which Narsi Mehta gave to his daughter and happily sent her to her in-laws' house.

Narsi Mehta promised to get his son Shamaldas married to the daughter of Madan Mehta, who was the '*Diwan*' (a high ranking courtesan) of Badnagar. Sarangdhar Mehta, an acquaintance of Madan Mehta used to live in Junagarh. He wrote to Madan Mehta that the priest who had fixed the marriage of his daughter with Shamaldas had done so without knowing that Narsi Mehta was a poor person, as people had sent the priest to Narsi Mehta for making fun of him (Narsi Mehta). Madan Mehta wrote to Narsi Mehta that if he was not able to come with people suited to his (Madan Mehta) status for the marriage of his son, he (Madan Mehta) would not allow the marriage to take place. Narsi Mehta replied that he had faith in the Lord that whatever the Lord would do, it would be auspicious for him. On the Magh-Shukla-Panchami day Narsi Mehta proceeded towards Badnagar with a group of Bhakts (devotees) to get his son married. People were thinking

that this would provide them an opportunity to laugh at Narsi Mehta, as he would make fun of himself. But at the entrance of Badnagar his Lord, Nand-Nandan Himself was present with a divine procession to welcome and accompany Narsi Mehta. The Lord embraced Narsi Mehta and joined him. Madan Mehta was thrilled to receive them. He considered himself fortunate that his daughter was being married in such a family. On the other hand the Lord said that he is always at the call of Narsi Mehta. Whenever he remembers Him, He appears before him. Narsi Mehta was overwhelmed at the kindness and grace of the Lord. The marriage took place happily but after a few days Shamaldas fell ill and passed away. Narsi Mehta made a lot of effort to save his life but could not save him. Narsi Mehta consoled his wife (Shamaldas's mother) saying it was Lord's wish and that now we shall spend all our time in remembering the Lord.

‘BHALU THAYO BHAGI JANJAL,

SUKHE BHAJISHUN SHRI GOPAL.’

Narsi Mehta was completely dependant upon the Lord. He was happy in the way his Lord wished him to live. Once on the day of his father's death anniversary Vanshidhar Mehta, his elder brother, invited him to participate in the ‘*Shraddh*’ ceremony. Narsi Mehta told him politely that he would be able to attend only after doing Pooja and Kirtan. Vanshidhar considered this to be insulting and, therefore, asked Narsi Mehta if it was so, he should do the ‘*Shraddh*’ at his own residence. Narsi Mehta accepted it and said that he would try to do so. He then mortgaged his wife's jewelry to arrange for the food and invited about seven hundred Nagar-Brahmans. As ghee fell short, he went to market to buy the same. In the market, he started singing Bhajan for the shop-keeper. The Lord sent Akroorji asking him to make all arrangements for the ceremony and then the Lord Himself appeared in the form of Narsi Mehta to feed the Brahman and after they finished the meals the Lord gave a gold-coin to each one of them. After feeding everyone when the Lord sat for taking food, Narsi Mehta returned with ghee. The Lord immediately disappeared. The Lord takes care of all the needs of his Bhakt and does not let him down.

The incidence related to ‘*Hundi*’ (a bill of exchange) is an unforgettable one in the life of Narsi Mehta. On the death of Narsi Mehta's wife the Brahman advised him to perform some rituals. Narsi Mehta, however, had no money to spend. He was sitting outside his house a bit concerned when four Sadhus appeared and told him that they were going to Dwarka and that they had seven hundred rupees with them, which they did not wish to carry and instead asked Narsi Mehta to keep that money with him and write a *Hundi* for them to be honored in Dwarka, where they could get their money. Narsi Mehta accepted the offer and happily wrote the *Hundi* in the name of Seth Shamalshah, his Lord Krishna, believing firmly that this money was sent by his Lord and that it is He, Who would take care of the *Hundi*, as well. It turned out the same way; the Lord took pleasure in appearing as Seth Shamalshah in Dwarka and encashed the *Hundi* for the Sadhus. Narsi Mehta utilized the money in performing the rituals and in the service of saints.

After the death of his wife, Narsi Mehta lived for five years. He devoted all his time in Bhajan. He had completely surrendered himself to the will of the Lord. Once the

people of Junagarh conspired against Narsi Mehta at the behest of Sarangdhar Mehta, who was a great opponent of Narsi Mehta. They sent a beautiful prostitute, who had dressed herself in white attires and was wearing a lot of jewelry on her person. She entered into the hut of Narsi Mehta when he was deeply engrossed in Bhajan. When Narsi Mehta noticed her, she said that she was going to visit Lord Shri Krishna in Dwarka and that on the way she wanted to rest in the hut for a night. Narsi Mehta made the necessary arrangements for her stay. At midnight she tried to seduce Narsi Mehta. Narsi Mehta, on the other hand told her to focus all her attention on the Lord, as by seeking the Lord, one is filled with divine bliss, beyond which there is nothing to seek. The words of saint had their impact on her. She fell at the feet of Narsi Mehta and went away to her home, as a completely changed person. Sarangdhar Mehta went to her home to know what had happened in the night but he was surprised to see her as a completely changed person. While he was returning, on the way a snake bit him. Narsi Mehta cured him with Lord's *Charnamrit* (sacred water offered to the Lord). Sarangdhar Mehta, however, still did not mend his ways. He wanted to disgrace Narsi Mehta. He provoked Ravmandalik (the ruler of Junagarh) by complaining against Narsi Mehta that he was a vicious person. Ravmandalik asked Narsi Mehta to appear in the royal-court and prove his innocence. While he was proceeding to the royal-court, Narsi Mehta met a Brahman on the way, who was in the need of sixty rupees for the marriage of his daughter. He asked Narsi Mehta for help. Narsi Mehta took sixty rupees from Dharnidhar Brahman by pledging 'Kedar Raag', which was very dear to him and which he used to sing to invoke the Lord. Ravmandalik gave him a garland asking Narsi Mehta to put it on the idol of Radha-Damodar and if in the morning, the Lord puts that garland in the neck of Narsi Mehta he would be proved innocent. The doors of the temple were then closed. A worried Narsi Mehta sat in the court-yard of the temple. He could not sing Kedar-Raag, as he had pledged the same and the Lord would not wake-up till he (Narsi Mehta) sings Kedar-Raag. On the other side, the Lord took the form of Narsi Mehta, went to Dharnidhar and paid him the money. The Lord then dropped the receipt of the payment made to Dharnidhar in the court-yard of the temple. Narsi Mehta was overwhelmed by the grace of the Lord. He sang Kedar-Raag to invoke the Lord. He sang that he was not afraid of death but he was afraid of bringing disgrace to the Lord that the Lord could not save his Bhakt. It was about to dawn that the doors of the temple opened up on their own and the Lord put the garland in the neck of Narsi Mehta. Everyone started shouting in the praise of the Lord. Ravmandalik felt ashamed and sought forgiveness of Narsi Mehta.

After this incidence Narsi Mehta went away to Dwarka. The last five years he spent in Dwarka. In Vikram Samvat 1577, he left this mortal world to live with his Lord for the eternity. One of his most famous Bhajan is:

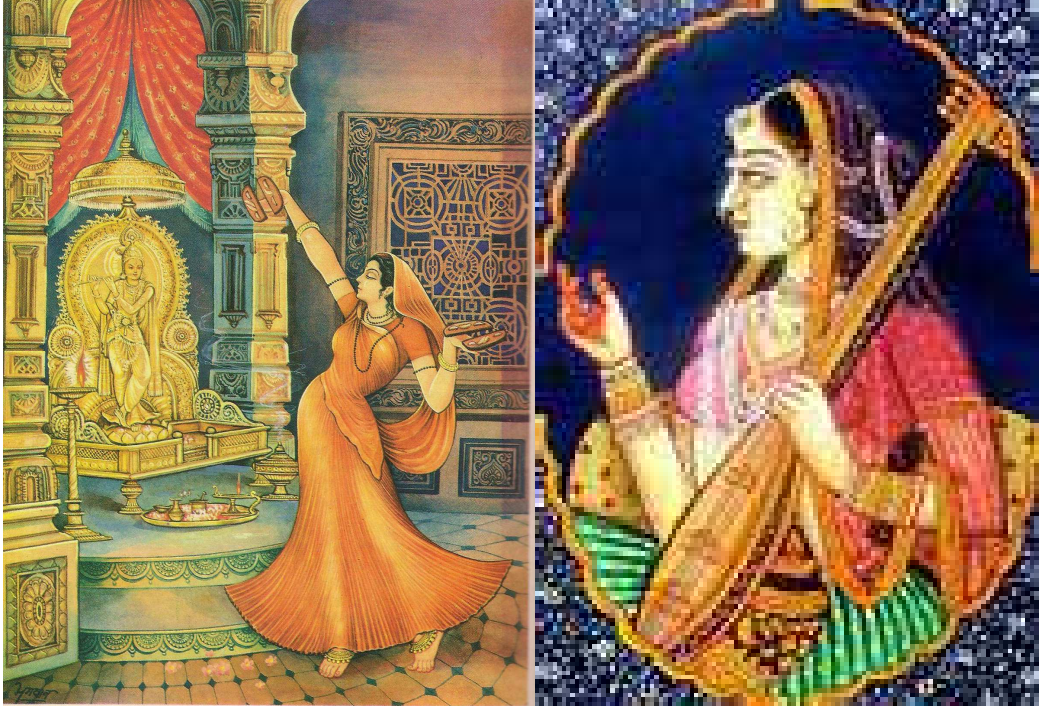
VAISHNAV JAN TO TENE KAHIYE, JE PIR PARAI JANE RE,

PAR DUKHE UPKAR KARE TOYE, MAN ABHIMAN NA AANE RE.

SAKAL LOKMAN SAHUNE VANDE, NINDA NA KARE KENI RE,

VAACH, KKACH MAN NISCHAL RAKHE, DHAN-DHAN JANANI TENI RE.

SAMDRISHTI NE TRISHNA TYAGI, PAR STREE JENE MATA RE,
JIHVA THAKI ASATYA NA BOLE, PARDHAN NAV JHALE HAATH RE.
MOHMAYA VYPE NAHI JENE, DRIDH VAIRAGYA JENA MANMA RE,
RAM NAAM SHOON TALI LAGI, SAKAL TIRATH TENA TANMA RE.
VAN LOBHI NE KAPAT RAHIT CHE, KAAM KRODH NIVARYA RE,
BHANE NARSAIYO TENU DARSHAN KARTA, KUL EKOTERE TARYA RE.



Sant Meerabai

Sant Meerabai

Meerabai is one of the greatest saints of India, who absorbed in the love for her Beloved Lord Krishna, left aside the royal comforts and wandered in the streets for the pleasure of her Lord. She was a contemporary of Goswami Tulsidas and Sant Raidas. She sang in the praise of her Lord showing her deep devotion and complete surrender to Lord Krishna. She through her sadhana showed path to many. It is certain that if Meerabai was not there, the history of the medieval India, as far as devotional literature is concerned would have been incomplete. Her Krishna-bhakti and *Vairagya* bore approval of Sant-Shiromani Goswami Tulsidas, supported by Mahatma Jeev Goswami and received the grace of Sant Raidas.

Meerabai was born in 1558-59 Vikram Samvat in a village called Kurki in Merata of Rajasthan. She was born in the royal family of Rathors. She was great-grand daughter of Rao Jodhaji, the founder of Jodhpur, grand daughter of Rao Dudaji and daughter of Raja Ratan Singhji. She was brought up in the company of famous saint Jaimal, who has been greatly acclaimed by Sant Nabhadras in his 'Bhaktmal' (a great treatise of saints and Mahatmas of India). Jaimal was her cousin. In one of her verses Meerabai has said: 'MERATIYE GHAR JANAM LIYO HAI, MEERA NAAM KAHAYO'.

From her early childhood Meera exhibited inclination towards the divine. When she was about ten, a saint visited the royal family. He had a beautiful idol of Lord Krishna with him. Meera got very fascinated by the idol. The saint, therefore, while leaving the palace gave that idol to Meera. Meera started taking care of the idol, giving it bath, smearing sandal paste and so on. One day Meera saw a wedding procession with a lot of musical instruments being played and amongst them the bridegroom was riding on a horse. The bridegroom was adorned and was the center of attraction. Meera looked curiously towards the procession and asked who her bridegroom was? A relative of Meera in a lighter way told her that Giridhar Gopal (Lord Krishna) was her bridegroom. She was yet a child. From that day Meera took Nandnandan Lord Shri Krishna as her husband. She had started composing verses from an early age and now she started reciting them to Lord Krishna keeping awake at times till mid-night. In her dreams also she started having glimpse of her Lord. In one of her verses she has said: 'MAAI MHANE SAPNA MEIN PARNYA RE DINANATH' (O My Mother! My Lord has married me in my dream).

After a few years in 1573 Vikram Samvat Meera was married to Kumar Bhojraj, the eldest son of Maharana Sanga, ruler of Chittor. She performed the wedding-rituals keeping the idol of Lord Krishna with her. While going around the sacred fire (*Phere*) also she kept the Lord with her and thus in her perception she got married to the Lord. At the time of leaving her parent's house, she was given a lot of things as dowry. Meera, however, requested her mother to permit her to take the idol of Lord Krishna with her to Chittor. Her mother gladly agreed and got the idol duly adorned kept in her palanquin. She thus took the idol of Lord Krishna with her to Chittor. Kumar Bhojraj arrived in the capital city with his bride. People were happy and greeted each other. Meera's mother-in-

law was also pleased to see a beautiful and worthy girl as her daughter-in-law. According to the customs her mother-in-law asked Meera to participate in the Pooja (worshipping) of the family deity, but Meera did not agree saying that she would not worship any one else except her Lord Giridharlal. Her mother-in-law was annoyed and also scolded Meera but Meera did not budge.

In Rajasthan Gauri-Poojan (worshipping goddess Parvati) is performed every year, especially by the young girls and newly married women to seek long life for their husbands. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law Udabai exhorted Meera to perform Gauri-Poojan in order to seek the blessing of the goddess for the long-life of her husband Kumar Bhojraj but Meera did not agree to worship any one else except her Giridhar-Gopal. She said: 'NA MHE POOJAN GAURYAJI, NA POOJAN AN DEV; MHE POOJAN RANCHODJI, SASU THE KAAIN JANO BHEV'. Her mother-in-law was annoyed with her. When other ladies tried to persuade Meera, she told them that 'I have been married to the Lord and, therefore, my husband is eternal. Only they need to worship Gauriji leaving aside Giridhar-Gopal, who entertained doubt about the eternity of their husband'. As most of them could not reach the depth of Meera's words, they felt bad.

The queen of Chittor should dance and sing in the praise of Lord, was unacceptable to the royal family. But Meera was made of a different material, she was fully devoted to her Lord and was unperturbed by the behavior of her in-laws. This devotion of Meera towards the Lord first made Kumar Bhojraj a little upset, but later on he was impressed by the purity of her heart. Although Meera considered Lord Giridharlal to be her real husband and used to spend most of her time in His service, yet she never let Kumar Bhojraj feel annoyed with her. Through her simplicity and selfless service she kept him happy. Once his sister Udabai complained to Kumar Bhojraj that Meera locks her up in the temple and no one knows with whom she keeps on talking through the night. Kumar Bhojraj stood in front of the gate of the temple and heard Meera talking. Meera was talking to the Lord. Kumar Bhojraj thought that there was some one inside. He pulled out his sword and entered the temple but there was none else except Meera. On asking Meera told him that she was talking to the idol of Giridhar-Gopal and that she knows no other man in her life. Kumar Bhojraj searched the entire place thoroughly and when he found none else, he felt ashamed. Later he got a separate temple of Lord Shri Ranchodrai erected for Meera a little away from the fort. Meera used to spend her time there composing her verses for the Lord. Kumar Bhojraj was a brave person with poetic inclination. He liked Meera's compositions and took pride in the same. When Meera used to sing her verses before Kumar Bhojraj, it used to please him.

Meera now used to spend her time in Bhajan-Poojan and in the company of saints. At times she would start crying out of the pain of separation from her Lord and at times she would laugh having a glimpse of the Lord in meditation. Sometimes she would start dancing and singing without caring for food or rest for days together. If some one tried to reason her out, she used to talk with her about the divine love and grace. As a result she became weak bodily. Vaidyas (doctors) were asked to treat her, even her father came

with some Vaidya from Marwar but they did not have cure for this divine-love. Meera has said in one of her compositions:

HE RI MEIN TO PREM DIWANI, MERA DARAD NA JANE KOI;
 GHAYAL KI GATI GHAYAL JANE, KI JIN LAAI HOI;
 JOHRI KI GATI JOHRI JANE, KI JIN JOHAR HOI;
 SULI UPAR SEJ HAMARI, SAUVAN KIS VIDH HOI;
 GAGAN MANDAL PE SEJ PIYA KI, KIS VIDH MILNA HOI;
 DARAD KI MARI VAN-VAN DOLU, VAIDH MILA NA KOI;
 MEERA KI PRABHU PIR MITEGI, JAB VAIDH SAVALIYAN HOI.

Such a longing, such frenzy, such a beautiful desire! The Lord can be reached only then; He is sold at the hands of such a devotee. Meera had bought the Lord at this price. Once Meera left the royal palace suffering with the pangs of separation from her Lord. She decided to jump in a river and as she was about to jump, she had the glimpse of the Lord. The Lord told her that 'Vrindavan is My Kingdom; it is the place for devotees. Devotees should, therefore, live in Vrindavan for Bhajan'. Meera, therefore, decided to proceed to Vrindavan leaving aside all considerations of being a queen and so-on. She entered the Brij area with great happiness and in frenzy. Her songs filled the air of Brij with love for the divine. Saints started singing her songs to please the Lord. Meera announced:

MERE TO GIRDHAR GOPAL DOOSARO NA KOI,
 JAKE SIR MOR MUKUT MERA PATI SOI,
 TAT MAT BHRAT BANDHU AAPANO NA KOI,
 CHODI DINI KUL KI KANI KAHA KARAIHE KOI,
 SANTAN DHIG BAITH-BAITH LOK LAJ KHOI,
 CHOONARI KE LIYE TUK ODH LINI LOI,
 MOTI MOONGE UTAR VANMALA POI,
 ASUNVAN JAL SINCHI-SINCHI PREM BEL BOI,
 AB TO BEL FAIL GAI ANAND FAL HOI,
 DUDH KI MATHANIYA BARE PREM SE BILOI,
 MAKHAN JAB KADHI LIYO CHACH PIYE KOI,
 BHAGAT DEKH RAJI HUI JAGAT DEKH ROI,
 DASI MEERA LAL GIRIDHAR TARO AB MOI.

The name of Meera was on every tongue; in all temples her Bhajans were being sung. Kumar Bhojraj went to Brij to bring Meera back with him. Meera told him that she sings and dances before the Lord. She visits the Lord and drinks the Charnamrit (sacred water-offered to the Lord). Bhojraj, however, convinced her to accompany him to Chittor.

About seven years thus passed and in Vikram Samvat 1580 Kumar Bhojraj died. Maharana Sanga also left this mortal world. Meera's second brother-in-law Vikram Singh occupied the throne. Udabai, the sister-in-law of Meera provoked him to harass Meera. Vikram Singh tried many ways to distract Meera from her devotion towards Giridhar-

Gopal, but he could not do so. On the contrary, Meera got more and more inclined towards the divine. Sadhus and saints kept on visiting Meera, which became unbearable for Rana Vikram Singh. He appointed two maids to persuade Meera and Udabai also tried to persuade her but Meera did not give up her ways. Meera first politely told them and later she firmly told:

BARJI MEIN KAHU KI NA RAHOON;
 SUNO RI SAKHI TUM CHETAN HOKE, MAN RI BAAT KAHOON;
 SADHU SANGAT KAR HARI SUKH LEHOON, JAG SOON MEIN DOOR
 RAHOON;
 TAN DHAN MERO SAB HI JAO, BHAL MERO SIS LAHOON;
 MAN MERO LAGYO SUMRIN SETI, SABKA MEIN BOL SAHOON;
 MEERA KE PRABHU GIRIDHAR NAGAR SATGURU SARAN RAHOON.

They told her that if you love the Lord, no one has any objection to that but you should not spend all your time in the company of Sadhus and saints, singing and dancing with them against the royal etiquettes of the family. Maharana is annoyed because of your behavior. Meera replied: 'MEIN TO GOVIND KE GUN GAASU; RANA ROOTHE NAGARI RAKHE, HARI ROOTHE KAHAN JAASU.' (I would sing in the praise of my Lord. If the king is annoyed, one could be protected by the people, but if the Lord is annoyed, where can one go?-He is Omnipresent.)

It is said that impressed by Meera's devotion, Emperor Akbar with Tansen visited her and while departing Akbar offered a valuable necklace to Lord Ranchodji. The next day when Rana Vikram Singh came to know about the visit of Akbar, he was furious. He started torturing her more and more. He sent a poisonous snake and thereafter deadly poison to kill Meera but nothing happened to Meera. She has said:

MEERA MAGAN BHAI HARI KE GUN GAAY;
 SAANP PITARA RANA BHEJYA MEERA HATH DIYA JAY;
 NAHAY DHOY JAB DEKHAN LAGI, SALIGRAM GAI PAY;
 JAHAR KA PYALA RANA BHEJYA, IMRAT DIYA BANAY;
 NAHAY DHOY JAB PIVAN LAGI, HO GAI AMAR ANCHAY;
 SOOLI SEJ RANA NE BHEJI, DIJYO MEERA SUVAY;
 SAANJH BHAI MEERA SOVAN LAGI, MANO PHOOL BICHAY;
 MEERA KE PRABHU SADA SAHAI, RAKHE BIGHAN HATAY;
 BHAJAN BHAV ME MAST DOLTI, GIRIDHAR PAR BALI JAY.

Premyogini (devout-lover) Meera had firm faith in her Lord. She showed it to Rana: 'THARI MARI NA MARUN, MERO RAKHANHARA AUR' (You can not kill me, as my protector is my Lord).

The royal palace where musicians and artists from far off places used to come to show their performance, that palace was now overwhelmed with Meera's divine Bhajans.

PUG GHUNGHRU BANDH MEERA NACHI RE;

LOG KAHEN MEERA BHAI BAVRI, SAAS KAHE KUL NASI RE;
 VISH KA PYALA RANAJI BHEJYO, PIVAT MEERA HASI RE;
 MEIN TO APNE NARAYAN KI AAP HI HO GAYI DASI RE;
 MEERA KE PRABHU GIRIDHAR NAGAR SAHAJ MILYA AVINASI RE.

The entire royal family became her enemy. The flowers on the way turned into thorns but Meera was completely absorbed in bhakti. She had understood it well that the birth in human form is not to be wasted in worldly affairs, rather it was the opportunity to reach one's Beloved.

Harassed by Rana Vikram Singh, Meera wrote a letter to the great saint Goswami Tulsidas. She took him as her counsel to get the justice and wrote him:

SWASTI SRI TULSI KUL-BHUSHAN DUSHAN HARAN GUSAI;
 BARAMBAR PRANAM KARAHON, AB HARAHU SOK SAMUDAI;
 GHAR KE SVAJAN HAMARE JETE, SABAN UPADHI BADHAI;
 SADHUSANG ARU BHAJAN KARAT MOHIN DET KALESH MAHAI;
 SO TO AB CHUTAT NAHI KYON HI, LAGI LAGAN BARIYAI;
 BALPANE SE MEERA KINHI GIRIDHAR LAL MITAI;
 MERE MATA PITA KE SUM HO, HARI BHAGTAN SUKHDAI;
 HAMAHU KAHA UCHIT KARIBO HAI, SO LIKHIYO SAMUJHAI.

Goswami Tulsidasji understood the pain of the devotee-heart of Meera. Without caring what would happen if his reply fell in the hands of Rana Vikram Singh, he wrote:

JANKE PRIY NA RAM VAIDEHI;
 TAJIYE TAHI KOTI VAIRI SUM, JADHAPI PARAM SANEHI;
 TAJYO PITA PRAHLAD, VIBHISHAN BANDHU, BHARAT MAHTARI;
 BALI GURU TAJYO, KANT BRIJ BANITANI, BHAYE MUD
 MANGALKARI;
 NATE NEH RAM KE MANIYAT, SHUHRID SUSEVYA JAHAN LON;
 ANJAN KAHAN AANKHI JEHI PHUTE BAHUTAK KAHAN-KAHAN LON;
 TULSI SO SAB BHANTI PARAMHIT, PUJYA PRAN TE PYARO;
 JAANSO HOY SANEH RAMPAD, ETO MATO HAMARO.

Meera was pleased to receive this reply of Goswami Tulsidas, which was according to her expectation. She was overwhelmed by the very thought that now she could go to Vrindavan, the play-ground of her Lord leaving behind the obstructions imposed by the royal palace. Her poetic heart started singing:

CHALO MAN GANGA-JAMUNA TIR;
 GANGA-JAMUNA NIRMAL PANI, SHEETAL HOT SHARIR;
 BANSI BAJAVAT GAVAT KANHO, SANG LIYE BALBIR;
 MOR MUKUT PITAMBAR SOHE, KUNDAL JHALKAT HIR;
 'MEERA' KE PRABHU GIRIDHAR NAGAR, CHARAN-KANVAL PAY SIR.

Udabai by now had changed; she was impressed by Meera's devotion. Meera, however, was greatly eager to have a glimpse of her Lord. She, therefore, proceeded to visit the Brijbhoomi. Her heart was full with the love for her Lord. She was singing:

MEIN GIRIDHAR KE GHAR JAAUN;
GIRIDHAR MHARO SANCHO PRITAM, DEKHAT ROOP LUBHAUN;
RAIN PARE TABAHI UTH JAAUN, BHOR BHAIYE UTH AAUN;
RAIN-DINA WANKE SANG KHELUN, JYUN-TYUN TAHIN RIJHAUN;
JO PAHRAVE SO HI PAHARUN, JO DE SO HI KHAUN;
MERI UNKI PRITI PURANI UN BIN PAL NA RAHAUN;
JAHAN BITHAVEN TIT HI BATHUN; BEECHEN TO BIK JAAUN;
'MEERA' KE PRABHU GIRIDHAR NAGAR BAR-BAR BALI JAAUN.

Meera now had reached the abode of her beloved. The eternal beauty of her Beloved dispersed in every nook and corner of Brijbhoomi had engulfed Meera. The people of Brij associated everything with Lord Krishna; so much so that those selling curds would not say 'take curds', but would say 'take away Shyam Salona'. Meera now got entirely submerged in the love of her Lord. She stated:

MAI RI MEIN TO LIYO GOVINDO MOL;
KOI KAHE CHANE KOI KAHE CHUPKE, LIYO RI BAJANTA DHOL;
KOI KAHE MUNHGHO KOI KAHE SUHANGHO, LIYO RI TARAJU TOL;
KOI KAHE KARO KOI KAHE GORO, LIYO RI AMOLAK MOL;
KOI KAHE GHAR MAIN, KOI KAHE VAN MAIN, RADHA KE SANG
KILOL;
'MEERA' KO PRABHU DARSAN DIJYO, POORAB JANAM KO KOL.

Meera lived in the company of saints in the Brijbhoomi. She was greatly impressed by the contemporary saints like Goswami Tulsidas and Sant Raidas, whom she mentioned in her verses as her Guru. She was also influenced by the 'Godiya-Vaishnav-bhakti'. Once she went to visit Mahatma Jeev Goswami, who was a Vaishnav saint in the order of 'Gaur-Vaishnav'. Mahatma Jeev Goswami, however, declined to meet her saying that 'I do not see ladies'. Meera replied "I thought that in Brij there was only one man-Lord Shri Krishna, but I am surprised to find another one". When Mahatma Jeev Goswami heard this he rushed to meet Meera bare-footed. Meera in one of her verses also wrote about Chaitnya Mahaprabhu.

Meera was not only a devotee but also an emotional poet; her devotion found its expression through her verses, which emanated from her heart. To her the Lord was her husband and she was devoted to the Lord like a spouse. Lord Shri Krishna was the very basis of her life and existence. She has repeatedly told herself that everything between the earth and the sky shall perish one day. The physical body would convert into dust and similarly everything else would vanish. One should, therefore, look towards the Lord rather than looking towards the world. She had surrendered herself completely to the Lord. She has said:

“MEIN TO SANVARE KE RANG RAANCHI;
 SAAJI SINGAR BANDHI PUG GHUNGHRU, LOK LAAJ TAJI NAACHI;
 GAI KUMATI, LAI SADHU KI SANGATI, BHAGAT ROOP BHAI
 SAANCHI;
 GAY-GAY HARI KE GUN NISDIN, KAAL VYAL SOON BAANCHI;
 UN BIN SAB JAG KHARO LAGAT, AUR BAAT SAB KAANCHI;
 ‘MEERA’ SHRI GIRIDHARAN LALSOON, BHAGATI RASILI JAANCHI.

Meera was continuously seeking the Lord; she was ever eager to have His glimpse. Like a lotus flower without water and night without the moon, Meera was similarly desperate for her Lord. She lived the experiences of the playful activities of Lord Krishna in Brij and expressed them in many of her verses. She has poured her heart out in such verses. In one of such verses she has said:

JAGO BANSI WARE LALNA, JAGO MORE PYARE;
 RAJNI BITI BHOR BHAYO HAI, GHAR-GHAR KHULE KIWARE;
 GOPI DAHI MATHAT SUNIYAT HAI, KANGNA KE JHANKARE;
 UTHO LALJ BHOR BHAYO HAI, SUR-NAR THADE DWARE;
 GWAL-BAL SAB KARAT KULAHAL, JAY-JAY SHABAD UCHRE;
 MAKHAN ROTI HATH MAIN LINI, GAUAN KE RAKHWARE;
 ‘MEERA’ KE PRABHU GIRIDHAR NAGAR, TARAN AAYA KO TARE.

Her verses depict her Lord so lively, as if she was seeing Him. In the guise of natural beauty, she has sung about the Eternal Beauty of her Lord. In one of her verses she says-‘MEIN BADAL DEKH DARI, JAHAN BHI DEKHOON PANI DIKHE, BHIGOON KHARI-KHARI’. In another verse she says that by seeing the dark clouds I come to know about the arrival of my Beloved.

Meera left Brij for Dwarka. There she used to sing and dance before the Lord Ranchodrai. After Meera had left Chittor, it faced much turmoil, which they thought had occurred because a devotee like Meera was harassed in Chittor and she had deserted it. The Rana of Chittor, therefore, thought of taking her back to Chittor but she declined to accompany him to Chittor. Around Vikram Samvat 1630, one day she sang before Dwarkadhishi:

SAJAN! SUDH JYAN JAANON TYAN LEEJ;
 TUM BIN MERE AUR NA KOI, KRIPA RAVARI KIJE;
 DIN NAHI BHOOKH, RAIN NAHI NIDRA, YO TAN PAL-PAL CHIJE;
 MEERA KE PRABHU GIRIDHARNAGAR MILI BICHURAN NAHI DIJE.

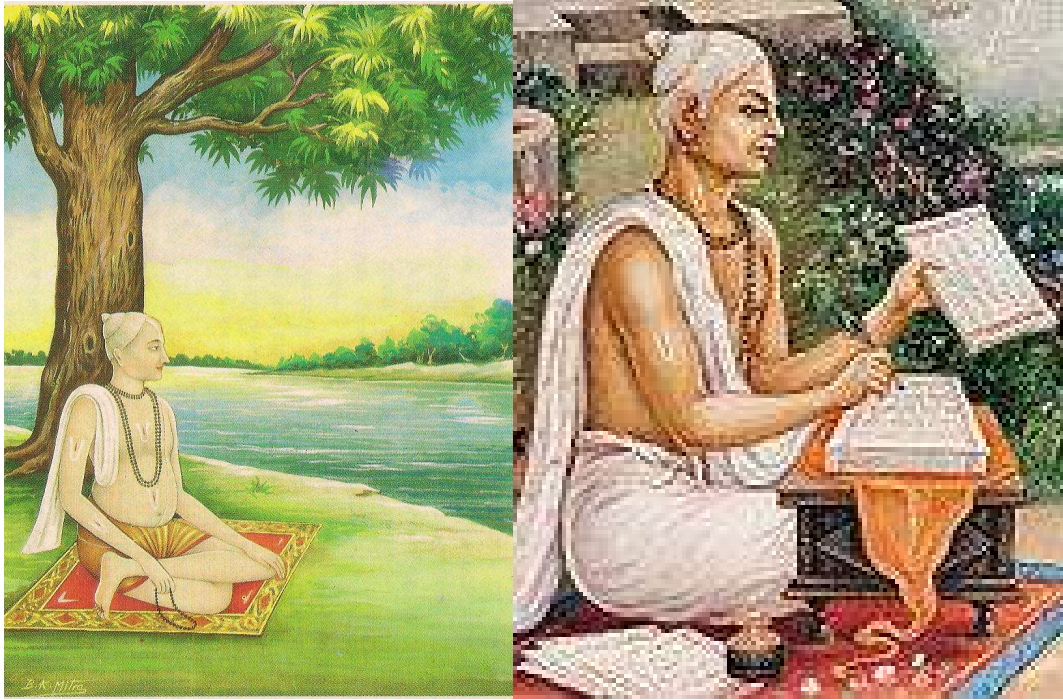
And then she sang:

AB TO NIBHAYA SAREGI, BAHN GAHE KI LAAJ;
 SAMARATH SARAN TUMHARI SAIYAN, SARAB SUDHARAN KAAJ;
 BHAVSAGAR SANSAR APARBAL, JAME TUM HO JAHAJ;
 NIRDHARAN ADHAR JAGAT GURU, TUM BIN HOY AKAJ;

JUG-JUG MEERA HARI BHAKTAN KI, DINI MOCHA SAMAJ;
MEERA SARAN GAHI CHARNAN KI, LAAJ RAKHO MAHARAJ.

When she was singing and dancing before Dwarkadhishi, a divine beam of light emerged from the Lord's image, embraced Meera and thereafter no one saw Meera, she was absorbed in her Lord. This idol of the Lord is now in Dakor in Gujarat, near Baroda and a piece of Meera's *Audhani* (scarf or shawl) is seen hanging by the side of the Lord's statue.

NRITYAT NUPUR BANDHI KE, GAVAT KARTAR;
DEKHAT HI HARI ME MILI, TRIN SAM GAIN SANSAR;
MEERA KO NIJ LEEN KIYE, NAGAR NANDKISHORE;
JAG PRATIT HIT-NATH-MUKH, RAHYO CHOONARI-CHOR.



Goswami Tulsidas

Goswami Tulsidasji

Goswami Tulsidasji was one of the greatest saints of the medieval India. He through the Ramcharit-Manas immortalized his devotion to Lord Ram and gave such an epic to people, which is perhaps the most popular and is considered to lay the ideals for them to guide their lives. He brought about a revolution not only in the literary world but also in the arena of bhakti. By presenting Lord Ram as protector, auspicious and ideal person, he laid limits for the Indian culture through the medium of literature. The entire population of the country by singing in tune with the Ramcharit-Manas exhibited firm faith in the ideals of Lord Ram. Moropant, a great saint and Marathi-poet, who is considered as Tulsidas of Marathi literature has greatly appreciated Tulsidas and has equated him with Mahrishi Valmiki stating that his work 'Ramcharit-Manas' is a great temple of love; the more one visits it, the more it attracts and makes one addict to drink the nectar flowing from it.

Most of the information about the life of Goswami Tulsidas is found in 'Gosai-Charitra' by Raghuvvar Das and the 'Mool Gosai-Charit' of Baba Veni Madhav Das and 'Vinay-Patrika' of Tulsidas where he has mentioned about himself. Bhakt-Mal also throws light on the life of Goswami Tulsidas.

The ancestors of Tulsidasji were Saryuparain Brahmans. They were Mishras of Gana of the Basti District of Uttar-Pradesh. In *Yagyas* they used to get the share meant for Lord Ganesh. One of his ancestors, Parshuram Mishra moved from Gana to Ksaya, which is historically famous being the place of Samadhi of Bhagwan Buddha. Parshuram Mishra was the great-grand father of Goswami Tulsidasji. Once he went on pilgrimage to Chitrakoot, where he had a glimpse of Lord Hanuman in dream asking him to reside there. Accordingly, Parshuram Mishra started residing at village Rajapur on the bank of river Kalindi. His descendant Murari Mishra was the father of Tulsidas and Hulsis was his (Tulsidas's) mother. At some places the name of Tulsidas's father is mentioned as Atmaram also. Tulsidas was born in Vikram Samvat 1554 in Rajapur. Tulsidas was born in 'Abhukta Mool Nakshtra', which was considered as greatly inauspicious for his parents. At the time of his birth, Tulsidas did not cry and had thirty-two teeth in his mouth. People were surprised to see him. He was named 'Rambola' or 'Tularam'. Unfortunately, Tulsidas's mother died and thereafter his father also discarded him.

Tulsidas had a difficult time. He started living on begging. He used to feed on whatever little he could get, but he kept on remembering the Lord. At the age of seven, his sacred thread ceremony was performed. His Guru was Narharidas. At the confluence of the rivers Saryu and Ghaghra, Tulsidas heard the 'Ram-katha' (the story of Lord Ram) from his Guru, which awakened the dormant impressions of Ram-bhakti in Tulsidas's heart. For five years he lived with his Guru in Sookar-khet listening to the Ram-katha. From there he came to Kashi. Here he studied the scriptures and from there he moved to Chitrakoot and after some time he came to Rajapur. By now he had crossed twenty-eight years of his age. He married to Ratnavali, who was not only beautiful but also a wise person. Tulsidas was greatly attracted towards her. Once Ratnavali went to her paternal

house to visit her parents. Tulsidas could not remain without her and pulled by her charms, he proceeded to meet her at the midnight itself. The sky was surrounded by dark clouds and it was lightening. He crossed the river and reached the parental house of Ratnavali. She was astonished to see Tulsidas there at that hour of the night. She politely told Tulsidas that he, who had crossed the river at such hours and in such conditions, just to meet her, if he had fallen in love with the Lord with the same intensity, it would take no time for him to cross the 'Bhav-sagar' (the ocean of life). She said:

‘ASTHICHRMMAY DEH MAM, TAME JAISI PRITI;
TAISI JO SRIRAM MAHN, HOTI NA TO BHAVBHITI.’

Tulsidas was shocked; these words jolted him up. His conscience was stirred up deeply. His shackles of worldly attraction were broken in a moment. He understood the mortality of the world. He praised Ratnavali, who had wakened her up from a deep sleep. He decided to take *Sanyas*. Ratnavali tried to persuade him not to do so, but now the arrow had been shot. The love for the Divine had taken the place of love for the world. Tulsidas stated:

‘JO CHETAN KAHN JAD KARAI, JADAI KARAI CHETAINYA;
AS SAMARTH RAGHUNAYAKHI, BHAJAH JEEV, TE DHNAY.’

He was now embraced by the flux of divine love. The words of his wife had changed his life. He said:

‘KATE EK RAGHUNATH SANG, BANDHI JATASIR KESH;
HUM TO CHAKHA PREM RAS, PATNI KE UPDESH.’

He took *Sanyas*, visited Prayag and then kept on visiting various other places like Jaggannath, Rameshwar, Dwarka and Badri-Narayan for fourteen years. After that he started residing at Kashi, where he started spending his time in satsang with saints and in reciting the Ram-katha. A strange incidence is related to him. He used to go across the river Ganges every morning for relieving himself and on return he used to empty the water remaining in the vessel that he used to carry at the base of a tree. A ghost used to live on this tree. Pleased with the offering, this ghost appeared before Tulsidas and asked him to ask for a boon. Tulsidasji asked him to tell him how he could have a glimpse of his Lord Ram. The ghost told him about a place where Hanumanji (Lord Hanuman) comes to listen to the Ram-katha and told him that he comes before everyone else and leaves the place after everyone else has gone and that with his grace he could reach Lord Ram. Tulsidas went there and spotted Hanumanji, who asked him to go to Chitrakoot. In Chitrakoot, Tulsidas had a Darshan of Lord Ram along with Laxman. It was in Vikram Samvat 1607 on the day of Mauni-Amavasya (the full dark night), Wednesday, while making sandal paste, Tulsidas had a glimpse of Lord Ram. With the grace of Lord Hanuman, Tulsidasji decided to compose 'Ramchritmanas'. In Kashi at Hanuman-Ghat and in a small room of Gopal temple, he completed the major portion of his work. In Vikram Samvat 1631, in Ayodhya, on the ninth-day of the spring-month, Tuesday, he made it public. He took about three years in completing this work. He has stated:

‘SAMVAT SORAH SE EKTISA, KARAUN KATHA HARIPAD DHARI SISA;
NAUMI BHOMVAR MADHUMASA, AVADHPURI YAH CHARIT
PRAKASA.’

Tulsidas went to meet his Guru-bhai (co-disciple) Nanddas in Vrindavan. During this journey, he met Sant Nabhadass and Mahatma Surdas. Literature of Vallabh-sampraday (the sect of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya) confirms that Nanddas was a co-disciple of Tulsidas and Nanddas himself has also accepted Goswami Tulsidas as his co-disciple in the following verse:

‘SHRIMATTULSIDAS SWAGURU-BHRATA PAD BANDE;
SESH SANATAN VIPUL GYAN JIN PAI ANANDE;
RAMCHARIT JIN KINH TAPTRAY KALIMAL HARI;
KARI POTHY PAR SAHI AADAREU AAP PURARI;
RAKHI JINKI TEK MADANMOHAN DHANUDHARI;
VALMIKI AVTAR KAHAT JEHI SANCH PRACHARI;
NANDDAS KE HRIDAY-NAYAN KO KHOLEU SOI;
UJJAVAL RAS TAPKAY DIYO JANAT SAB KOI.’

Both Tulsidas and Nanddas had studied together under Shesh-Sanatan. Once Nanddas accompanied a group to visit Lord Ranchodrai at Dwarka but he had to give up the journey in between at Brij, where he got initiated by Mahatma Vitthalnath and started spending his time in the bhakti of Lord Srinathji. Tulsidasji invited him to Kashi but it was not possible for Nanddas to come over to Kashi. Tulsidasji himself, therefore, went to see him in Brij. He was very happy with the Krishna-bhakti of Nanddas. Tulsidas had a glimpse of Nanddas’s Ishta-dev Lord Srinath in the form of Lord Ram. Tulsidasji stated before Lord Srinath:

‘KA BARNAU CHABI AAJ KI BHALE BANE HO NATH;
TULSI MASTAK TAB NAVE, DHANUSH BAAN LEAU HATH.’

Lord Srinath, pleased with his honest pleading took a bow in his hand instead of the flute. Tulsidas also met Mahatma Surdas during this visit. Both were impressed with each-other’s bhakti. Surdas composed and included some verses concerning Ramchritmanas in his Sursagar and Goswami Tulsidas wrote Krishnagitawali. Surdas in one of his compositions has mentioned about their meeting.

In Brij Tulsidas also met Sant Nabhadass, who is the composer of ‘Bhaktmal’-a compendium of saints and Mahatmas of India. Earlier Nabhadass had visited Kashi and there he had desired to meet Tulsidas but that meeting could not take place. Nabhadass, therefore, returned to Brij without meeting Tulsidas. When Tulsidas went to meet him in Brij, Nabhadass was busy in a Bhandara (offering food to devotees) for saints. Nabhadass deliberately did not pay attention to Tulsidas, as he wanted to test him. There was no vessel for serving *Kheer* (a desert made by cooking rice in milk) to Tulsidas. Goswami Tulsidas picked up a slipper of one of the saints and said what could be a better vessel

then it. Nabhadass was overwhelmed by the humility of Tulsidas. Nabhadass embraced him and said-‘I have spotted the Sumeru (the mythological mountain which was used to stir the ocean) of my Bhaktmal today’.

Tulsidas was a contemporary of many great saints and Mahatmas and was also in touch with them. Mahatma Hitharivansh, Meera and Rahim are foremost amongst them. Mahatma Hitharivansh through his disciple Navalda had sent his work ‘Radha-Sudhanidhi’ for Goswami Tulsidas to have a look at it. Meera had sought his advice before leaving Chittor and Tulsidas had advised her to leave all those, who did not have love for the Lord stating: ‘JANKE PRIY NA RAM VAIDEHI, TAJIYE TAHI KOTI VAIRI SUM, JADHAPI PARAM SANEHI’. Meera followed his advice.

Rahim Khankhana was one of the nine jewels of Akbar’s Court. He was greatly impressed by Tulsidas. He also expressed great reverence towards Lord Ram and Krishna in his compositions. Once a poor Brahman, who wanted some money for the marriage of his daughter visited Goswami Tulsidas. Since Tulsidas had no money, he took a piece of paper on which he wrote one half of a couplet: ‘SURTIY, NARTIY, NAGTIY CHAHATI HAIN SAB KOI’ and asked the Brahman to go and show it to Abdul Rahim Khankhana. Rahim gave plenty of money to the Brahman and thus completed the couplet: ‘GODI LE HULSI FIRE, TULSI SA SUT HOI’.

Rahim donated a lot with great humility. It was asked of him:

‘KAHO RAHIM SIKHI KAHAN, AISI DAINI DEN;
JYON-JYON KAR UNCHA UTHE, TYON-TYON NICHE NAIN.’

He replied:

‘DEVENHARA DET HAI, DEVAT HAI DIN RAIN;
LOG BHARAM MO PE RAKHEN TA TE NICHE NAIN.’

Besides the Ramcharitmanas, Tulsidasji is famously known for his ‘Vinay-Patrika’. He has stated in the Vinay-Patrika:

AB LAUN NASANI AB NA NASAIHON;
RAMKRIPA BHAVNISA-SIRANI JAGE FIR NA DASAIHON;
PAYO NAAM CHARU CHINTAMANI, UR-KAR TEN NA KHASAIHON;
SYAM ROOP SUCHI RUCHIR KASAUTI CHIT KANCHANHI KASAIHON;
PURVAS JANI HANSYO IN INDRIN, NIJBAS HAVAINI HASAIHON;
MAN MADHUKAR PAN KARI TULSI RAGHUPATI-PAD KAMAL
BASAIHON.

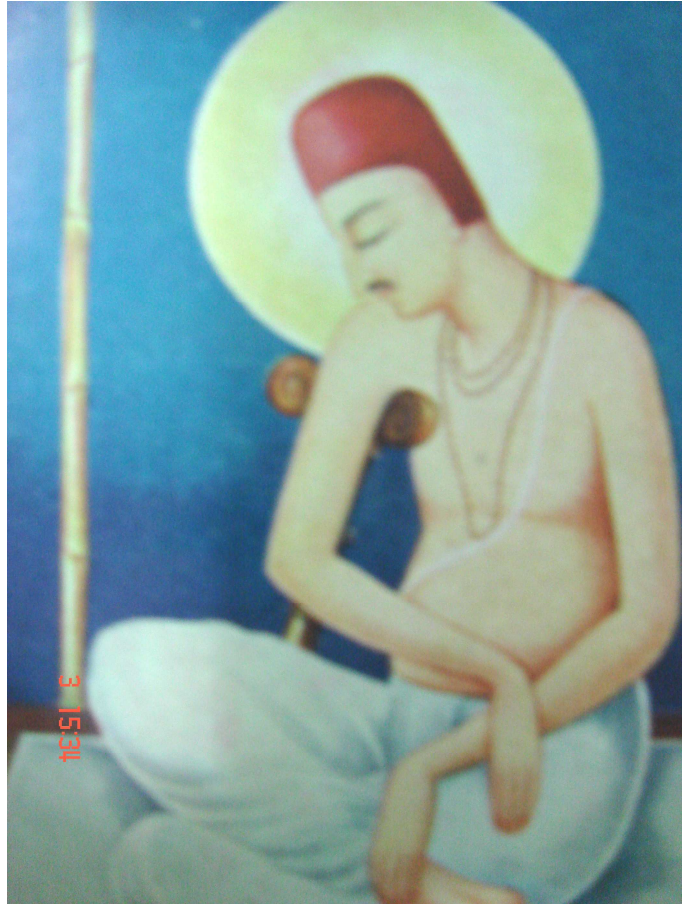
Many miracles are associated with him. Once some thieves went to his hut for stealing. There they saw a dark-complexioned boy with a bow and arrow in his hand guarding the hut. They returned and when they went the next night, they saw the boy again. Third day in the morning, the thieves narrated the incidence to Tulsidasji, who was

shocked to realize that the Lord had to take so much trouble for him. He immediately gave away whatever he had in his hut .

Once a lady was going to commit sati. On the way she saluted Goswami Tulsidas and not knowing that the lady had lost her husband, he blessed her to be '*Saubhagyavati*' (a lady whose husband is alive). When he came to know that her husband had died a little ago, he asked the body of her husband to be preserved and started doing Kirtan in the name of the Lord. In a little while life returned in her husband's dead body. The then ruler of Delhi, Emperor Jahangir came to know of this incidence. He asked Goswami Tulsidas to show some miracle to him. Tulsidas, however, replied that for him the greatest miracle was the name of the Lord itself. He was, therefore, taken into custody. In the jail, Tulsidasji started singing in the praise of Lord Hanuman. The next day, monkeys started destroying the royal palace. The emperor realized his mistake and sat him free.

Goswami Tulsidas spent all his life in promoting and preaching Ram-bhakti. He considered devotion as the means to reach the Lord. Lord Ram was his Ishta, his objective and the center of all his activities. He adored the Sagun-Rupa (Lord with attributes) of Lord Ram and his Ram is the 'Maryada-Purushottam-Ram' (the Perfect One). He experienced the divine-grace in the entire existence, in all living and non-living things. In the Ramcharitmanas, Tulsidas has depicted the ultimate objective of all as the Lord Ram. Even the villains crave to ultimately rest at the feet of the Lord. He has stated that even if one is as handsome as Kamdev and as brilliant as a thousand suns, even then it all is of no use without Ram-bhakti.

Tulsidasji spent his last days in Kashi. He used to live at the 'Assi-Ghat'. He breathed his last in Vikram Samvat 1680 on the day of Savan-Shyama-Teej.



Bhakt Surdas

Bhakt Surdas

Sant Surdas was a great devotee and a divine-poet. In the words of Mahaprabhu Srivallabhacharya, he was an ocean of bhakti and in the opinion of Gosai Vitthalnath, he was like a carrier (ship) of the Pushti-Marg. His 'Soor-Sagar' is a treasure of devotional composition.

He was born in the year 1535 Vikram Samvat in a village Sihi, near Delhi on the day of Vaishakh Shukla-Panchami in the family of a poor Brahman. At the time of the birth of the child, a bright light got spread over there, which surprised not only the parents of the child but also the villagers. The eyes of the new-born child were, however, closed. The child could not see which made his parents indifferent towards him. Gradually even others in the family started ignoring him. But in due course of time the child started exhibiting his divine and pure nature and started showing a tendency of *Vairagya*. He started living in a secluded hut near a pond at the boundary of the village under a *Pipal* tree. He started practicing augury and it was strange that his predictions came true.

Once a landlord lost his cow. Surdas told him where he could find it. The landlord found the cow and pleased with his miraculous powers, the landlord got a hut made for him. Gradually his popularity increased and people from far-off places started visiting him. His reputation and income started growing. By now Surdas was nearing eighteen. He thought that the worldly things, which he had left behind and come to live in this hut had again started clutching him, taking him away from Bhajan. He, therefore, left that hut for Mathura, but did not like it and, therefore, he thought of going to Gaughat. Before going to Gaughat, he lived in Renukakshetra for some time and benefited from the satsang of saints and Mahatmas. Here also he used to feel the need of solitude. He, therefore, moved about three miles away from Renuka (Runakta) towards west and started living on the bank of river Yamuna at Gaughat. Here he composed music and poems. Soon he came to be known as a Mahatma.

The founder Acharya of 'Pushti-Marg' (the path of fostering or tending the soul, the philosophico-devotional system of Vallabhacharya), Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya in 1560 Vikram Samvat had sat his foot out from his residence in Arail for Brij. His serious erudition, knowledge of scriptures and his excellence over others had reached the ears of the religious-minded people of the North India. On his journey to Brij, Mahaprabhu decided to stay at Gaughat. Surdas expressed his deep desire to meet him and similarly Mahaprabhu also wanted to meet him. Surdas from a distance started saluting and praying at the feet of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, who called him and made him sit nearby. The very touch of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya took Surdas into a trance. Surdas sang a few Bhajans in which he described himself as the worst of all sinners seeking His grace. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya asked him-'TUM SOOR HOKAR ITNA GHIGHIYATE KYON HO? (You are a brave-one. Why then are you so afraid?-Soor means brave.) Sing in the praise of God and describe His Leelas'. Surdas was very much encouraged by these words of the Acharya and, therefore, he said before him that 'I am

not aware of the secrets of the divine Leelas'. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya then initiated him and bestowed upon him the capability to understand the secrets of divine Leelas. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya stayed there for three days and then left for Gokul. Surdas accompanied him to Gokul. Surdas now started singing verses relating to Krishna-Leela. From Gokul Surdas accompanied Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya to Govardhan. Here he visited the temple of Lord Shrinath and resolved to live there for the rest of his life. Surdas was greatly inclined towards Lord Shrinath and with the grace of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, he was appointed as the main *Kirtankar* (the principal singer) of Lord Shrinath.

In Govardhan he started living at Parasoli near Chandrasarovar, from where he daily used to go to visit Shrinathji and used to recite before him new verses with great devotion and reverence. Gradually his interaction with other great saints of Pushti-Marg like Kavi-Nanddas, Mahatma Kumbhandas and Govinddas started increasing. Under the soothing shield of Bhagvad-bhakti (bhakti for the Lord), he composed a great work like Soorsagar. After the departure of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, Gosai Vitthal established Surdas as one of the eight great saints of the 'Ashta-chap'. He was declared as the principal-poet of the Lord. At times Surdas also used to go to Gokul to have a Darshan of the Lord Navnitpriya.

Once Tansen sang a devotional verse of Surdas before Emperor Akbar. The Emperor was impressed by the elegance of the verse and expressed his desire to meet Surdas. The Emperor also had to visit Mathura even otherwise. In Vikram Samvat 1623, the Emperor met Surdas, who obliged the Emperor pleased with his politeness, courtesy and regard and sang a verse for him, the essence of which was-'O My Heart! You should fall in love with the Lord'. With a view to test him, Akbar asked him to sing something in his praise. Surdas used to sing for his Lord; he sang: NAHIN RAHYO HRIDAY MAHAN THAUR, NANDNANDAN ACHAT KAISE AANIYE UR AUR'. Akbar was deeply impressed with his devotion.

Once Surdas went to Gokul to have Darshan of Lord Navnitpriya. He used to describe Lord's adornment, as it is in his verses. Giridhar, the son of Gosai Vitthalnath, on his asking took a test of Surdas. He adorned the Lord strangely; instead of clothes, the Lord was covered with garlands of pearls. Surdas started singing:

DEKH RI HARI NANGAM NANGA;
 JALSUT BHOOSHAN ANG BIRAJAT, BASAN HEEN CHABI UTHATH
 TARANGA;
 ANG ANG PRATI AMIT MADHURI, NIRAKHI LAJIT KOTI ANANGA;
 KILKAT DADHISUT MUKH LE MAN BHARI, SOOR HANSAT BRIJ
 JUVATIN SANGA.

(Meaning thereby-Look at the Lord, Who is wearing nothing. He is wearing pearls and from His body waves of bliss are flowing. He is so handsome that looking at it millions of Kamdev i.e. the Lord of love, feel ashamed.)

Soordasji lived till about eighty-five years of age. He used to visit Lord Shrinath daily at all the *Jhankis* (opening of the doors of the Lord for public Darshan). One day, however, he did not appear after the morning *Jhanki*. Gosai Vitthalnath looked towards the Lord and understood that the time had come when a great devotee of the Lord was about to leave them. He sent a group of saints to bring Soordasji and he himself after offering the '*Rajbhog*' to the Lord along with other saints Kumbhandas, Govinddas and Chaturbhujdas etc. went to see Surdas. They brought Soordasji with them and on arriving at Parasoli Surdas saluted the flag at the temple of Lord Shrinath and got absorbed in the remembrance of Lord Shrinath and Gosaiji. On reaching there Gosaiji took Surdas's hand in his hands. On being asked by Gosaiji, Surdas replied-'I pray at the feet of Radharani, who is beloved of the Lord Nandnandan'. Chaturbhujdas asked him that he had composed so many verses in praise of the Lord but not a single in praise of his Guru Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. Surdas replied-'I considered Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya as the Lord personified and never distinguished between the two. From the beginning to the end I have sung in his praise' and then he sang a verse in the praise of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya:

BHAROSO DRIDH IN CHARANANI KERO;
 SHRIVALLABH NAKH CHANDRA CHATA BINU SAB JAG MANJH
 ANDHERO;
 SADHAN NAHIN AUR YA KALI MEIN JASO HOY NIBERO;
 SOOR KAHA KAHE DWIVID AANDHARO BINA MAUL KO VHERO.

On the request of Chaturbhujdas, he briefly narrated the main principles of Pushti-Marg. He said 'Devotion towards the Lord with the feeling of being a *Gopi* (a companion of the Lord Krishna), fills the devotee with bliss. On this path, love is the supreme most.' He then got absorbed in the meditation of the divine couple Radha-Krishna for the eternity.



Chaitnya Mahaprabhu

Chaitnya Mahaprabhu

Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was a divine incarnation, who took not only Gaur-Bengal but the entire country into the fold of Krishna-bhakti. He was born at a time when the country was passing through a difficult phase of political, religious and social anarchy, unrest and turbulence. The throne of Delhi was getting weaker under the rule of Bahlol Lodi and his successor Sikandar Lodi. There was constantly a threat of foreign-attack and Vijaynagar and Mewar both were making attempts to throw out the foreign-rulers. Gajpati Prataprudra was the sole ruler of Orissa and Gaur was under the rule of Hussain Shah. In the sphere of religion various faiths and beliefs had cropped up. The country was passing through a phase where people were obsessed by various Yanas- e.g. Mahayana, Hinayana of Buddhism and thoughtless acts of Tantra-Mantra. Social unrest was spreading its wings but at some places Vaishnav bhakti was providing the soothing effect and comfort to people. In Gaur also people had started singing Leela-Bhajans of Radha-Krishna. The devotional songs of Chandidas and Kanubhatt were helping people to strengthen their feelings.

At such a time Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was born in a pious Brahman family of Nadia-Navdweepdham. He uprooted various hypocritical practices being followed by people in the name of religion. Innumerable people made their lives auspicious by taking shelter at the feet of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu. A person like Roopsanatan, who was deeply immersed in worldly pleasures, discarded all those luxuries; Advait-Vedanti like Prakashanand and Sarvabhaum Bhattacharya, leaving aside the Brahmanand (the pleasure of being absorbed in Brahman) and a Paramhans and Avdhut like Nityanand forgetting his *Vairagya*, all took refuge under Chaitnya Mahaprabhu in order to taste the nectar of Krishna-bhakti at the hands of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu. Mahatma Roop Goswami sang in his praise. Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was the Radha-Krishna assimilation personified. His appearance is supported in various scriptures. Anantasahmita, Bruhnnaradpuran, Bhavishya-puran, Devi-puran, Skand-puran, Markedey-puran, Padma-puran, Kapil-Tantra and Vishvasar-Tantra etcetera mention that Krishna-Chaitnya would appear in Navdweep at the bank of river Bhagirathi. Taking the shelter of bhakti-yoga and *Sanyas-Ashram*, Chaitnya Mahaprabhu converted the Kaliyuga for some time in Dwapar-Yuga through the *Harinaamsankirtan* (Kirtan of Lord Hari). Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was absorbed deeply in the Divine Beauty of Radha-Krishna and Their Leela. His biography is based on the descriptions recorded by his contemporary saints and mahatmas like Chaitnya-Bhagvat and Chaitnya-Charitamrit written by Vrindavandas and Chaitnya-Charitamrit by Murarigupt. Vrindavandas had written Chaitnya-Bhagvat fifteen years after Chaitnya Mahaprabhu's departure on order by Nityanand. Krishnadas Kaviraj also wrote Chaitnya-Charitamrit.

Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was born in 1543 Vikram Samvat. His father was Jaggannath Mishra, who was a staunch Brahman and his mother Shachidevi was a noble and very affectionate person. His ancestors used to live in Chandradweep but his father came for studying to Navdweep and started residing there after marrying Shachidevi. Chaitnya Mahaprabhu's parents did not have happy experience as far as their progeny

was concerned. Their eight daughters had died and the elder brother of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, Vishvaroop had taken *Sanyas*. The birth of Chaitnya was, therefore, a very happy occurrence for them.

The new born child was named Vishvambhar. As a child his playful activities were strange. He used to stop crying on uttering the name of the Lord. At times he used to entirely upset the well set house and then used to pretend as if he was sleeping. His mother loved him more than her life. On the occasion of his 'naming-ceremony', Chaitnya picked up the 'Bhagvat' from amongst various things kept to test his inclination. Gradually he started growing and going out of the house to play. Once he was playing outside his house. The loveliness of his body smeared with dust and his long hairs were alluring the passersby. Two thieves thought of stealing the golden ornaments, which were put on him. They offered him sweets etcetera and tried to persuade him to come with them to some secluded place. They were, however, so charmed and possessed by his splendor that they took Chaitnya to his own house and could not do anything.

When he grew up a little older, he was sent to a school. He was naughty and restless. Young unmarried girls used to do Pooja at the bank of river Ganges. Vishvambhar-Nimai (Chaitnya), however, used to tell them to worship him for being blessed with what they wanted. He then used to offer himself the things like milk and curds brought by them and used to bless them that they would be married to very handsome and smart grooms. The girls felt happy in their hearts but outwardly used to show annoyance. They used to get engrossed in his beauty and glamour forgetting about the Pooja.

Child Nimai was greatly impressed by his elder brother and he had expressed his happiness over his brother taking *Sanyas* before his parents, which had made them worried thinking that Nimai may also not follow his elder brother. At the due time his sacred thread ceremony was performed. Once his father dreamed that Nimai had taken *Sanyas*, which made his father all the more worried and after some time he passed away. Now the entire responsibility of looking after the family had fallen on the young shoulders of Nimai. He completed his education at the age of sixteen and started running a school in a premises owned by one Mukundsanjay. Impressed by his eloquence and the in-depth knowledge of law, students in large numbers started seeking admission in his school. During the period of his education, Nimai made a great sacrifice for his colleague Raghunath, who had written a book on Law and wanted to read it to Nimai. He did not know that Nimai also had written a book on Law. Riding a boat in the river Ganges, Nimai read his book to Raghunath. Raghunath started crying and said to Nimai that no one would appreciate his book once they come across Nimai's book. Nimai felt the anguish of his friend and then and there threw his own book in the river.

Chaitnya married Laxmi, the daughter of Vallabhacharya of Navdweep. Both of them had great affection and love for each-other. Before their marriage, Nimai on spotting fair and beautiful Laxmi at the bank of river Ganges used to ask her to worship him and that he would grant her a boon. They were happily married. Mahatma Ishwarpuri, the author of 'Krishnalilamrit-Kavya' was his Guru, who had initiated him (Nimai). Once he visited Navdweep, where Nimai invited him to his house. Impressed by

Nimai's love and dedication towards him, Mahatma Ishwarpuri recited some excerpts from 'Krishnalilamrit-Kavya' to Nimai and explained him the secrets of bhakti. Nimai felt that he was greatly fortunate to receive such knowledge from his Guru. After the death of his father, Nimai traveled to East Bengal for earning his livelihood. In this journey he received lots of wealth but when he returned, he was saddened to learn about his wife's death. Nimai, however, accepted it as God's wish and consoled his mother.

Nimai was a great scholar of jurisprudence. He used to visit the town along with his disciples and used to explain them the intricacies of jurisprudence at the bank of the river Ganges. Once another great scholar visited Navdweep, who was proud of his excellence and knowledge. The people of Navdweep were highly impressed by him. One evening he came across Nimai on the banks of the river Ganges. Nimai requested him politely to say some thing in praise of the Ganges. The scholar-pundit composed one hundred new verses ex-tempore and recited them in front of Nimai pundit. Nimai quoted one of them and requested him to explain the same. He was surprised by the par-excellent brilliance of Nimai pundit, who with his permission interpreted many of the verses and then with humility pointed out the short-comings in some of them. The pundit was humbled.

Nimai was rising higher and higher in wisdom and brilliance. The people of Navdweep were greatly impressed and considered themselves fortunate being able to see and spend some time with him. Later for the sake of his mother, Nimai married Vishnupriya. She was the daughter of an affluent and well-known Brahman of Navdweep. The marriage was performed with great festivity. Vishnupriya was a noble and divinely beautiful person. Her presence made their home like a heaven.

Nimai then planned for a visit to Gaya. This was an important event in his life, as there he met Mahatma Ishwarpuri, who was already known to him. Mahatma Ishwarpuri through the 'Mantra-Diksha' stimulated the waves of love for Lord Krishna in his heart. Nimai now got deeply immersed in the love for the Lord. With the permission of his Guru he came back to Navdweep and while returning he picked up the dust at the feet of his Guru, which he tied close to his chest and said that this dust was the most valuable treasure for him.

His heart had now been colored in the color of Krishna-bhakti. He was fully absorbed in it, forgetting about everything else. He found no interest in teaching as well. Day and night he remained engrossed in Bhajan-Kirtan. Once he fainted at the residence of one Shuklambar Brahmachari while reciting the name of Lord Krishna. He started crying repeatedly. Once after bathing in the Ganges he went straight to the school and started explaining the importance of the name of the Lord to the students. He forgot that he was to teach jurisprudence and grammar to them. With a heart deeply absorbed in the love for the Lord, he started telling them that the name of the Lord alone is true and that devotion at the feet of the Lord is the greatest thing to achieve. On being asked by the students to explain about '*Dhatu*' (the root from which any word derives its meaning), he told them that the power of the Lord is *Dhatu* and then he closed the school for ever devoting all his time in seeking the Lord.

Every house of Navdweep started enchanting the name of the Lord Krishna. For propagating the name of the Lord, Nimai Pundit took Nityanand-Nitai and Haridas in his service. Those days two brothers named Jagai and Maghai were the Kotwal (officers-in-charge of the police station) of Nadia. They used to drink a lot and used to give a lot of money in bribe to the Qazi-ruler of Nadia so that they could behave in the manner they liked with the people of Nadia. One night they both camped near the place where Nimai used to do Kirtan. They were drunk. Maghai hit Nityanand with the pot in which they drank, as a result of which blood started oozing out of his head. Nimai himself reached the spot and summoned the ‘Sudarshan-Chakra’ (the divine weapon of the Lord Shri-Krishna). Nityanand, however, requested Nimai to pardon the brothers as they were not aware of his power (of Nimai). Jagai had helped Nityanand. Nimai, therefore, embraced him. Maghai also by now had realized his mistake. He fell at the feet of Nimai and sought refuse. Nimai told him that he had offended Nityanand and, therefore, he alone could pardon him. On the request of Nityanand Nimai pardoned him. He took both the brothers to the river Ganges and asked them to take a vow not to indulge in bad-deeds thereafter. They took the holy water in their hands and took the vow not to indulge in such deeds in future. Maghai then got a beautiful *Ghat* (river-bank) constructed where he used to seek forgiveness of the visitors for his misdeeds.

At the residence of Srivas Pundit of Nadia, Nimai used to do Kirtan in the night. Jagai and Maghai also used to participate in it. The Qazi of Nadia was one Chand, who was appointed by the ruler. Chand was opposed to Kirtan and, therefore, people refrained from doing Kirtan. Once the Kirtan was going on around midnight when Chand went there, disrupted the Kirtan and destroyed the musical instruments. Nimai with companions reached his house doing Kirtan. Chand got frightened and hid in the house. Nimai summoned him out. Chand sought his forgiveness and promised that then onwards no one from his family would ever object to Kirtan. Nimai took him under his shelter. Gradually the fame of Nimai started reaching every nook and corner of Gaur-Bengal. He said that in *Kaliyuga* (myth.) recital of the name of the Lord is the greatest means for liberation. He emancipated innumerable people by asking them to recite the name of the Lord.

One night he saw a Sanyasi in his dream and felt as if he has inspired him to take *Sanyas*. The next day Sanyasi Keshav Bharti, who used to live on the other side of the river bank visited Nimai and begged for alms. Nimai told him about his desire to take *Sanyas*. Keshav Bharti told him that he (Nimai) was a God-incarnation personified. Nimai, however, replied that taking *Sanyas* had become essential for him for the sake of propagating Krishna-bhakti. The day for taking *Sanyas* was fixed. When his mother and wife came to know of this they were worried but could not stop him. Nimai told them that he would fill the house with the treasure of the name of the Lord. In the night of Magh-Shukla-Sankranti in the year 1567 Vikram-Samvat he left the house. He swam across the river. The golden aura of his body was reflecting in the water of the river. He reached the Ashram of Keshav Bharti and requested him to initiate him for the *Sanyas*. Keshav Bharti, however, was hesitant and tried to persuade him that it was not the age for him to take *Sanyas* but Nimai was firm in his resolution. The barber who shaved his head started crying, so did Keshav Bharti, who then gave him *Sanyas-Diksha* and re-named him as “Chaitnya”. He then came to be known as Chaitnya Mahaprabhu.

After taking *Sanyas*, Chaitnya Mahaprabhu visited Advaitacharya in Shantipur, where he met his mother and on her insistence agreed to live in the Nilachal-Jaggannath area. He then proceeded along with his devotees to Nilachal to be present before Lord Jaggannath. When he visited Lord Jaggannath, his ecstasy reached a new high. He got desperate to embrace the Lord's statue. He was about to run and embrace the statue that the caretaker of the temple stopped him. The priests of the temple wanted to punish Chaitnya but fortunately a great scholar of Vedanta Pundit Sarvabhom Bhattacharya was present over there, who spotted the divine aura on the face of Chaitnya and stopped the priests. He was impressed by the divinity of Chaitnya. Chaitnya then for seven days listened to the principles of Vedanta from Pundit Sarvabhom Bhattacharya.

Thereafter Chaitnya decided to visit the Southern part of the country. During this journey he met Ramanand Roy at the bank of the river Godavari and Shankaracharya of Shringeri. In Udipi he visited the temple of Nartak-Gopal erected by Madhvacharya, where he started dancing before the Lord in ecstasy. In Pandharpur he visited Lord Vitthal. Later he returned to Puri where the then ruler Maharaja Pratap Rudra desired to meet him but Chaitnya refused saying that he does not meet kings. It was the time of Rath-Yatra (the festival of Lord Jaggannath being carried on a chariot). A little before the chariot was to be pulled over, Maharaja Pratap Rudra was sweeping the path wearing the attires of a Vaishnav with a broom made of gold. Chaitnya was pleased with his devotion. On seeing the Lord riding the chariot Chaitnya Mahaprabhu fainted. Maharaja Pratap Rudra started comforting him by stroking his feet and recited a verse of the Gopi-Geet (a verse depicting the love of Gopis towards Lord Krishna). This inspired Chaitnya Mahaprabhu to visit Vrindavan. He decided to visit Vrindavan. On the way he met his mother in Shantipur. He then came to Navdweep and stood in front of his house. His wife Vishnupriya came out to see him. He gave her Khadaun (wooden-slippers) and told her to spend the rest of her life with the support of those slippers. From Navdweep he came to the village Ramkeli, where Dabir Khas (Sanatan Goswami) and Shakir Mullick (Roop Goswami), who were high ranking officials of the ruler of Gaur-Bengal Hussain Shah, met him and became his disciples. On the request of Roop and Sanatan he postponed his journey to Vrindavan for a few days and came back to Puri. He was, however, desperate to visit Vrindavan. He proceeded to visit Vrindavan via Jharkhand. On seeing jungles, rivers and hillocks, he was reminded of Vrindavan, Yamuna and the Govardhan. On the way he visited Lord Vishvanath in Kashi and stayed in Prayag for three days before reaching Mathura. On entering Vrindavan he started dancing enchanting the name of Lord Krishna. The people of Brij had a glimpse of Lord Krishna in the form of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu. The state of affairs of Vrindavan, however, disturbed Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, who discovered many of the forgotten spots of pilgrimage and resolved to reinstate them.

After spending a few days in Vrindavan, Mahaprabhu Chaitnya returned to Prayag where he met Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. Both were delighted to meet each other. Chaitnya Mahaprabhu asked Roop and his younger brother Anoopam to rediscover various pilgrimage-spots, which had been lost in oblivion. To Sanatan he asked to write bhakti-Granthas (devotional-literature) and sent him also to Vrindavan.

From Kashi Chaitnya Mahaprabhu returned to Purushottam-Kshetra (Jaggannath-Puri) with Balbhadra Bhattacharya. Here he used to bathe in the sea daily and then used to visit Lord Jaggannath's temple. He used to see the Lord from behind the *Garud-Sthambha*. Once an old lady leaned over his shoulders to have a glimpse of the Lord. One of his devotees tried to stop the lady from doing so but Chaitnya Mahaprabhu asked him not to do so. He told him that she is looking at the Lord charged with emotions and that she is not aware of the surroundings at all. He would have been fortunate to find himself in such a state some day.

Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was now deeply absorbed in the love of Lord Krishna. This was the most charming period of his life, which he spent in Nilachal. He laid a lot of emphasis on the importance of Hare Ram Hare Krishna Mantra ('Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram Ram Hare Hare; Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.') and said that by reciting this Mantra one could achieve liberation and reach the Lord.

While Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was on his journey from Jaggannathpuri to South, he saw a Brahman sitting near a pond and reading Gita. The Brahman was deeply engrossed in it and tears were rolling out of his eyes. Chaitnya Mahaprabhu sat near him and waited for him to finish his reading. The Brahman did not notice his presence. When he finished the reading, Chaitnya Mahaprabhu asked him that perhaps he did not know Sanskrit as there were mistakes in his pronunciation but still what meaning did he derive from those Shlokas (verses) that he was so overwhelmed. The Brahman prostrated before Chaitnya Mahaprabhu and said that he did not understand the real meaning of those verses but when he starts reading Gita, he visualizes the army of Kauravas and Pandavas facing each other in the battle field of Kurukshetra and the chariot of Arjuna being driven by Lord Krishna and Arjun standing in the chariot with folded hands pointed towards the Lord, which fills his heart with love for the Lord. Chaitnya Mahaprabhu said that it was he (the Brahman), who in fact had understood the real meaning of Gita, as the true devotion needs pure love and nothing else.

Chaitnya Mahaprabhu considered Srimadbhagvad-Mahapuran' as the greatest scripture and attached a lot of importance to Geet-Govind. He also greatly liked 'Krishnakarnamrit' of Lilashuk. He also very much liked the Bhajans of Jaydev, Vidyapati and Chandidas. He said that the Lord is not formless; His name is His form. It is only through His grace that one garners His love in one's heart. Through sadhana, one could acquire only *Brahmagyan* (the esoteric knowledge). Gopi is the beloved of Lord Krishna, an eternal Beloved and the *Swaroop-Shakti* of the Lord. Radha is the ultimate height of absorption in the Lord. In his ecstasy Chaitnya Mahaprabhu experienced the Presence of Radha and Krishna. It is said:

'RADHIKAR BHAVKANTI KARI ADHIKAR;

NIJ RAS ASWADITE KARIAACHAVTAR;

TABE HASI PRABHU NIJ DEKHAL SWAROOP;

RASRAJ MAHABHAV DUH EK ROOP.'

Chaitnya Mahaprabhu used to see the Lord from behind the Garud-Sthambha. In the year 1580 Vikram Samvat, one day in the month of Asadh (July) he was looking at the Lord from behind the pillar. Suddenly he went inside the temple and the doors of the temple got shut. People were astonished. Chaitnya Mahaprabhu was absorbed in the Jyoti of Lord Jaggannath.

Sant Vemna

Sant Vemna was a Shaivite-saint, who is considered to be the Kabir of Andhra. He was a great saint, who spent his early life in oblivion, rather sinfully. He opposed the social evils, blind faith and orthodox bigotry. He was the spiritual leader of the fifteen-sixteenth century of Vikram, a saint of people, who proved the truth of the saying –‘One who worships Shiva, becomes ‘Shiva’ (auspicious) himself. His period is from 1469 to 1537 of Vikram Samvat.

He was born in an affluent Reddy family in Andhra Pradesh. His parents were well respected in the society and his father was a Shiva devotee. People differ about his birth place but he in one of his couplets indicates that he was born in a village named Mughchintal in Nellur district. Vemna was brought up in affluence, as a result of which he got inclined towards an easy life of indulgence. It was not abnormal then to visit prostitutes and Vemna also fell into this trap. Not caring for his family, he also started visiting brothel and spending money on prostitutes.

Vemna, however, had great respect for her elder brother’s wife (sister-in-law) Narsamma. She used to tell him to mend his ways, saying that people laugh at him; they consider him unworthy and strayed. She suggested him to get married. Vemna accepted her advice and got married. Although his wife was strict, but Vemna was so attracted towards her that he could not remain without her even for a moment. He got into a job but did not like it. His family did not approve of his way of living. Gradually he also got fed up with his life and started thinking that he was wasting his life. He now started praying Lord Shiva to take him out of his sinful life and bless him with His love and devotion. He had the seeds of *Vairagya* in him right from his childhood, as an influence of his father, which he exhibited by composing poems filled with thoughts of *Vairagya* at the age of ten-eleven. The company of Narsamma encouraged him to climb up the path of devotion. Family life now became a load on him and he started thinking of *Sanyas* and taking refuge in Shiva-bhakti.

Vemna took Deeksha (initiation) of Shiva-Mantra at the hands of Shiva-Yogi Lambika. Lambika was also a great alchemist. Vemna initially thought of learning the art of making gold but soon he changed his mind. He started his training in *Hathyoga* [a mode of yoga laying emphasis on Pranayam-(breathing exercises)- and Asanas-(postures) etcetera). The intensity with which he was engaged in worldly pleasure, with same intensity now he got attracted towards yoga. Soon he became an accomplished, Self-realized Shiva-Yogi. He got so absorbed in the Self that he did not care for his outer appearance. He started roaming about as a ‘Digamber’ (without any clothes on his body) rising above the sense of man or woman and started propagating ‘Shiva-Tatva’ (the Essence of Shiva).

He used to say that one is born without clothes on him and when he dies, he is cremated without clothes. It is, therefore, amusing that one puts on clothes during the in-between period. He said that he had heard the sound of a gong in his heart and had seen a

divine light in the quest of which he had realized the Supreme Shiv-Brahm and that it was not an illusion. He also said that as light is needed to remove darkness and medicine to cure an ailing person, similarly one needs the shelter of a Guru to realize the Truth. He realized the Shiva in the Self and said that one should look within and not outside to realize Shiva.

Sant Vemna asked his followers to abide by seven principles. These are: not to steal, not to hurt anyone, not to feel jealous with others in their prosperity, compassion for all creatures, contemplation of God, not to get angry and contentment.

Although Vemna was a Shaivite saint, he did not discriminate between the Shiv-Mantra and Vishnu-Mantra and cautioned people against the weaknesses of the Shaiv-Dharma, which was just like Kabir, who also had cautioned people against blind following of rituals in North India. Sant Vemna criticized the followers of both Shaiv and Vaishnav-Dharma for their dissimulation. He also said that merely by reading scriptures one does not become civilized, cultured or pious; it does not enlighten him in the same way as a donkey does not acquire greatness by carrying the load of perfume on his back. He also believed that one gets inclined towards bhakti as a result of his good deeds in previous births. According to him the Source of the river Ganges-Lord Shiva is the true Lord, Anahat-Nad is the sweet melodious music and that the desires are the root-cause of all evils.

Vemna started a new sect and brought about a spiritual revolution based on a renewed consciousness. In the last days of his life, he traveled throughout the Andhra Pradesh. Seeing him wearing no clothes, often people thought him to be a mad person and pelted stones at him. For Vemna, however, all creatures were manifestation of his Lord and, therefore, he never reacted against them. He started living in cremation-grounds and the number of his followers started swelling. He used to sit under the shadow of trees to quench their thirst for *Gyan* and to resolve their doubts. Like Kabir he told people not to look down upon the lowly-caste people, as the God resides in the heart of all creatures. He also stated boldly about the Oneness of God, Who takes care of the needs of all creatures and blesses the people who do sadhana and that He is the Ocean of Bliss.

Sant Vemna composed a lot of verses in Telugu, which he used to recite to people. The number of verses composed by him is about four thousand. These verses are laden with Advait-Vedantic thoughts. Most of his verses have various meanings. His verses are unique in Telugu literature for simplicity of their diction, clarity of thought, unparalleled style, profundity of message and capability to pierce the heart.

His Samadhi is situated in Katarupalli. Once a thunderbolt struck his Samadhi but no damage was caused to it. Sant Vemna emerged out of the Samadhi in the form of a young boy with the thunderbolt in his hand. One of his disciples sang a hundred verses in Sanskrit in his praise, which are known as 'Sata-stotra'. Sant Vemna blessed him and entered back in the Samadhi.



Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya was a great philosopher and devotee. He was an Acharya of bhakti. His actions were divinely-inspired and beyond worldly desires. His greatest contribution was to promote affectionate fondness towards Krishna. He propagated 'Bhagvat-Dharma' in the medieval India which was then under the influence of dry 'Nirgun-Brahm' of Acharya Shankar.

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya was born in Belnat family of Andhra Pradesh. His father was Laxman Bhatt and mother was Illmagaru. They lived in Kakarvad or Kakusmakar city at the bank of river Krishna. Laxman Bhatt was a pious Brahman and Illmagaru was also a devotee and a noble lady. About five hundred years ago in 1535 Vikram Samvat, when Laxman Bhatt along with his wife was on pilgrimage to Kashi, they heard that Kashi was about to be attacked. They, therefore, proceeded towards south. On the way, on Vaishakh-Krishna-Ekadashi, Illmagaru gave birth to Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. They were so scared of the attack by the Yavan that they had to flee leaving the newly born child under a tree, but the tender heart of the mother did not allow her to leave behind the child. They, therefore, returned to take the child with them. They found that the child was protected by a divine fire around him. The parents considered themselves fortunate to beget such a child. They returned to Kashi and started residing at the Hanuman Ghat.

Vallabhacharya was a blessed child and gifted with extra-ordinary brilliance. People started calling him '*Bal-Saraswati-Vakpati*'. He was given the best of education under Vishnuchit, Tirummal and Madhav Yatindra. By the grace of his Masters and the Lord, the child acquired knowledge of the scriptures. At the age of eight he had acquired knowledge of the Vedas, Puranas and other religious scriptures and had started spending his time in bhakti. At the age of eleven he lost his father and thereafter he completely turned away from the world.

Gradually the fame of his erudition and devotion reached far and wide. Maharaja Krishnadev was the then ruler of Vijaynagar in South. Vijaynagar was the main fortress of Vedanta those days. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya visited Vijaynagar, refuted 'Mayavad' in the royal-court and established superiority of Vishnu-bhakti and Bhagvat-Dharma. The scholars were humbled and the royal-court granted him the title of 'Mahaprabhu'. The king honored him and showed due respect to him. He became famous as '*Jagadguru-Srimadacharya-Mahaprabhu*' in the North as well as South India. He propagated the Vaishnav-mat. The period of Maharaja Krishnadev Rai was the golden period of Vijaynagar. Maharaja Krishnadev Rai had profound knowledge and loved music, literature and arts. He had a deep understanding of the essence of bhakti and considered himself fortunate by the presence of Mahaprabhu. Because of the recognition of Vaishnav-dharma by Vijaynagar, it soon took the entire South in its fold. Thereafter, Mahaprabhu decided to visit all the important pilgrimage places in North India and to propagate bhakti-mat.

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya visited Brij and on the Govardhan-Parvat (mountain) erected the statue of Lord Shrinathji. A rich devotee of Ambala, Seth Surajmal Khatri, got a temple of Lord Shrinathji erected with the permission and for the pleasure of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. He then proceeded to Pandharpur, which was the fortress of Bhagvat-Dharma and received great encouragement for his mission. Thus traveling through various places of pilgrimage, Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya reached Prayag where the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna specially enchanted him.

At the age of twenty-eight, Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya entered family life. He got married to a pious and religious Brahman girl Laxmidevi of Kashi. She through her dedication and service made their family life heavenly. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya then started living near Prayag in Arrail on the other side of the bank of river Yamuna. He had already acquired the status of Acharya. His popularity and fame was multiplying manifold. He had accepted the family life for the pleasure of the Lord. In due course he was blessed with two sons-Gopinath and Vitthalnath. Both of them were great devotees and Vitthalnath made great contribution in promoting the *Pushti-marg*. Saints like Kumbhandas, Surdas and Parmananddas also made great contribution in this direction. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya initiated a lot of people which included Surdas, Krishnadas and Parmananddas. Krishnadas in one of his couplets has described the greatness of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya in following words:

‘KRISHNADAS GIRIDHAR KE DWARE,

SHRIVALLABH PAD RAJ BAL GARJE.’

The grace of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya inspired Parmananddas to pour the *Rasa* of bhakti in his verses. A symbol of simplicity and humility, great poet and devotee Mahatma Kumbhandas, on the strength of the dust at the feet of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya humbled the royalty of the Mugal Emperor Akbar in the royal court at Fatehpur Sikri. The affluence of the great emperor lacked luster before the brilliance of Mahatma Kumbhandas, who warned the emperor in following words:

‘BHAKTAN KO KAHAN SIKRI SO KAAM,

AVAT JAVAT PANHAIYAN TUTI, BISAR GAYO HARI NAAM.’

A lot of miraculous incidences are related to Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. In Gokul Lord Krishna had shown His glimpse to him. He was very strict in following the schedule for the service of the Lord. Once due to scarcity of money he had to pledge a bowl made of gold in order to arrange for the offering to the Lord. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, however, did not take the Prasad himself. On asking he explained that the bowl was pledged for the sake of the Lord, how then he could accept a part of the proceeds thereof, which would have been a great sin. He accepted the Prasad after two days when some money was received and Prasad was offered from that money. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya had surrendered all his belongings, his body, mind and soul at the feet of the Lord. Once the Lord asked Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya to offer Him a cow. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya had a piece of gold with him, which he gave to Saddu

Pandey and asked him to buy a cow. Saddu Pandey was very close to him and had made a lot of offerings. He said that he had lots of cows, which he would bring for offering to the Lord. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, however, did not agree and insisted that a cow be bought by selling that gold piece. Saddu Pandey, therefore, followed the order and bought a cow. The followers of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya when came to know of it, they were inspired to offer their cows in the service of the Lord. All around it were cows and cows. Mahatma Chint-Swami in one of his verses has described this incidence saying that everywhere it is cows and cows; the Lord's pleasure lies in living in the surrounding of cows.

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya accepted Srimad-Bhagvat, Brhma-Sutra and Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita as the main scriptures for the followers of Pushti-Marg. Inspired by him people started organizing public recital of Srimad-Bhagvat. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya was the founder of Pushti-Marg and he announced that Lord Shri Krishna is the Essence of all essences. He proclaimed that the existence of creatures is as true as the Creator, but creature is an *Ansh* (part) and servant of the Creator. Pushti-Marg leads one to the pure love for the Lord. Pushti-bhakti takes the *Jeev* away from worldly desires and showers on him the grace of the Lord. Surrendering everything at the feet of the Lord and receiving His grace through bhakti is *Brahm-Sambandh* (getting connected to the Lord). Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya considered Pushti as the synonym of the grace of the Lord or the nourishment of the soul. He also considered 'Shri Krishnam Sharanam Mum' as the basic mantra of the Pushti-Marg.

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya lived for fifty-two years. During his stay at Arrail, he had met Chaitnya Mahaprabhu and both of them were deeply impressed by each-other. During his last, he lived in Kashi. In 1587 Vikram Samvat he entered the Ganges and people saw a brilliant ray of light ascending in the sky in place of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya.



Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, was born about five hundred forty years ago on 15 April 1469 in a village named Talwandi, also called Rai Bhoeki Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib, near Lahore in the present-day Pakistan. His father Kalyan Singh Mahto, popularly known as Kalu Mahto and his mother Tripta, both were Hindus. The child Nanak did not weep as is usual with the newly born children, but he smiled, which surprised the midwife Daulatan. People also were surprised and were talking about it when the village-priest Pundit Hardayal arrived there. He desired to see the newly born child. When he saw the child Nanak, he saluted him seeing an aura around the face of the child. He told the people that their village was fortunate that such a divine child has taken birth in their village.

When he grew a little older, Nanak was sent to a school but his mind was absorbed some where else. He used to enjoy company of Sadhus and saints. When the time of sacred thread ceremony came, all the relatives were invited but Nanak refused to put on the sacred thread saying that this thread would become dirty in a few days whereas he wanted such a thread which would never become dirty. He asked for a *Janeu* (sacred thread) made from the cotton of compassion, spun with contentment and with knots of restrain. His father, the priest and all the relatives were astonished on his demand.

His father thought of engaging him in some business. He got him a small shop and gave him twenty rupees to buy things for his shop. He asked Nanak to enter in to a deal which was beneficial. On the way he met a group of Sadhus, who asked for food. Nanak spent all the money in their service, as in his eyes there was nothing more beneficial than serving them. When his father came to know of it, he was very annoyed and rebuked him severely. Nanak's mother felt very sad. She tried to explain him that he should become worldly-wise but Nanak told him that the worldly people were caught in the fire of selfishness, desires and ego and that he wanted to do something for them. The elders of the family thought that Nanak was suffering from some disease. They consulted a *Vaidya* (an Ayurvedic doctor). When he started examining Nanak, Nanak told him that he had no suffering in his body but his soul was at pain, the pain of separation from the God. The *Vaidya* had no answer.

His relatives thought of marrying Nanak as that in their opinion could bring a change in him. By now Nanak was fourteen. He was married to Sulbauni, daughter of Moolraj of Batala. They were blessed with two sons-Srichand and Laxmiichand. But even the family life could not change Nanak, who still spent lot of his time in the company of Sadhus or in contemplating alone. Nanak's elder sister was Nanaki. She was very affectionate towards Nanak and was wiser than others. She was married to Jayram, an employee of Nawab Daulatkhan in the city named Sultanpur Lodhi. She invited Nanak to live with her for some time.

In Sultanpur, Jayram took Nanak to the Nawab. The Nawab was very impressed looking at the searching eyes and innocent face of Nanak, which was shining with glory. He asked Nanak whether he would like to work for him. Nanak replied, 'Yes, if it

interests me'. Nawab asked him what would interest him. Nanak replied, 'Which would benefit many'. Nawab thought for a while and then said to Nanak to take charge of the '*Modikhana*' i.e. the store of food-grains for charitable distribution. Nanak accepted this job and started doing it well. The food, which he got for himself, was also distributed by him to the Sadhus and saints.

Once Nanak was giving food-grains to someone after weighing the same. He had already weighed and given him twelve such lots and proceeded to give him the thirteenth lot. Counting the lots, he uttered '*Tera*' for the thirteenth lot (the Hindi equivalent of thirteen and also meaning "Yours, i.e. belonging to the God") and got stuck at '*Tera*'. He kept on weighing and giving him more and more food-grains. People complained against Nanak to the Nawab that Nanak is mindlessly giving away the food-grains, but when the food-grains were weighed, there was no shortage at all.

Once Nanak went to take bath in the nearby river and did not return for three days. People thought that he was drowned in the river but his sister Nanaki insisted that her brother is alive and would return, as he has to do a lot for the benefit of the people. After three days Nanak appeared suddenly with a changed outlook. During these three days he was in Samadhi and had an experience of the Divine. People were surprised to spot a brilliant aura around his face and sparkling eyes. He was saying 'None is Hindu or Muslim'. This, however, annoyed both the staunch Hindus and Muslims and the matter reached the court of Nawab. In the court Qazi asked him whether he was aware that a Muslim reaches the God simply because he is a Muslim. Nanak replied that he did not endorse it. According to him a true Muslim follows the path of saints, has compassion for the poor and needy and feels happy at the will of the God. Nanak further said that for such a Muslim mercy is his mosque, patience is his prayer-mat, honest earning is his Qur'an, feeling ashamed for the wrong-doings is '*Sunnat*', decency is his '*Roja*' (fasting), his good-deeds are the Qaba and truth is his guide. The Qazi had no answer to this but then he asked what Nanak thought about Namaz (offering the prayers five times). Nanak replied that truth, honest earnings, faith, purity of mind and wishing well for the whole world are the five Namaz for a true Muslim. By the time they were talking, it was the time for the Namaz. All of them went to the mosque. While the Qazi and the Nawab offered prayers, Nanak did not. After the Namaz when they asked him why did not he offer prayers, Nanak smiled and told them that the mind of Qazi leading the Namaz was somewhere else. On asking Nanak replied that the Qazi was thinking about his newly born calf that it may not fall into the well in his compound and then he told that Nawab Sahab you also were thinking about buying horses in Kabul. Both of them were astonished how Nanak could know what was going on in their minds.

Nanak then left the job assigned to him by the Nawab, who requested him to continue but Nanak refused saying that now he would serve the Master of the entire universe. In Sultanpur a Muslim named Mardana had become Nanak's friend. He used to play *Rawab* (a musical instrument) very well and used to give company to Nanak when he used to sing Bhajans. This was the time when people were being harassed by the foreign attackers. Nanak, therefore, started roaming amongst them together with Mardana. He started the journey with the visit of South-west Punjab. In Saidpur village Nanak accepted hospitality of one Lalo, who was carpenter. In the same village there was

a rich man Malik Bhago, who belonged to an upper caste and had invited a lot of Sadhus and Nanak as well. Nanak, however, did not accept his invitation. Malik Bhago was very annoyed and took it as his insult. He asked his servants to bring Nanak forcibly if he did not agree to come. Nanak, however, came to his residence and when Malik Bhago asked Nanak as to why he refused to accept his invitation, Nanak took a Roti (pan-cake) of Malik Bhago in his hand and in another hand he took a Roti of Lalo. On squeezing them Malik Bhago's Roti oozed out blood whereas Lalo's Roti oozed out milk.

After some time Nanak reached Multan, where they met a thug, who had erected a temple and a mosque and used to invite people to take rest at his place and then used to kill them in order to loot their belongings. When he saw Guru Nanak and Mardana he was impressed by the glow on the face of Guru Nanak and invited them to stay with him that night. In the Night Guru Nanak sang a Bhajan, the essence of which was that the outwardly appearance is of no use, the real thing is intention. The words of Guru Nanak had deep impact on the thug, who fell at the feet of Guru Nanak and asked him what he should do for his salvation. Nanak asked him to distribute the wealth earned through wrong means to the poor and needy and to live a simple and honest life.

In Panipat Guru Nanak met Shah Sharaf, a famous Sufi saint. Nanak then reached Haridwar, where people were offering water towards the east. People replied that our forefathers are resting in the heavens and we are offering water to them. Guru Nanak then started offering water towards the west. People asked him why he was doing so. He replied that he was offering water for his farm in his village. When people told him that it was funny, he asked people that if the water could not reach his farm, which was only a few miles away, how the water offered by them to their forefathers could reach them, who were in heavens.

Guru Nanak then reached Kamroop (Assam), where Mardana was lured by the queen. Guru Nanak went to the queen and preached her about the reality of life asking her to devote her attention towards the Lord of all Lords. The queen was deeply impressed by Guru Nanak. Nanak then reached Jaggannath-Puri, where priests were doing *Arati* holding lamps in a dish. Guru Nanak felt that this *Arati* for the Lord was too small a thing. He started singing an *Arati* the essence of which was that in the dish in the form of sky, the sun and moon are lit as lamps; the stars are like the pearls strewn in the dish; the wind flowing from the Malay mountain is like the fragrance and the air is like the flywhisk; the entire flora is the flowers and the Anahat-Nad is acting as the bugle. O Lord! Such a divine is your *Arati*.

Quite some time had passed after they had left home and Mardana was getting desperate to return back home. They spent some time with family and then again started for the next journey. During this journey Guru Nanak met famous Sufi saint Sheikh Ibrahim. In Lahore Guru Nanak was received by a rich man Doonichand, who had lot of money and had hosted number of flags at his main door, each flag indicating a lakh of rupees. When Guru Nanak learnt this, he gave a small needle to Doonichand and asked him to hand it over to him (Guru Nanak) after his death in the heavens. Doonichand was surprised and asked Guru Nanak how could he carry the needle to the heavens. Guru

Nanak queried that when you can not carry even this small needle to heavens, why you are showing off your wealth, which would not accompany you to the heavens.

Guru Nanak then traveled to Uttrakhand, Punjab, Kashmir and the Himalayas. While returning at a place named Hasan Abdal, Mardana felt thirsty. On a hillock there lived a fakir Wali-Kandhari. Guru Nanak told Mardana that on the hillock there is a spring of water, go and ask Wali-Kandhari for water. Wali-Kandhari, however, refused. Guru Nanak then asked Mardana to move a stone lying near a rock. Mardana was surprised to find a spring of water flowing under the stone. On the other hand the water-spring on the hillock started drying. When Wali-Kandhari saw this happening, he caused a big stone to roll towards Guru Nanak from the hillock. Mardana shouted and alerted Guru Nanak, who told Mardana not to worry and held the rolling stone with his hand. In the memory of this incidence Gurudwara Panja-Sahab has been erected at that place, which is now in Pakistan.

By now Guru Nanak had visited most of the important pilgrimage places of Hindus, Shaivites, Jains and Buddhists. He now thought of visiting Mecca. Both of them, therefore, put on suitable dress and joined a group of Hajis. After covering a long distance when they reached Mecca boils had erupted on their feet and night had fallen. Guru Nanak, therefore, lay down and it so happened that his feet were in the direction of the Holy Qaba. No one does so. A mullah saw this and rebuked Guru Nanak that he does not know even this much that he should not direct his feet towards the house of God. Guru Nanak politely asked him to turn his legs in the direction without the house of God. The mullah angrily turned Guru Nanak's feet in a different direction but he was surprised when after a while Qaba appeared to him in that direction. It is said that Qaba appeared to him in the direction in which he turned Guru Nanak's feet.

After spending a few days in Mecca, Guru Nanak proceeded towards Medina and then to Baghdad and Afghanistan before returning to India. When they reached Multan, the fakirs of Multan sent him a bowl filled with milk to the brim. The message behind it was that the place is already saturated with fakirs and that there is no further place for anyone else. Guru Nanak placed a jasmine flower in the bowl and sent it back. The message behind it was that I shall live here without any burden on any one like the fragrance of the jasmine flower.

From there Guru Nanak reached Saidpur. Babar had attacked India and his soldiers had reached Saidpur. The entire town had been looted and people were massacred. Those, who were left, had been taken in custody. Guru Nanak and Mardana were also arrested and were asked to attend to work along with other prisoners. Guru Nanak was put on the job of grinding and Mardana was to look after horses. While the other prisoners used to cry, Guru Nanak used to sing Bhajans while attending to his work. This behavior of Guru Nanak reached the ears of Babar through Mirkhan. Babar summoned him and was deeply impressed on seeing Guru Nanak. He sought his forgiveness and said that he was free. Guru Nanak, however, said that he did not want to be sat free unless all the prisoners were sat free. Babar, therefore, sat free all the prisoners.

Guru Nanak by now had spent about twenty-five years away from his family traveling to distant places. He was now about sixty and wanted to propagate his views by staying at one place. For this purpose he chose Kartarpur, where his family also joined him. Thousands of people used to visit him and gradually this place turned into an important pilgrimage.

Guru Nanak now had turned about seventy and Mardana had left for his heavenly abode. Guru Nanak wanted to appoint his successor. His sons thought that they may be appointed as his successors and some of his disciples also thought that Guru Nanak would appoint them. Guru Nanak had a disciple by name Lahinaji, who always remained in the service of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak thought of appointing him as his successor but only after a difficult test. He once threw a bowl in mud and asked his sons to pick it up. One of them started looking for a servant and the other started looking for a long bamboo with the help of which he could pull out the bowl without spoiling clothes. In the meanwhile Lahinaji reached over there and Guru Nanak asked him whether he could pick up the bowl from the mud. Lahinaji without waiting for a moment entered the mud and picked up the bowl.

On another occasion Guru Nanak adopted a fearsome appearance that of a hunter. He took some weapons with him and a few hunting dogs and took the direction of jungle. Many disciples also accompanied him. In the jungle Guru Nanak said that I have come here for hunting and those who wish to accompany would also have to participate in hunting. Many of the disciples got perturbed and returned. Some of them who still were with Guru Nanak found some gold coins lying scattered on the way and they got busy collecting them. Guru Nanak, however, kept on moving deeper in the jungle. Now only a handful of disciples, his sons and Lahinaji were left with Guru Nanak. On moving a little ahead they spotted a dead body covered with white sheet and surrounded with four lamps. Guru Nanak stopped near the dead body. People around him were looking curiously as to what Guru Nanak was about to do. Suddenly Guru Nanak asked them who all wanted to accompany him. All of them said that they wanted to live with him. Guru Nanak then asked them in a penetrating voice to eat the dead body. They were stunned and a few of them quietly turned away and the remaining started looking with their heads down. Guru Nanak asked the remaining ones as to who wanted to eat that dead body. No one answered but Lahinaji with folded hands said-‘I shall do it, my Master. Please tell me whether I should start from the head or the feet of the dead body’. From the middle, asked Guru Nanak. Bhai Lahinaji saluted Guru Nanak and moved towards the dead body. Others were looking aghast at him. Lahinaji pulled away the sheet from the dead body and found that instead of dead body it was ‘Prasad’ that was lying underneath. Lahinaji picked up the Prasad and offered it to Guru Nanak, who was very pleased with the devotion of Lahinaji. Guru Nanak then said-‘You have been blessed with this Prasad because you desire to share it with others. One, who desires to use everything for himself, for him those things are like the rotten dead body. You have known my secret. You are my reflection, born from my body (*Anga*) and, therefore, from today you would be known as ‘Angad’.

Knowing that his end was nearing Guru Nanak appointed Angad as his successor and he came to be known as Guru Angad. Guru Nanak left this world after some time

when the *Sangat* (his disciples and followers) was reciting 'Kirtan Sohila'. The *Sangat* was doing Kirtan when Guru Nanak took Samadhi. It is said that the Hindu followers of Guru Nanak wanted to cremate his body whereas his Muslim followers wanted to bury it. It was, therefore, decided that flowers would be kept by both Hindus and Muslim followers besides the dead body for three days and whose flowers wilt first would give up their claim. But the next day they found that in place of the dead body there were flowers, which both the parties divided between them for cremation or burial, according to their tradition.

Japuji Sahib is the most famous and popular prayer of Guru Nanak:

EK AUNKAR SATINAMU KARATA PURAKHU NIRBHAU NIRVAIRU,
 AKAL MURATI AJOONI SAIBHAM GUR PRASADI.
 ADI SACHU JUGADI SACHU, HAI BHI SACHU NANAK HOSI BHI SACHU.
 SOCHAI SOCHI NA HOVAI JE SOCHI LAKH VAR, CHUPAI CHUP NA HOVAI JE
 LAI RAHA LIVTAR.
 BHUKHIA BHUKH NA UTERI JE BANA PURIA BHAR,
 SAHAS SIANAPA LAKH HOI TA EK NA CHALAI NALI.
 KIV SACHIARA HOIAE KIV KOORAI TUTAI PALI,
 HUKUMI RAJAI CHALANA NANAK LIKHIA NALI.



Bulleh Shah (a portrait by an artist)

Hazrat Bulleh Shah

Hazrat Bulleh Shah, one of the great Sufi saints of India belonged to the Qadri Order of Sufis. Scholars and Dervishes have addressed him with various titles such as ‘Sheikh-E-Har-Do-Alam’ (A Sheikh of both the worlds), Marde-Haqqani’ (A servant of God or Truth), ‘A Knower’ etc. People belonging to various religions love him equally. He is considered as one of the greatest poets of the Punjab. His personality and sayings have been put at par with great Sufi saints like Shams-Tebrez and Maulana Rumi. He is remembered with great love and honor both in India and Pakistan.

The real name of Hazrat Bulleh shah was Abdullah Shah, which in the course of time came to be popularly known as Bulleh Shah. Though people differ about his date of birth but it is generally agreed that his period was from about 1680 to 1757-58 AD. Scholars differ about his place of birth as well but it is believed that he was born in the village ‘Uch-Galaniyan’ of Bahawalpur (undivided Punjab) and later taken to village Malakval in District Sahival where his forefathers were already residing. After a few days the people of village Pandoke needed a Maulvi for their mosque and on the recommendation of the people of Malakval, they took Shah Muhammad Dervish, the father of Bulleh Shah to Pandoke, where he besides attending to the duties of mosque also started teaching children. Although all scholars agree that the forefathers of Bulleh Shah belonged to village Uch-Galaniyan, some of them believe that Bulleh Shah was born after his father shifted to Pandoke.

It is said that Syed Jalaluddin Bukhari, an ancestor of Bulleh Shah came to Multan from ‘Surkh-Bukhare’ about three hundred years ago and after being initiated by Hazrat Sheikh Gauss Bahauddin Jakaria Multani started residing at Uch-Galaniyan. Bulleh Shah’s grand-father Syed Abdur-Razak was his lineal descendant. This meant that Bulleh Shah’s family was connected not only with Hazrat Paigamber but was also influenced by Sufi thoughts.

Bulleh shah’s father was a person with spiritual inclination and possessed good knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Qur’an. He was a pure-hearted person, who was respected by people as a Dervish. His Samadhi is located in Pandoke. In Bulleh Shah’s family his sister was the most affectionate to him, who like Bulleh shah remained unmarried and spent a life of restraint and in bhakti. They were both inspired by their father to spend a pious life.

The initial education of Bulleh shah took place under the guidance of his father and later he was sent to Kasoor, which was then a center for Islamic teachings, for higher education. Bulleh Shah’s teacher was Hazrat Gulam Murtaza, who was highly accomplished and well recognized. Bulleh Shah soon became apt at Arabic and Persian languages and also acquired thorough knowledge of Islamic scriptures and Sufi traditions. This aroused inquisitiveness in Bulleh Shah for the true knowledge of the Truth. This desire took Bulleh shah at the door of Hazrat Shah Inayat Qadri.

The Sufi tradition of Qadris started with Hazrat Abdul Qadir Zilani who was born in Baghdad (1077-78 to 1166). Two books 'Al Fatah-Al-Rabbani' and 'Fatuh-Al-Gaib' based on the sayings of Hazrat Abdul Qadir Zilani are very famous. In these books he has laid stress on purity of heart and on focusing on God rather than following rituals. He has said that good and bad are the two branches of the same tree, one of which is laden with sweet and the other with bitter fruits. He has also said that a 'Jihad' against one's own self (ego) is far greater than a 'Jihad' (a war fought for the sake of protection of religion) fought with swords. Sheikh Zilani considered him to be a true Sufi, who in stead of running away from the world, lives a family life and yet remains unaffected by worldly desires. The Qadri tradition of Sufis was introduced by Hazrat Muhammad Gauss, who arrived in Bahawalpur in India and spread the message of Sufism. Hazrat Miya Mir (1550-1635), the famous Sufi saint, who laid the foundation of Hari-Mandir Sahib in Amritsar, belonged to Qadri tradition. Dara Sikoh, brother of Emperor Aurangzeb, held Miya Mir and the Qadri Order of Sufis in high esteem.

Hazrat Inayat Shah was an accomplished saint of the Qadri Order. He has written many spiritual books, in one of which - 'Dastoor-UI-Amal'- he has described the seven stages of spiritual ascent, which are also accepted by the ancient Hindu sages. Hazrat Inayat Shah then lived in Lahore and, therefore, he was popularly known as 'Inayat Lahori'. By caste he was an 'Arai' and used to live on gardening and farming. For some time he lived in Kasoor but later on facing opposition from the ruler of Kasoor left for Lahore. His Samadhi is situated in Lahore.

It is said that Bulleh Shah possessed some miraculous powers even before meeting his Master Hazrat Inayat Shah. When Bulleh Shah, as a seeker reached near the garden of Hazrat Inayat Shah, he saw that the mango trees by the side of the road were laden with fruits and Hazrat Inayat Shah was working in the garden. Bulleh Shah some how wanted to attract the attention of Hazrat Inayat Shah. He, therefore, uttered the name of God and looked at the mangos, which started falling on the ground by the mere site of Bulleh Shah. Hazrat Inayat Shah when noticed that the fruits were falling without any reason, he looked at Bulleh Shah and understood that it was his mischief. He asked Bulleh Shah as to why has he plucked those fruits. Bulleh Shah wanted a dialogue to begin. He replied-I have neither climbed over the trees, nor have I thrown any stone towards the fruits. How am I then responsible for the falling of the fruits'? Hazrat Inayat Shah said-'Oh! You are not only a thief but also a clever person'. The moment Hazrat Inayat Shah uttered these words and looked towards Bulleh shah, he fell at his feet. Hazrat Inayat Shah asked him his name and as to what did he desire. Bulleh Shah replied that his name is Bulla and that he wants to reach the God. Hazrat Inayat Shah asked him 'Why are you bending downwards. Get up and look at me'. As soon as Bulleh Shah looked in the eyes of Hazrat Inayat Shah, he looked with love towards Bulleh Shah and said, "BULLAYA RUB DA KI PANA, EDHARON PUTNA TE AUDHAR LANA" (meaning thereby-O Bulleh Shah! It is so easy to reach the God. Just divert your attention from the world towards Him).

Bulleh Shah had received what he wanted. By looking at Bulleh Shah, his Master Hazrat Inayat Shah had sowed the seed of divine love in his heart. Bulleh Shah now was swimming in that ocean of love. He was absorbed in his Master and his time was now

flying. He was progressing fast on the spiritual path. In one of his *Kafis* (verses), Bulleh Shah has indicated about his internal condition in these words: “My Master has colored me in the red-spiritual color. My internal eyes have opened up and all my illusions have vanished. I am now bathing in the light of Truth. By the grace of my Master I am getting a glimpse of the Beloved in my heart and for me now there is no distinction between my Master and the God”.

Bulleh shah was so absorbed in the love for his Master that he forgot about everything else. A strange ecstasy had filled him completely. Once he saw a young girl, who was getting her hair tied, as her spouse was to visit her. Bulleh Shah got so influenced by it that he also got his hair tied like that young girl and went to visit his Master in order to please him. This incidence indicates not only the intensity of Bulleh Shah’s love for his Master, but also the purity of his heart. Bulleh shah had given up his entire ego and had surrendered himself completely at the feet of his Master. People used to ask Bulleh Shah that he was from the family of the Prophet (being a Syed) and possessed miraculous powers and yet had become a disciple of a low-caste person. But his Master was also true to his name ‘Inayat’ (literally meaning ‘to give’), who by a mere site had filled the heart of Bulleh Shah with divine grace. On the other hand Bulleh Shah also never did leave the shelter of his Master. In his verses he has expressed deep gratitude and love for his Master. He started feeling non-duality between his Master and the God.

Bulleh Shah was a Syed but had accepted a low-caste person as his Master, which was an unacceptable thing for the people those days. They taunted variously at Bulleh shah, who faced opposition from various quarters including his family. It is said that to avoid people, Bulleh shah took some asses and started living with them. During this time, a Muslim Haakim (officer) kidnapped a poor man’s wife. When no one came to help this poor man, some one suggested him to go to Bulleh Shah saying that Bulleh Shah is an accomplished fakir and he alone could help you. When this man sought Bulleh Shah’s help, Bulleh Shah asked him to go and find whether ‘Tabla’ (a small drum) and Sarangi (a musical instrument) were being played together at some place in the town. This man found that at one place eunuchs were playing Tabla and Sarangi together. He informed Bulleh Shah, who joined them and started dancing with them. When Bulleh shah got into an ecstasy, he proceeded towards that officer’s residence and called that lady to come out. She immediately came out, as if some one had pulled her out and joined her husband.

In the meanwhile people complained to Bulleh Shah’s father that earlier your son was living with asses but now he has started dancing with eunuchs. His father reached at the spot with a rosary in one hand and a stick in the other. Bulleh Shah, however, was in ecstasy and when he looked at his father, he thought that today his father should also get colored in this color. He sang for his father:

LOKAN DE HATTH MALIYAN TE BABE DE HATTH MAAL’

SARI UMAR PIT PIT MAR GAYA KHUS NA SAKA VAL’

CHINA IYON CHARIDAN YAAR! CHINA IYON CHARIDAN.

The words of Bulleh shah had such an impact on his father that he also started dancing with Bulleh Shah and his inner veil was lifted. He threw away the rosary from his hand and sang:

PUTRA JINHA DE RANG RANGILE MAPE VI LAINDE TAR,

CHINA IYON CHARIDAN YAAR! CHINA IYON CHARIDAN.

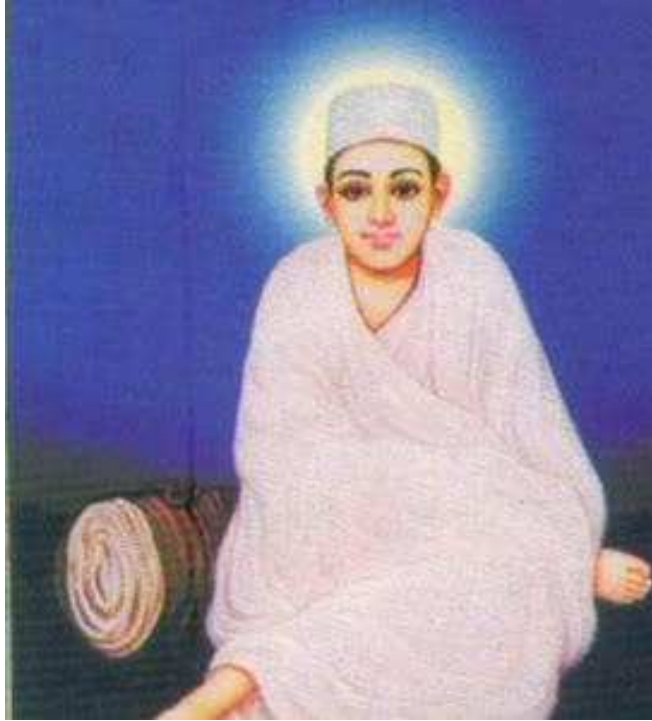
Once, however, Bulleh Shah's Master got annoyed with Bulleh Shah. Bulleh Shah had invited his Master to attend a marriage function in his family. Hajrat Inayat Shah, however, did not come himself but sent one of his disciples as his representative, who also belonged to the same caste as his Master. Bulleh Shah's family did not take care to pay proper attention to him. Bulleh Shah also did not pay proper respect to the representative of his Master under the influence of his family, owing to his lower caste. This annoyed Hajrat Inayat Shah and he discarded Bulleh Shah. Bulleh Shah's world changed with the annoyance of his Master. He tried to seek forgiveness of his Master but did not succeed. The ecstasy of love which he was enjoying so far dried up. Bulleh Shah started repenting and thought of winning the love of his Master again. Bulleh Shah knew that his Master liked music. He, therefore, started learning the art of singing and dancing from a lady, whom he took as his mother. Soon Bulleh Shah became apt at it. His Master used to participate in the annual *Urs* (a religious function). Bulleh Shah reached there along with his teacher. He had covered his face under a veil and asked his teacher not to reveal his identity and that if his Master Hajrat Inayat Shah is pleased with his singing and dancing and asks her to remove his veil, she should agree to do so only after she has sought forgiveness of Hajrat Inayat Shah for all his wrong doings.

Bulleh Shah danced and sang to his heart. Hajrat Inayat Shah was pleased. He did not know who he or she was. He desired to see the face of the singer, but Bulleh Shah kept on singing and dancing. Hajrat Inayat Shah asked thrice. At that moment the lady asked Hajrat Inayat Shah to first pardon all the sins and wrong doings of the singer as a pre-condition to lift the veil. Hajrat Inayat Shah agreed and when he saw Bulleh Shah, he embraced him and accepted him again. Hajrat Inayat Shah bestowed upon Bulleh Shah his entire spiritual treasure, making him a Master instantly.

An interesting anecdote is related. It is said that once in the month of Ramzan, Bulleh Shah was offering prayers sitting inside a hut and some of his followers were eating carrot in front of the hut. Some Muslims who were observing fast (Roza) and were passing by asked them why were they eating at the time of Roza. The followers told them that they were eating because they were feeling hungry and asked them to mind their business. The passengers thought that perhaps they were not Muslims. To confirm this they asked the followers, 'who they were'? The followers replied, 'we are Muslims. Do Muslims not feel hungry?' The passengers asked them not to eat at the time of Roza, but the followers did not stop. The passengers who were riding on horses got down, snatched away carrots from them and also gave them a few blows. It also occurred to them that their Master would also be like them. They went inside the hut and asked Bulleh Shah, 'who he was'? Bulleh Shah was sitting with his eyes closed. He did not say anything and waved his hands. They again asked him. Bulleh Shah again waved his hands. They

thought him to be mad and left the hut. Immediately after they left that place Bulleh Shah's followers appeared before him and started complaining. Bulleh Shah asked them that they must have done something wrong. In reply the poor followers said that they had done nothing wrong. Bulleh Shah then enquired with them, 'what did they ask you'? His followers told him that they asked us 'who we are' and we replied that 'we are Muslims'. Bulleh Shah told them, 'Look, you said you were some body and got beaten up. I did not claim to be any body, and I was saved.'

Bulleh Shah lived his last in Kasoor, where he left this world in 1758. Bulleh Shah was such an accomplished Dervish, fakir and a true lover, who through the love for his Master reached the God.



Sant Dadu Dayal

Sant Dadu Dayal

Sant Dadu Dayal was born in the Seventh Century of Vikram Samvat. He was a contemporary of Emperor Akbar. This was the time when people had started adopting a liberal attitude towards all religions and Fatehpur Sikri had become the center for this movement. The influence of Sant Kabir had its impact on the people, which was further strengthened by Sant Dadu Dayal. He propagated the Nirgun Upasana.

There are different opinions about his exact place of birth, but it is believed that he was born in a Nagar Brahman family of Ahemdabad. Lodiram, an issueless Nagar Brahman lived in Ahemdabad. In the year 1601 Vikram Samvat on the Falgun Shukla Ashtami he was passing by the Sabarmati river bank when he spotted a box floating in the river. He picked up the box to find a smiling new-born child in it. Lodiram brought the child home and gave it to his wife. The couple started looking after the child and by the grace of God Lodiram's wife started feeding the child. They named the child as Dadu.

Once when he was about eleven and playing with other children, an old Sadhu inserted juice of betel leaf being chewed by him in the mouth of Dadu and begged alms from him. Dadu could not understand any thing and the Sadhu left. Gradually Dadu started developing a feeling of detachment from worldly pleasures and started thinking about the transitory nature of the world. Many a times he attempted to leave his home but did not succeed. At the age of eighteen that Sadhu again appeared before Dadu. Dadu showed a lot of respect for the Sadhu and bowed down at his feet. The Sadhu told him- 'I am at your door for a moment and you are welcoming me with so much respect and devotion. But you do not know that the Lord is waiting for you from eternity at the other end of your life. If you turn towards the Lord, you would be liberated'. Uttering these words, tears started rolling out of the Sadhu's eyes. Dadu fell at his feet stating that he (the Sadhu) was all-in-all for him and requested for initiation. The Sadhu initiated him. Dadu has recognized this in one of his verses stating:

GAIB MAHI GURUDEV MILA, PAYA HUM PARSAD,

MASTAK MERE KAR DHARYA, DAYA AGAM AGADH.

The Sadhu embraced Dadu, whose heart got enlightened and from Dadu he became Dadu Dayal. It is said that this Sadhu was 'Kamal' (son of Sant Kabir) It is also believed that this Sadhu was Kabir's disciple Sant Buddhan.

When his family noticed that Dadu was getting disinterested in worldly affairs, they married him to a girl from a pious Brahman family of Badnagar. He was blessed with children, Garibdas was his eldest son, but they could not keep Dadu tied to family. Dadu Dayal left his family and visited many places including Bihar, Gaud-Bengal and Kashi and met many saints. After this pilgrimage, he settled at a place Sambhar in Rajasthan, where he started earning his livelihood by ginning cotton. He always remained conscious to make spiritual progress. He was deeply influenced by Sant Kabir. He started turning people towards the Lord through satsang. The place in Sambhar where the

satsang was carried was named as 'Alakhdariba' or 'Chaugan'. At Alakhdariba conferences of Sadhus and saints used to be held to contemplate on the Brahm. Sant Dadu Dayal lived for six years in Sambhar and then he moved to Amer, the then capital of Jaipur State. His entire life was spent in Bhajan. He did not approve of showing miracles. On invitation by Emperor Akbar, he spent forty days with him at Fatehpur Sikri. Emperor Akbar asked him about the color, caste and form of the Brahm. Sant Dadu had replied:

ISHQ ALLAH KI JATI HAI, ISHQ ALLAH KA ANG,

ISHQ ALLAH AAJUD HAI, ISHQ ALLAH KA RANG.

Emperor Akbar was very much impressed by Sant Dadu Dayal. Abdul Rahim Khankhana also showed great respect towards him. Many of Emperor's Navratnas had great reverence for him. On return from there, Sant Dadu Dayal held satsang at various places of Rajasthan including Dausa, Marwar and Bikaner.

Sant Dadu was a great forgiver. Once when he was in Samadhi, some people covered him with bricks all around him. When Dadu got up from Samadhi, he found that he was enclosed from all around. He again closed his eyes and got absorbed in contemplation. When people came to know of it they rescued Dadu, who forgave those persons.

Rajjab, Mahatma Garibdas, Sunderdas, Jagjivandas and Vashnaji were some of the prominent disciples of Dadu Dayal. Sunderdas and Rajjab have a special place in his tradition. His tradition is known as 'Brahm-Sampraday' and also as Dadu-Panth. Dadu followed the '*Ekeshwarvad*' (monotheism) of Kabir. Dadu considered the Brahm as the 'Adiguru' (the Master of all), Akal (Eternal), Avinashi (Immortal) and Avaran (Having no caste or creed). This Sampraday puts the Guru at a very high place. The Atmavad (the supremacy of the Soul) of the Upanishads has been recognized as the fundamental basis of Brahmanand (bliss) by Nirgun saints and Dadu followed the same path. The medieval monotheist saints belonging to Nirgun-Dhara (stream) explained the principles of Soul and Brahm in the common men's language, which is considered as the greatest contribution in promoting Sant-Sahitya. Dadu Dayal established the Sahaj-Tatva in simple language. His Sahaj-Param-Tatva is venerable by all, being absolutely Impartial and Neutral. He considered the Divine full of Love and Innate. He established non-duality of the Brahm and Jeev.

In his last days Sant Dadu started living at Jaipur, where he lived for nine years and towards his last he moved to Narena, where he lived in solitude along with some of his disciples in a mountain-cave. In 1660 Vikram Samvat he took Samadhi in the cave where his hair, *Tumba*, gown and slippers are still preserved. One of his famous Bhajans is:

BHAI RE GHAR HI MEIN GHAR PAYA,

SAHAJ SAMAI RAHYA TA MAHI, SATGURU KHOJ BATAYA.

TA GHAR KAJ SABAI FIRI AYA, AAPAI AAP LAKHAYA,
KHOLI KAPAT MAHAL KE DINHE, THIR ASTHAN DIKHAYA.
BHAY AUR BHED BHARAM SAB BHAGA, SAACH SOI MAN LAYA,
PYAND PARE JAHAN JIV JAVE, TAMEN SAHAJ SAMAYA.
NIHCHAL SADA CHALAI NAHI KABAHUN, DEKHYA SAB MEIN SOI,
TAHI SOON MERA MAN LAGA, AUR NA DOOJA KOI.
ADI ANT SOI GHAR PAYA, AB MAN ANAT NA JAI,
DADU EK RANGE-RANG LAGA, TAME RAHYA SAMAI.

He also said:

AAPA METE HARI BHAJE, TAN-MAN TAJE VIKAR,
NIR-BAIRI SAB JEEVSON,'DADU' YAH MAT SAAR.



Sant Tukaram

Sant Tukaram

Sant Tukaram was one of the greatest saints of medieval India, who made a significant contribution in the bhakti-Sahitya of India. The center of his bhakti was Pandharpur and by the grace of Lord Vitthal he was enlightened. Tukaram along with Goswami Tulsidasji and Samarth Sant Ramdas is considered to be one, who reassured people at a time when the entire country was reeling under pressure from the foreign tormenters. Though living as an ordinary family man, Tukaram earned a special place for himself amongst the saints of his time, which is considered as unique and unprecedented.

Tukaram was born in Samvat 1665 in Dehu village, near Alandi, on the bank of river Indrayani in a Bhagvat family. His ancestors were great devotees and Lord Pandurang showered His grace on them. Pleased with one of his ancestor Vishwambhar's bhakti Vitthal had appeared in Ambikavan near Dehu. His parents Boloji and Kankabai were also devotees and led a family life of contentment. His elder brother Savji took *Sanyas* after a few days of marriage. His younger brother was named Kanhji. Tukaram assisted his father in running his business.

When Tukaram turned thirteen, he was married to a girl named Rakhubai. She, however, suffered from asthma and, therefore, Tukaram's father married Tukaram with another girl named Jijabai. After some time Tukaram's father passed away and the responsibility of the entire family fell on the shoulders of Tukaram. His business, however, did not run well and his second wife was insensitive and harsh towards him. Tukaram was thus passing his time under these circumstances. Once he took loan from some of his friends and relatives for selling pepper in Konkan. He earned some profit in it but some thugs took away all his money. Tukaram was such a simple person that he easily believed everyone. One of the thugs showed him bangles made of brass with gold coating. Tukaram believing them to be made of gold bought them and handed over all the money to him.

Once there was nothing to eat in the house. The crop of sugar cane was standing in the field. He picked up some of them. On the way people asked him for some of them and he happily kept on parting with them. When he reached home only one sugar cane was left. His wife was annoyed and started beating him with that lone sugar cane, which broke into two pieces. Tukaram was so patient that he said to his wife that she had saved him from the labor of making pieces of the sugar cane. Similarly, once Jijabai collected some money with which Tukaram bought salt and earned some money. While returning from Balighat he, however, gave away that money to a poor person. Those days were of severe famine and people were dying of hunger. Tukaram had no greed for money. In the meanwhile his first wife and son also passed away. Tukaram had firm faith in God and, therefore, he stood firm even in these circumstances.

Tukaram was now twenty. He got disinterested in the transitory nature of the world and started doing penance. He collected the promissory-notes written during his father's time and gave half of them to his younger brother and the balance he threw away in the river Indrayani. He used to go to Bhagnath or on the mountains of Bhandara for

solitude and spending time in the remembrance of Lord Pandurang. Jijabai used to take care of food etcetera. Tukaram restored the temple of Lord Vitthal erected by his ancestor Vishwambhar. A person named Mahadji helped him in this restoration. Tukaram used to visit Lord Pandharinath in Pandharpur on the *Ekadashi* of the *Ashad* and *Kartik* months. He had great faith in observing fast on *Ekadashi* and in the recital of the name of Lord Vitthal. As a result of his penance, Tukaram Maharaj was inspired to compose verses. In this context, there is a mention that Lord Vitthal appeared in his dream along with Sant Namdev and told him that Namdev has composed many verses in His praise and whatever has been left should now be completed by him (Tukaram). Tukaram has vividly and with great devotion described this incidence in his *Abhangas*.

Sant Tukaram composed *Abhangas* as ordered by the Lord and in these *Abhangas* he described the essence of scriptures in simple and sweet Marathi, laying greater emphasis on bhakti. He did not talk of *Gyan* or rituals. One Rameshwar Bhatt, a ritualistic Brahman, who was apt at scriptures, did not approve of these *Abhangas* and said that such compositions derogate scriptures. In spite of this Tukaram's *Abhangas* were gaining popularity and people used to sing them. It was unbearable for Rameshwar Bhatt, who complained to the king of Dehu. When Tukaram came to know of it, he went to meet Rameshwar Bhatt and told him that he was composing these *Abhangas*, on receiving divine inspiration and if a scholar like him (Rameshwar Bhatt) did not approve of them, he would stop composing the same in future and then asked him as to what should be done with the *Abhangas* already composed. Rameshwar Bhatt asked Tukaram to drown them in the river Indrayani and if by the grace of the Lord the *Abhangas* are retrieved safely after thirteen days then he would recognize them. Sant Tukaram complied with it but was sad. He did not eat or drink anything and did not leave the main door of the temple. Devotees can not be destroyed, nor does the Lord let them down. Lord Pandurang appeared in the dream of the residents of Dehu and told them that the *Abhangas* are safe at the surface of river Indrayani, asking them to retrieve the same. On the other hand, Lord appeared as a child in front of Tukaram and informed him of the safety of the *Abhangas*. Rameshwar Bhatt fell at the feet of Sant Tukaram, who embraced him and on his insistence accepted Rameshwar Bhatt as his disciple. Rameshwar Bhatt is considered as one of the main disciples of Tukaram Maharaj.

Many miracles are related to Sant Tukaram. Once a *Thather* (utensil-maker) joined Sant Tukaram in Kirtan at a temple, in spite of his wife asking him to stay at home to look after his ailing son. While he was participating in the Kirtan, his son passed away. His wife brought the dead body in the temple and complained to Sant Tukaram that he had spoiled his family. She said that the name of the Lord has proved inauspicious for her. Sant Tukaram replied that the name of the Lord could never be inauspicious to any one and started reciting the name of the Lord loudly. Others present over there also joined him. By the grace of the Lord, her son regained life and all-around people started appreciating Tukaram's bhakti.

Once Tukaram Maharaj was doing severe *Tapa* (penance). His wife had changed her attitude towards him as a result of his bhakti and used to follow him. Sant Tukaram told her that the Lord takes care of all their needs and, therefore, they should offer all

their belongings in serving others. She gave away all her belongings to poor and Brahmans, only one saree was left with her. While she was taking bath, a poor Brahman lady asked Sant Tukaram for a saree. Tukaram Maharaj gave away that saree to her. Jijabai felt very dejected and got annoyed with the Lord. She picked up a piece of stone and entered the temple to hit at the feet of the Lord. The Lord started trembling. Looking at her anger, Rukminiji (Lord's consort) asked the Lord to run away from there but the Lord said that if We flee from here, it would be disgraceful for Their Bhakt. Jijabai narrated this to Tukaram, who reached the door of the temple repenting and seeking Lord's forgiveness. Jijabai, however, entered the temple. The moment she entered inside, the doors of the temple got shut and Rukminiji gave lot of money to her and clothes to wear. The doors of the temple opened thereafter.

Shivaji those days was making efforts to establish self-rule. He was deeply impressed by Sant Tukaram and wanted to be his disciple. Tukaram, however, asked him to go to Samarth Swami Ramdas. Shivaji had a desire that at least once Tukaramji visits his royal court. He invited him and sent lots of people to accompany him, but Tukaramji refused saying that it would serve no purpose. In stead he advised Shivaji to remember the Lord and to serve the poor people.

Once a great commemoration of saints took place in Pandharpur. All the arrangements were made on behalf of Shivaji. Shivaji himself was present and the commemoration was attended by Sant Tukaram, Samarth Guru Ramdas and many saints from every part of the country.

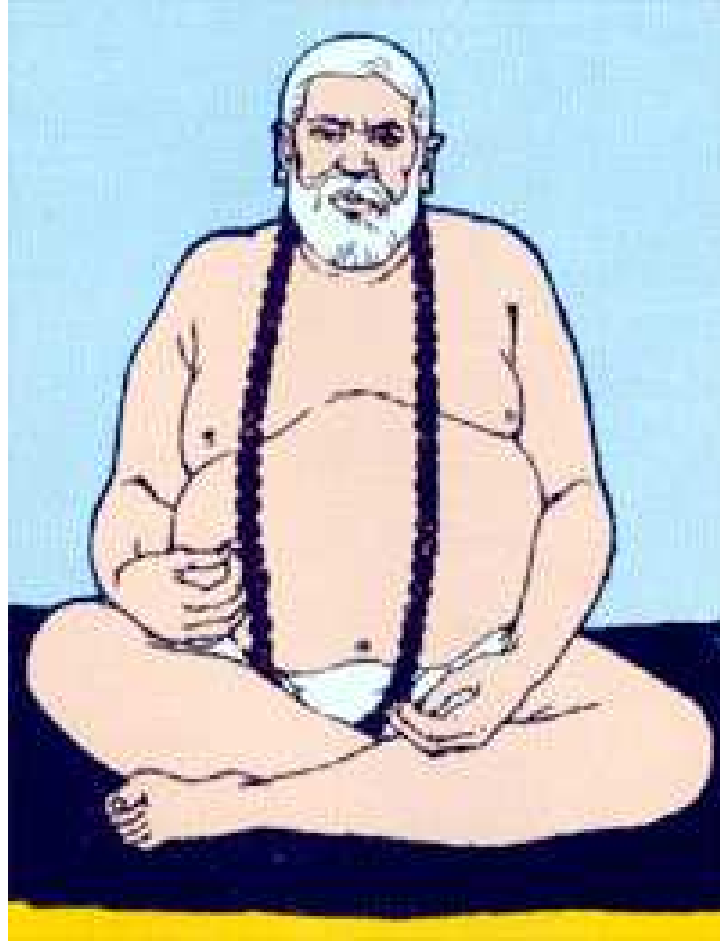
Once Tukaramji was doing Kirtan in a temple. Per chance Shivaji also was present. Shivaji's enemies came to know of it but Shivaji did not leave the Kirtan. He had firm belief that by the grace of Sant Tukaram and the Lord, no harm would come to him. He did not consider it appropriate to leave the Kirtan for the sake of saving his life. It was a moon-lit night and cool breeze was flowing. The enemy soldiers spotted a hundred of people looking like Shivaji. They were confused and left the place without harming him.

Tukaram Maharaj used to visit Pandharpur regularly. Once he could not go to Pandharpur. He composed *Abhang* and gave it to others. On reaching Pandharpur they started reciting it before Lord Vitthal. The Lord sent his 'Garuda' (Eagle-the divine carrier) for Tukaram to be brought to Pandharpur but Tukaram declined to ride on the Lord's carrier. The Lord, therefore, appeared Himself along with Rukminiji before Tukaram.

The greatest contribution of Tukaram Maharaj was to establish faith of people in the name of the Lord. He also synthesized the Sagun and Nirgun bhakti and propagated the path of bhakti all around.

Tukaram Maharaj was a *Grihasth-sant* (a saint leading family life). At his last, his two sons-Mahadev and Vithova and three daughters Kashi, Bhagirathi and Ganga were present beside him. On the Chaitra-Krishna-Dvitiya in Samvat 1706 Tukaram Maharaj left physically for his heavenly abode. Poet Mayur has said that like Lord Ram, Tukaram

Maharaj had left with his physical body for the heavens. In Dehu his *Abhangas* are worshipped. Shivaji thereafter had visited Dehu and gave away four villages to his family.



Tailang Swami

Tailang Swami

Tailang Swami was born in the year 1664 Vikram Samvat in a village named Hollia in Andhra Pradesh in a pious and rich land-lord Brahman family. His father was Narsinghdhar Rao and mother was Vidyavati. His mother Vidyavati was a virtuous and devotee lady. She had great faith in the Lord. She had everything in life except a child. She carried out many rites and rituals and ultimately was blessed with a son, who was named Tailangdhar. Tailangdhar was greatly influenced by the bhakti of his mother, as a result of which right from his early childhood, he got inclined towards *Vairagya*. He had sharp mind and quiet nature. He possessed sharp memory and used to remember whatever was heard even once. When his father asked him to marry, Tailangdhar declined and his mother also supported him saying that it was their fortune that such a son was born to them, who wishes to devote his life in realizing the Self.

When he was about forty, his father departed from the world. His mother survived for another twelve years. After the death of his mother, Tailangdhar started to live at the place where his mother was cremated. He erected a hut over there and lived in it for about twenty years. Once a saint named Bhagirath Swami visited him from the Punjab. Tailangdhar spent time with him in satsang and developed faith in him. He then accompanied him for pilgrimage and in Pushkar he took Bhagirath Swami as his Guru. For about two years Tailangdhar lived in the company of his Guru and then after Bhagirath Swami departed from this world, Tailangdhar proceeded to visit various sacred places. He first went to Rameshwaram and from there to Sudamapuri and then to Nepal.

Tailang Swami started doing *Tapa* (penance) in the forest of Nepal. Once the King of Nepal was out on hunting with his servants. His general (army-chief) was chasing a tiger. A little away was the Ashram of Tailang Swami. The tiger entered the Ashram in order to save its life and sat at the feet of Tailang Swami. Tailang Swami comforted the tiger by stroking tiger's back. Just then the general arrived there and was stunned to witness that scene. Tailang Swami called him near and lovingly explained him the importance of Ahimsa (non-violence). A little later the general brought the king to Tailang Swami. The king offered some valuables at the feet of Tailang Swami, but Tailang Swami returned it to the king saying that those who are devoted to the Lord do not crave for worldly possessions. From Nepal Tailang Swami went on the pilgrimage of Mansarovar and after that he started doing *Tapa* in the Ashram of Markandey Rishi on the bank of river Narmada. Here Sadhus and saints from distant places started visiting him. Tailang Swami, therefore, proceeded to Prayag.

In Prayag once he was standing at the bank of the river Ganges. People around him thought that Tailang Swami was waiting for a boat to go to the other side of the river. Just then a boat with many passengers on it was entering the mid-stream of the river. Suddenly the sky got covered with dark clouds and it started thundering and raining heavily. Tailang Swami jumped into the river and disappeared from the eyes of people. Simultaneously that boat also got capsized. People were, however, surprised to see that boat on the bank of the river a little later safe with all the passengers. They saw Tailang

Swami also getting down with them, who through his yogic powers had saved the life of those passengers.

Tailang Swami did *Tapa* in Kashi at the Assi-Ghat in the Tulsidas-garden, Vedvyas Ashram and at the Dashashvamegh Ghat. He lived as an Avdhut and ate whatever he got as alms, otherwise spent all his time in Bhajan. Once a Magistrate put him behind the bars and got the jail locked and asked for watch to be kept over him. A little later Tailang Swami was seen roaming out of the jail compound. On asking he said 'locks can not keep the body arrested. If it was so, people would have locked themselves at the time of death to avoid it.' The Magistrate sought his forgiveness.

Swami Dayanand, the founder of Arya-Samaj once visited Kashi. He was refuting idol worship and worship of gods and goddesses. Tailang Swami was a great yogi and a realized soul but he had faith in the worship of gods and goddesses. On coming to know about Swami Dayanand's intention he wrote something on a piece of paper and sent it to Swami Dayanand. Swami Dayanand read the letter and left Kashi. No one knows what was written in that letter.

Tailang Swami laid a lot of stress on the purity of conduct. He was also a great tolerant. Once a person gave him milk with lot of opium dissolved in it. Swamiji knowingly drank the milk and through yogic exercises nullified the effect of the poison. That person fell at the feet of Tailang Swami, who forgave him.

Tailang Swami lived a long life of about 280 years. He spent the later period of his life in Kashi. Towards his last he had taken the vow to observe silence. Tailang Swami, however, used to speak to clarify spiritual matters. Through out his life he experienced that there was nothing else except the manifestation of God in all beings. Before departing from this world, he established Shiva-Linga in his Ashram at the Panchanga-Ghat in Kashi. On the Shukla Ekadashi of the Paush month of 1944 Vikram Samvat he took Mahasamadhi. His body was kept in a box and was let to drift in the river as per his last wish.



Samarth Ramdas

Samarth Ramdas

Samarth Ramdas is one of the most renowned saints of medieval India, who exhorted people to sacrifice their life for the sake of protecting their country, religion and *Swarajya* (self-rule). He was born in 1608 AD in a village named Jamb in Maharashtra. His father Suryaji Pant was a devotee of Sun. His mother Renubai was also a religious and noble lady. Suryaji Pant was blessed with two sons after thirty-six years of prayers. The elder son was named Gangadhar and the younger one was named Narayan, who later came to be known as Samarth Guru Ramdas. He was a contemporary of Sant Tukaram and Mahatma Eknath. Once his parents had taken him to Mahatma Eknath, who predicted that he is born with the blessings of Lord Hanuman and would be a great saint.

Samarth Ramdas was brought up in a religious environment. In childhood he was attracted towards playing and roaming about at river banks or on hills etc. He lost his father at an early age after which his mother paid a lot of attention towards his education. As a result Samarth Ramdas acquired great qualities of noble conduct and restraint. He used to worship Sun and Lord Hanuman and had a belief that Lord Hanuman was his Guru. Once he firmly resolved that until he had a glimpse of Lord Hanuman, he would not take food or water and started meditating on Lord Hanuman in the temple. Pleased with his devotion, Lord Hanuman and Lord Ram appeared before him, blessed him and asked him to propagate religion and to spend his life for the welfare of people. Lord Ram changed his name from Narayan to Ramdas.

At the age of twelve he was married, though he was not interested in marriage but agreed on persuasion by his mother. When the marriage ceremonies were being performed, a screen was hanging between the groom and the bride. After the ceremonies were over the priest asked Ramdas to be alert. The priest had meant now that he was married he should be alert towards his responsibilities but Ramdas got alerted towards his larger role and immediately ran away from there. He crossed the river Godawari and reached Panchvati, where he again had the glimpse of Lord Ram, after which his life changed completely. He entered a cave near a village named Takli and started doing sadhana. For three years he was engaged in severe penance.

One day when he was performing an *Anushthan* (a ritualistic ceremony), a young lady saluted him. Ramdas blessed her to be the mother of eight sons. She was taken aback as she was going to commit Sati at the funeral of her husband and she had come just to pay her respect to him before doing so. Ramdas was not perturbed; he remembered his Lord and sprinkled the sacred water of the river Godawari on the dead body of her husband, who immediately came to life. His name was Giridhar Pant, who put the dust at the feet of Samarth Ramdas on his head. Pleased with him Samarth Ramdas blessed him saying that earlier I had blessed your wife to beget eight sons but now you shall beget ten sons. The couple offered their first son Uddhav at the feet of Samarth Ramdas. He was Samarth Ramdas's chief disciple. Samarth Ramdas spent twelve years in Takli doing severe penance and then on asking by Lord Ram he proceeded on pilgrimage and for spreading the message of religion.

For the next twelve years, Samarth Ramdas visited various places of pilgrimage, which included Kashi, Ayodhya, Gokul, Mathura, Vrindavan, Dwarka, Badrinarayan, Kedarnath, Jagannathpuri and Rameshwar. He also met various saints and then returned to Panchwati via Kishikandha, Pampasarovar and Pandharpur. During this journey he established a number of *Muths* (Ashrams) and temples of Lord Ram and Hanuman at various places. He thus had the firsthand experience of the condition and feelings of the whole of the country and then blew the conch for the cultural and spiritual uplifting of the country.

He now started the *Parikrama* (circumambulation) of the river Godawari, where he came to know that his mother crying for him had lost her eyesight. He visited his mother and fell at her feet. Thereafter he touched her eyes in the name of his Lord and she got back her eyesight. His mother asked him whether he had acquired some magical powers. Ramdas replied that he had taken the shelter of the Lord of Ayodhya, Mathura and Vrindavan by whose grace she had got her eyesight back. On the insistence of his mother he stayed with her for a few days and while leaving he recited the 'Kapil-Gita' (the Sankhya-yoga of Kapil Muni), which Kapil Muni had recited to Devahuti and thus showed her the path of self-realization. He then came back to Takli and thereafter he started living at Mahuli, which was at the confluence of the rivers Krishna and Vena, where many saints benefitted with his satsang. The number of his disciples started swelling and even the kings took pride in bowing at his feet.

The meeting of Samarth Ramdas and Shivaji is an important historical event. Sant Tukaram those days was highly revered and Shivaji wanted to take him as his Guru. Sant Tukaram, however, asked him to go to Samarth Ramdas. Shivaji was very keen to meet Samarth Ramdas but it was difficult to meet him as he kept on moving from one place to another. Shivaji, therefore, wrote him a letter. In 1649 AD he met Samarth Ramdas in Shinganwadi near Chafal, under a tree. Samarth Ramdas at that moment was reading Shivaji's letter. Samarth Ramdas accepted Shivaji as his disciple and asked him to rule the kingdom according to the Dharma (dutifully in accordance with the dictates of scriptures).

Around 1655 AD asking for alms, Samarth Ramdas along with some of his disciples once visited Shivaji in Satara fort. Shivaji dropped a letter in his basket giving his kingdom to Samarth Ramdas. Samarth Ramdas asked him as to what would he do after giving away his kingdom. Shivaji replied that he would come after him asking for alms from people and then he started following Samarth Ramdas. Samarth Ramdas, however, told him that his duty was to serve the people by ruling the kingdom. Shivaji, therefore, took the *Charan-Paduka* (the slippers) of Samarth Ramdas and kept them on the throne, thus establishing the '*Dharmarajya*' and changed the color of his flag to saffron in order to show his dedication to his Guru Samarth Ramdas. Shivaji then accepted the Vaishnav Dharma. Samarth Ramdas asked him to protect temples and people from the atrocities committed by foreign rulers saying that the Dharma and culture was under severe threat and that people were looking towards him as their savior. Shivaji followed his Guru's order and was always ready to sacrifice his life for the mission

entrusted to him by his Guru. On the other hand Samarth Ramdas knew that for 'Swarajya' (self-rule), it was necessary that one conquers the 'Swa' (Self) for which 'Satvikta' (being pious) and 'Dharmacharan' (acting in accordance with the dictates of scriptures) was necessary. He propagated this throughout the country by constantly moving from one place to another and exhorting people to wake up to the need of time.

Once Samarth Ramdas and Shivaji were standing at the bank of a surging river, which they wanted to cross. Both of them were insisting that he would first cross the river. Just then a boatman reached there, who took them safely on the other side of the river. Shivaji asked Samarth Ramdas as to why he wanted to cross the river first. Samarth Ramdas, instead of giving any reply asked Shivaji as to why he wanted to do so. Shivaji kept mum and started looking at the feet of Samarth Ramdas, who then said that he wanted to cross the river first because he did not want to risk the life of Shivaji. If Shivaji was drowned in the strong current of the river, it would have been a great loss, as he (Shivaji) was a great patriot and savior of religion and culture. Shivaji then said that the life of Samarth Ramdas was more precious than his, since he (Samarth Ramdas) could raise thousands of Shivaji and it was because of this that he wanted to cross the river first. Samarth Ramdas was very pleased with Shivaji and told him that he (Shivaji) had understood the essence of religion and devotion.

Samarth Ramdas established about seven hundred *Muths* throughout the country. He had innumerable disciples. He explained the true meaning of Sant-mat to people and led them on the path of Ram-bhakti. He said those who have risen above self-interest and are firmly engaged in fulfilling their duty, detached, soft spoken and think well of others in fact are the real Ram-Bhakt.

Once while Shivaji was getting the Sajjangarh fort constructed, he thought that he was very powerful and that he was providing livelihood to thousands of people. Just then Samarth Ramdas arrived there and asked a laborer to pick up a piece of stone lying over there and to break it. From inside the stone a frog leaped out. Samarth Ramdas looked at Shivaji and remarked-'Indeed you are very powerful. Who else except you can provide for the creatures in this world'. Shivaji immediately realized his mistake, fell on the feet of Samarth Ramdas and sought his forgiveness.

There is another similar incidence relating to the period when Samarth Ramdas was composing 'Manache-Shlok' (meaning verses addressed to mind). During his stay in Chafal he used to celebrate Ram-Navami with gaiety. All the arrangements were used to be made by Shivaji. Once, however, Shivaji forgot about it. The disciples of Samarth Ramdas suggested him to remind Shivaji but Samarth Ramdas refused saying that the Lord takes care of the needs of everyone by Whose grace everything would be managed. In the night he composed two hundred five shlokas and asked his disciples to recite those shlokas to people and ask for alms. His disciples got unexpectedly many times more than usual and the Ram-Navami was celebrated with equal fanfare.

Samarth Ramdas composed Dasabodh, Manache Shlok, Karunashtakas, and part of Ramayan. In 1680 Shivaji died, which was a great shock to Samarth Ramdas, who

stopped taking cereals and lived only on milk thereafter. He also stopped appearing before people. He breathed his last in 1682 at the age of 74 in Sajjangarh near Satara, uttering 'Har-Har' and then the name of Lord Ram. A beam of light emanated from his mouth, which got absorbed in the idol of Lord Ram.

Sant Rajjab

Sant Rajjab was the main disciple of Sant Dadu Dayal. He enjoys the same place amongst Dadu-Panthis as Mahatma Dharamdas amongst Kabir-Panthis. Sant Rajjab was born in the year 1624 Vikram Samvat in Sanganer near Jaipur. He was a Pathan and his full name was Rajjab Ali. His father occupied a prestigious post in the then Jaipur State. Sant Rajjab was brought up in affluence. Right from his childhood, he was attracted towards saints and he was loved by all, as his nature was very sweet.

In the year 1644 Vikram Samvat, Sant Rajjab's father decided to get him married in a family near Amer. The Ashram of Sant Dadu Dayal also was located in Amer. Sant Dadu Dayal was doing satsang along with some of his disciples. It was late afternoon when the marriage procession of Sant Rajjab was passing through the small lanes near the hillocks of Amer. Melodious tunes were being played on Shahnai (a musical instrument) and the procession was moving forward with all gaiety. Sant Rajjab was riding on a horse and was wearing the attires of a bridegroom. Suddenly his horse stopped near Sant Dadu Dayal's Ashram. Sant Dadu Dayal was in a state of ecstasy. Rajjab got down from the horse in order to get blessings from Sant Dadu Dayal. He prostrated before Sant Dadu Dayal, who blessed him and as Rajjab was about to ride the horse, Sant Dadu Dayal addressed him:

“RAJJB TE GAJJAB KIYA, SIR PAR BANDHA MAUR,
AYA THA HARI BHAJAN KO, KARE NARAK KI THAUR”

(Meaning thereby that O Rajjab! You are going to commit a great mistake. You had come in this world for realizing the Truth but instead you are moving towards the hell.)

The words of Sant Dadu Dayal straight pierced into the heart of Rajjab. Rajjab stopped then and there. He removed his headgear and kept it at the feet of Sant Dayal. The persons accompanying him were dumbstruck. Time had come for the impressions of previous lives of Sant Rajjab to surface and take him in their fold. The marriage was cancelled. His kith and kin tried to persuade him variously but could not succeed. Sant Dadu Dayal tested him by saying that he was a young man and perhaps could be lured by other women and, therefore, suggested him to get married and to do Bhajan as a family person. Rajjab replied that his mind was occupied by the beauty of the feet of Sant Dadu Dayal and that he had found his beloved in him and now the worldly pleasures can not lure him by his (Sant Dadu Dayal's) grace. He said:

“RAJJAB GHAR-GHARNI TAJE, PAR GHARNI NA SUHAY,
AHI TAJI APNI KANCHUKI, KAKI PAHARI JAY”

(Meaning thereby that Rajjab has renounced the world and its affairs. One, who has shorn off his own clothes, how he would put on clothes of someone else.)

Rajjab fell at the feet of Dadu and Sant Dadu Dayal embraced him in the attires of bridegroom. Rajjab thereafter dressed himself as a bridegroom. He used to say that my beloved has accepted me in these attires. Sant Dadu Dayal accepted him as his disciple and initiated him. His allegiance to his Guru was extraordinary. He distinguished not the least between his Guru and the God.

Once Sant Dadu Dayal was going some where with his disciples. Rajjab also was accompanying him. On the way there was a river and its bank was muddy. Dadu asked his disciples to place a few stones. While the other disciples were looking for some stones, Sant Rajjab himself lay down on the mud and requested Sant Dadu Dayal to walk over his body. He said what better use of this body could be then this and that by the touch of the dust at the feet of Sant Dadu Dayal he would achieve liberation. Sant Dadu Dayal was extremely pleased with this gesture of Sant Rajjab and embraced him.

Rajjab could not leave away from Sant Dadu Dayal even for a moment. After Sant Dadu Dayal proceeded for his heavenly abode, Sant Rajjab took a vow that he would not see the face of any one else for the rest of his life. He then came to Sanganer and started doing *Tapa* over there. Once some one invited Sant Rajjab along with his disciples for food. On the way Sant Rajjab came across a poor Brahman, who was wearing old and torn clothes. Sant Rajjab asked him to accompany them. At the time of food none of his disciples, however, agreed to make this Brahman sit with him. Sant Rajjab then asked the Brahman to sit besides him. His disciples taunted at him that he had given a seat to that poor man besides him. Sant Rajjab thought that his disciples were taking pride in succession after him. He, therefore, announced that that Brahman would be his successor and in future only poor would succeed him. He thus taught an important lesson to his disciples.

In regard to integration of various sects, Sant Rajjab has said:

‘APNE APNE BHES KI SAB HI RAKHE TEK,
RAJJAB NISHANA EK HAI, TIRANDAJ ANEK’

(Meaning thereby that everyone sings in the praise of his own ways but O Rajjab! the target is one and archers are many)

Sant Rajjab lived for about 122 years and left this mortal world in the year 1746 Vikram Samvat. He composed many couplets in simple language and also compiled verses of Sant Dadu Dayal under the title ‘Angvadhu’.



Sant Dariya Sahab

Sant Dariya Sahab

Sant Dariya Sahab was an empirical saint. He was greatly influenced by the thoughts of Sant Kabir. He was born in Dharkandha village of Ara district in Bihar in the year 1691 (or 1731) Vikram Samvat on the full moon night of Kartik month. His ancestors were Kshatriyas of Ujjain, who had migrated from Malwa to Bihar due to some political reason. His father was Pruthudev Singh, who had married to a Muslim girl, daughter of a tailor of one of the queens of Aurangzeb to save the life of his brother and had adopted Islam as his religion. His name was then changed to Piranshah. Dariya Sahab's mother was a great devotee. After about a month of his birth, when Dariya Sahab was in his mother's lap a saintly person visited them and named the child as Dariyashah or Dariyadas. People consider Dariya Sahab as a reincarnation of Sant Kabir.

Dariya Sahab was married at the young age of nine years but he used to seek solitude in order to contemplate about the Divine. At the age of fifteen, he took *Vairagya*. After about five years he started exhibiting signs of a great saint. People from distant places started visiting him to benefit from satsang with him. At the age of thirty he started giving sermons to Sadhus and disciples. Day-by-day his sadhana was leading him towards full accomplishment. He used to express his experiences in verses. Gradually the number of his disciples started increasing. Nawab Mir Qasim, the Subedar of Bihar was very much impressed by him. He was a patriot, who gave away 101 Bighas of land in Dharkandha to Dariya Sahab. Dharkandha was Dariya Sahab's maternal place where he spent all his life. It astonishes that although a family man, Dariya Sahab spent all his life in celibacy. He had adopted a son named Tekdas.

At times Dariya Sahab used to go on pilgrimage. He used to visit Maghar (the place where Kabir breathed his last), Kashi and Baisi (Gazipur) etc. and used to spend his time there in satsang leading people on the path of bhakti and alerting them about the transitory nature of the world.

Dariya Sahab was greatly influenced by Satnami sect, Kabir-Panth and Sufism. He had great faith in Kabir. At one place he has said that whatever spiritual experiences he has had was on account of molding his life in accordance with Kabir's preaching. He has said:

“SOI KAHO JO KAHAI KABIRA,
DARIYADAS PAD PAYO HIRA”

The ultimate target of Kabir was Satlok, which Dariyadas named as 'Chaplok'. He has also called it as 'Amarpur' and 'Abhaylok' and has made no distinction between them and Satlok of Kabir. He has said that the Satpurush lives eternally in the Chaplok. His Chaplok is the most esoteric Brahmaphad (Unity with the Brahman). He has said:

“ATI SUKH PAVAHI HANSA, KARAHAI KOTAHAL JAY,
CHAPLOK AMRIT PIYE, JUG JUG KSUDHA BUJHAY”

Dariya Sahab has said that the Satpurush resides eternally in the Abhaylok, from where I have come. Sahab is my Satguru. It is our duty to follow the same path, which was followed by Kabir. All the creatures are part of the Sahab-Parmatma, Who can be reached only through love.

He had thirty-six main disciples. Four of his Ashrams are very famous-these are Telpa, Danshi, Mirzapur (Chapara) and Manuva-Chowki (Muzzafarpur). Every follower of Dariya Sahab keeps with him a Huqqa (for smoking tobacco through water) and a Bharuka (an earthen pot) for drinking water.

He breathed his last in the year 1837 Vikram Samvat.

Mahatma Charandas

Mahatma Charandas was born in the year 1760 Vikram Samvat on the day of Bhado-Shukla-Teej in village Dehra of Alwar district. He was born in a Dhoosar family and his father Muralidhar was a detached person. Similarly his mother Kunjadevi was also inclined towards *Vairagya*. His childhood name was Ranjit. The tendencies of his parents had great impact on the upbringing of Mahatma Charandas. Sahjo Bai, who was the main disciple of Mahatma Charandas has thus described about the birth of Mahatma Charandas:

‘SAKHI RI AAJ DHAN DHARTI DHAN DESA,
DHAN DEHRA MEVAT MANJHARE, HARI AAYE JAN BHESA,
DHAN BHADO DHAN TEEJ SUDI HAI, DHAN DIN MANGALKARI,
DHAN DHOOSAR KUL BALAK JANMYO, FULIT BHAYE NAR-NARI,
DHAN-DHAN MAI KUNJORANI, DHAN MURLIDHAR TATA,
AGLE DATAV AB FAL PAYE, JINKE SUT BHAYO GYATA’

When Charandas was five, Shukdevji, the son of legendry Vyasdev, who is supposed to have an eternal life, appeared before him and at the age of seven his father, who had gone for Bhajan in the forest disappeared from there. Charandas was then brought to Delhi by her mother to live with his maternal grandfather. Charandas used to crave for having a glimpse of the Lord. On attaining adulthood, his life was devoted entirely to sadhana and *Tapa*. At times he used to get overwhelmed by the anguish of separation from the Lord. Once when he was desperate to have a glimpse of the Lord, Shukdevji appeared before him and gave him the Mantra. He sang before him:

‘HAMARO NAINA DARAS PIYASA HO,
TAN GAYO SUKHEE HAY HAYE BADHI, JIVAT HOON VOHI AASA HO,
BICHURAN THARO MARAN HAMARO, MUKH MEIN CHALE NA GRASA HO,
NIND NA AAVE RAINI BIHAVE, TARE GINAT AAKASA HO,
BHAYE KATHORE DARAS NAHIN JANE, TUM KOON NEK NA SANSA HO,
HAMARI GATI DIN DIN AUREHI, VIRAH VIYOG UDASA HO,
SUKDEV PYARE, RAHU MAT NYARE, AANI KARO UR VASA HO,
RANJITA APANI KARI JANI, NIJ KARI CHARANANDASA HO’

He begged at the feet of his Guru to give him humility and to destroy his ego. In the praise of his Guru, Charandas has said:

‘SHRIVYAS KO PUTRA TASU KO DAS KAHAUN,
SADA RAHOON HARI SHARAN, AUR NA SHISH NAVAUN’

After this for about fourteen years he did severe *Tapa* but he did not experience the real peace. He got desperate to visit Vrindavan. In Sevakunj he had a glimpse of Lord Shyam-Sundar. He was blessed to have an experience of the Raslila of the Lord Krishna. One day he got extremely desperate to have a glimpse of Lord Krishna. On this occasion

again Shukdevji appeared before him and as asked by Shukdevji, Charandas returned to Delhi. He now started giving sermons to people and also established 'Shuksampraday'. He had many disciples out of which SahjoBai and Dayabai were the main disciples. Both of them were yoginis of a high order. They have contributed a lot in the flourishing of the Sant-Sahitya (devotional literature).

Mahatma Charandas's popularity was increasing day-by-day. Badshah Muhammadshah had great faith in him. He had alerted Muhammadshah of the impending attack by Nadirshah six months before. On learning about it, Nadirshah came to meet him. Mahatma Charandas asked him not to attack Muhammadshah and to go back. It is said that Nadirshah got angry with him and put him in jail. Mahatma Charandas, however, came out of the jail through his yogic powers and kicked Nadirshah in his bedroom. Nadirshah then sought his forgiveness.

Like Sant Kabir, Mahatma Charandas also opposed meaningless rituals and established the supremacy of Truth and bhakti of the Lord.

In the year 1839 Vikram Samvat he took Samadhi through his yogic powers.

Sahajo Bai

Sahajo Bai was one of the great lady-saints of India. Amongst the saints of India she has a special place similar to Meera. A disciple of Mahatma Charandas, she interpreted and explained the Sant-mat and the principles of *Gyan*, bhakti and *Vairagya* of Mahatma Charandas. All her life she followed the foot-print of her Guru Mahatma Charandas and worshipped the God in the form of Love for her Guru. In her 'Sahaj-Prakash-Granth' she has attached a lot of importance to the status of Guru, which is entirely unprecedented and unique. She is the one, who boldly pronounced:

‘RAM TAJOON MEIN GURU KO NA BISAROON,
GURU KE SAM HARI KO NA NIHAROON.’

(Meaning thereby that I am prepared to leave the God but not my Guru, as I do not consider the God equal to my Guru)

She was born in 1740 in a Dhoosar family in village Dehara of Mevat area of Rajasthan. His father was Haridas, who lived a simple and pious life, which had its impact on Sahajobai. Right from her early childhood she exhibited inclination towards *Vairagya*. On reaching marriageable age, she strongly refused to enter family life and said that she had been blessed to be born as a human being and that she would not waste this opportunity and would spend her life in Hari-Bhajan. Mahatma Charandas, her Guru, was then living in Delhi. Mahatma Charandas was also a resident of Dehara village. Some unseen force was pulling Sahajobai towards him. She, therefore, proceeded to take the shelter at the feet of Mahatma Charandas. In one of her verses she has said:

JAKI GURU MEN WASANA, SO PAVE BHAGWAN,
SAHAJO CHOTHE PAD BASE, GAVAT VED PURAN

She bowed down at the feet of Mahatma Charandas and prayed him to take her in his shelter. She then started living in the Ashram of her Guru Mahatma Charandas and engaged herself in sadhana. She used to pray before her Guru:

AB TUM APNI AUR NIHARO,
HAMRE AUGUN PAI NAHI JAO, TUMAHİ APNA BIRAD SAMHARO,
JUG-JUG SAKH TUMHARI AISI, VED PURANAN GAI,
PATIT UDHARAN NAAM TIHARO, YEH SUN KE MAN DRIDHTA AAI.

Mahatma Charandas was very much pleased with the devotion of Sahajobai and he, therefore, accepted her as his disciple, initiated her and gave her the Mantra. Sahajobai has said that as soon as she heard the Mantra, her *Agyan* (ignorance) vanished; her heart was filled with light and that she realized that the world is transitory. She has further said that my Sadguru has enlightened me and through his grace I have made entry in the Kingdom of Love of the Lord.

With the grace of her Master, Sahajobai started spending her time in realizing the Self. She realized that this physical body is like a bubble of water and, therefore, the success of life lies in making an effort to realize the Self.

Sahajobai saw the manifestation of her Lord in the entire existence. She considered love for the Divine as the way to reach Him and that the love for the Divine comes from the knowledge of the Self or through Self-realisation. She composed verses on both the Nirgun and Sagun aspects of the Divine and accepted worship of both the aspects. Like her Guru Mahatma Charandas, she also was a great devotee of Vrindavan-Vilasi Lord Shri Krishna. She composed verses describing *Lilas* of Lord Shri Krishna. She has said:

NAAM NAHI, AU NAAM SAB, ROOP NAHI SAB ROOP,
SAHAJO SAB KUCH BRAHM HAI, HARI PARGAT HARI GOOP.

By the grace of her Guru, many a times she had the glimpse of the *Lilas* of the Lord. She has said that Nand and Yashoda are fortunate and so is the land of Vrindavan that the Lord played there as a cow-boy. She has said:

DHNAY YASHODA, NAND DHAN, DHAN BRIJMANDAL DES,
DI NIRANJAN SAHAJIYA, BHAYO GWAL KE BHES.

She also had glimpses of the *Raslila* of Lord Shri Krishna many a times and has described them vividly in her verses.

She lived till about 1820. Sahaj Prakash is a great contribution made by her in the devotional-literature. In relation to importance of time spent in the remembrance of Lord she has said:

EK GHARI KA MOL NA, DIN KA KAHAN BAKHAN,
SAHAJO TAHI NA KHOIYE, BINA BHAJAN BHAGWAN.

Mahatma Nabhadas

Mahatma Nabhadas was a great saint, who in his 'Bhaktmal', which is the history of bhakti-Sahitya (devotional literature), depicted the characters of saints of Satyuga, Treta, Dwapar and Kaliyuga. He was a contemporary of Goswami Tulsidas. There are different versions about his birth place. While saint Mahipati, the author of Marathi Bhaktmal 'Bhaktvijay' states that Nabhadas was a Nagar Brahman of Gwalior, Priyadas, who wrote commentary on Bhaktmal states that Nabhadas was a resident of Rambhadrachal of Godavari in Tailang area of South India. He has mentioned various miraculous events relating to the birth, childhood and upbringing of Nabhadas in his commentary on Bhaktmal.

When Nabhadas was about five years, Godavari area was hit by severe famine. People starved and could not get even a grain of food. In such a situation, one day Kilhadas and Agradas, two disciples of Krishnadas Payhari were passing through a forest, where they spotted a child crying under a tree. His mother had left the child in desperation. Mahatma Agradas took the child in his lap and sprinkled water on his face. The child became quiet. Mahatma Agradas then noticed that the child was blind by birth. His heart melted looking at the plight of the child. He sprinkled water on the eyes of the child and by their grace the child started seeing. On asking who he was, the child queried whether he should introduce his physical body made of the five gross elements or he should talk about his soul. Both of them were surprised by his reply. They named the child as Narayandas, who later came to be known as Nabhadas. Agradasji gave him the 'Ram-Mantra' and brought him to Galta in Jaipur, where he was put on the job to serve the visiting Sadhus by cleaning their feet and picking up the used utensils. This cleansed his heart and aroused in him the desire to seek the divine. His devotion to his Guru Agradas was great. He has spoken very highly about the status of Guru in his Bhaktmal.

Once Mahatma Agradas while he was engaged in mental-Pooja saw that the ship of one of his disciples, who was a trader and on sea voyage was about to sink. Mahatma Agradas got worried. Just then Nabhadas due to his devotion to his Guru Mahatma Agradas got an inspiration and in order that his Guru Mahatma Agradas may not be distracted while doing Pooja, he prayed to Lord Ram to save that disciple. Nabhadas could see that the trader had been saved and the sea had become quiet. He informed Mahatma Agradas about it and requested him to continue with his mental-Pooja. Mahatma Agradas was extremely pleased with the devotion of Nabhadas. Mahatma Agradas thought that a person, who could save a ship from sinking, would surely be able to help millions in crossing the ocean of life. Mahatma Agradas asked him to write about the saints. Nabhadas at one place has mentioned:

‘AGRADEV AGYA DAI, BHAKTAN KO JAS GAU,
BHAVSAGAR KE TARAN KO, NAHIN AUR UPAU’

He complied with the order of Mahatma Agradas and wrote Bhaktmal. His fame started reaching far and wide. In places like Ayodhya, Kashi, Jaggannath-Puri and

Vrindavan people started talking about him. Nabhadadas had natural love for saints. He used to go on pilgrimage in order to meet with saints.

Once Nabhadadas went to Kashi to meet Goswami Tulsidasji but could not meet him. Nabhadadas, therefore, returned to Brij, where he was then living. When Tulsidasji went to meet him in Brij, Nabhadadas was busy in a Bhandara (offering food to devotees) for saints. Nabhadadas deliberately did not pay attention to Tulsidasji, as he wanted to test him. There was no vessel for serving *Kheer* (a desert made by cooking rice in milk) to Tulsidasji. Tulsidasji picked up a slipper of one of the saints and said what could be a better vessel than it. Nabhadadas was overwhelmed by the humility of Tulsidasji. Nabhadadas embraced him and said-‘I have spotted the Sumeru (the mythological mountain which was used to stir the ocean) of my Bhaktmal today. I am fortunate to see you’.

In Bhaktmal Mahatma Nabhadadas has written about various saints and has thrown light on various methods of sadhana that were prevalent those days. He laid stress on Mahatma Agradas’s words that those who keep the Lord in their hearts are worth worship and they alone are praise-worthy. Nabhadadas in the conclusive part of Bhaktmal has stated that he has presented Bhaktmal as the remenant from the works of people who have written in praise of saints and Mahatmas. He spent all his life in contemplating about the Lord and in praising His devotees.



Mahatma Eknath

Mahatma Eknath

Mahatma Eknath was a Gyani saint and a great devotee, as well. He was a contemporary of Goswami Tulsidas. He wrote commentaries on both Ramayan and Srimadbhagvad. He was born in a pious Brahman family. His ancestors were devotees and Vaishnav. Bhakt Bhanudas was his great grand father, who was a devotee of Lord Pandharinath. Mahatma Eknath has mentioned about his great grand father in the commentary on Srimadbhagvad that it was because of him that their family received the grace of Lord Krishna. Chakrapani was the son of Bhanudas and Surya Narayan, the son of Chakrapani was Eknath's father. His mother was Rukmini. He was born in the year 1590 Vikram Samvat in Mool-Nakshtra and his father died at the time of his birth. After a few days his mother also died, as a result he was brought up by his grandparents, who named him 'Eka'.

Right from his early childhood, Eknath showed great spiritual inclination. He not only used to assist his grandfather Chakrapani in Pooja but used to himself do Kirtan. His grandfather used to say that Eknath would one day bring glory to the name of his great grandfather Bhanudas. At the age of six his sacred thread ceremony was performed. The neighbors were very affectionate to him. Every evening various scriptures were read over at their residence. Thus he was deeply rooted in bhakti right from the childhood.

Gradually he felt the need of a Guru to guide him. One night while he was doing Kirtan in a temple, he heard a divine voice asking him to go to Devgarh to take shelter at the feet of Mahatma Janardan Pant. Eknath sat on the journey by foot and after traveling for two nights reached Devgarh and became a disciple of Mahatma Janardan Pant. He used to serve him whole heartedly. Once he saved Mahatma Janardan Pant from enemies by fighting with them for four hours. Mahatma Janardan Pant was very much pleased with Eknath. He deployed him for keeping accounts. One day the accounts did not tally as there was an error of one Pai. When ultimately the accounts tallied Eknath was overjoyed. Mahatma Janardan Pant remarked that if he was so overjoyed by finding the mistake relating to a Pai, how much he would be happy if he could understand the mistake one commits in the world. Mahatma Janardan Pant told him that the greatest purpose of life is to realize the Truth and wasting this opportunity was the biggest mistake. Eknath fell at the feet of his Guru Mahatma Janardan Pant and by his grace had a glimpse of Lord Dattatreya. He felt no duality between Lord Dattatreya and his Guru. Eknath kept on getting glimpses of Lord Dattatreya. At one place Eknath has mentioned that 'within or without, in the entire creation Lord Dattatreya is present; He has enchanted me; my feeling of duality has vanished.' Once Dattatreya appeared before Eknath in the form of a *Malang* (an Avdhut) and blessed him that he would lead many people on the path of bhakti and would author an extra-ordinary commentary on Srimadbhagvad. Eknath then took Shri Krishna Mantra from his Guru and with his permission proceeded to Shoolbhanjan Mountain for *Tapa* near the Tapovan of Markendey Rishi.

He used to meditate upon Lord Krishna and Lord Krishna appeared before him. During this period of *Tapa*, a snake entangled him but because of touching Eknath's

body, the snake lost his biting faculty. The snake started dancing with its hood over the head of Eknath. A Gwala (milkman) used to bring some milk for Eknath, who later narrated this incidence to him. After completing his Krishna-Upasana *Yagya*, Mahatma Eknath proceeded for pilgrimage with the permission of his Guru.

For thirteen years Mahatma Eknath kept on visiting various places of pilgrimage and at the age of twenty-five he came back to Paithan, where he stayed in the Pimpleshwar Mahadev temple. His grand parents came to meet him. His grandfather Chakrapani showed him a letter of his Guru Mahatma Janardan Pant, who had asked Eknath to marry and lead a family life. Eknath complied with his Guru's order and married a Brahman girl named Girija. His family life was very peaceful and he spent his time in bhakti. His wife Girija extended him all support. He used to sleep for four hours in the night and the remaining time was used in talking about the Divine, Gyaneshwari (the book authored by Sant Gyaneshwar) and other scriptures.

Girija very competently managed her family. By serving her husband she climbed up the path of spirituality. Mahatma Eknath at one place has stated that when the husband and wife both together think alike and move ahead only then they accomplish their task. They had three children; their son was named Hari and two daughters were named Godavari and Ganga. Their house was regularly visited by Sadhus and Mahatmas. Mahatma Eknath was very tolerant and dignified. An important incidence of his life relates to a Yavan. Mahatma Eknath daily used to go to take bath in the river Godavari. This Yavan used to gargle on him when he returned after taking bath. Thus Mahatma Eknath had to take bath a number of times. One day he gargled 108 times on Mahatma Eknath and Mahatma Eknath happily took bath 108 times. This aroused a feeling of deep remorse in the Yavan, who fell at the feet of Eknath Maharaj. Mahatma Eknath forgave him immediately. He became a completely changed person by the grace of Mahatma Eknath.

Once on the occasion of the Shraddh (a ceremony in the honour and for the benefit of deceased) of his father, Mahatma Eknath was standing at his gate waiting for the Brahmans to arrive. Just then a few Mahars (low caste people) passed through and smelling the good odor of the food commented that they could never eat such a food. Mahatma Eknath heard them and his heart melted with pity for them. He invited them and offered them the food. He then got the food prepared afresh but Brahmans refused to eat. Eknath Maharaj then prayed the *Pitars* (the deceased parental ancestors). Bhanudas, Chakrapani and Surya Narayan, his ancestors appeared in person and accepted the food. The Brahmans were astonished and sought his forgiveness. The great poet saint Moropant has described this incidence very vividly.

Mahatma Eknath saw the same soul manifesting in the form of various creatures. Once after finishing his pilgrimage to Kashi, he was carrying the holy water of the Ganges from Prayag to Rameshwaram to offer it to Lord. On the way he saw a thirsty donkey in a deserted area. He was moved seeing the pathetic condition of the donkey and gave him the Ganges-water to drink. His companions objected to his doing so but Eknath Maharaj told them that the God resides in all creatures. Quenching the thirst of a thirsty

creature was equivalent to offering the holy water to the Lord a million times. The great poet saint Moropant has stated that by his act Eknath Maharaj earned the *Punya* (reward) of feeding a hundred-thousand Brahmans.

Eknath Maharaj was very kind hearted. He visited the residence of a prostitute, who repented for her past life and sought Eknath Maharaj's blessings in order to receive God's grace. Similarly, he blessed some thieves, who wanted to run away after committing theft at his house but became blind. Eknath Maharaj not only forgave them but gave them food. Their lives changed thereafter and they became good citizens.

Once a Brahman came to Paithan. He was in need of two hundred rupees for the sacred thread ceremony of his son. Some people told him that they would give him the money if he could somehow annoy Eknath Maharaj. The Brahman was a simpleton. He believed them and came to the residence of Eknath Maharaj, who was engaged in Pooja then. The Brahman set cross-legged on Eknath Maharaj's thigh. Eknath Maharaj, however, took it very kindly and took it as an expression of Brahman's affection. He was not annoyed at all. At the time of food the Brahman rode on the shoulders of Eknath Maharaj's wife Girija. She also was not annoyed and told Eknath Maharaj that she would not let her son (the Brahman) fall down. The Brahman was embarrassed. He told the entire story to Eknath Maharaj, who told him that if he knew about it, he would have expressed annoyance in order to help him.

Once a Brahman, who had Parasmani (the philosopher's stone) left it with Eknath Maharaj while going on pilgrimage. Eknath Maharaj kept it under the seat of the Lord and forgot about it. On return when the Brahman asked for the Parasmani, Eknath Maharaj asked his servant Uddhav to bring the Parasmani. Uddhav, however, told him that the Parasmani would have been thrown in the river Godavari along with other remnants. The Brahman doubted Eknath Maharaj, who took him to the river and picked out many such stones, asking the Brahman to take the one which belonged to him. The Brahman was surprised to see that all those stones were Parasmani.

The Lord enjoys the company and serving his Bhakts. Lord Shri Krishna used to serve Eknath Maharaj in the form of Shrikhandiya, who used to collect items necessary for Pooja and used to prepare Shrikhand-sandalwood paste for Eknath Maharaj for offering it to the Lord. A Brahman was doing *Tapa* in Dwarka for having a glimpse of the Lord, Who told him that He would meet him in Paithan in the form of Shrikhandiya at the residence of Eknath Maharaj. The Brahman accordingly came to Paithan and saw Shrikhandiya going to fetch water but he could not make it out that he was seeing the Lord. The Lord then disappeared. When the Brahman asked Eknath Maharaj about Shrikhandiya and told him what the Lord had told him, Eknath Maharaj was overwhelmed with gratitude towards the Lord, Who took all the pains for Eknath Maharaj and had served him in the form of Shrikhandiya.

Eknath Maharaj was deeply attracted towards Sant Gyaneshwar, who inspired him to visit Alandi-the Samadhi place of Sant Gyaneshwar via Pandharpur. Sant Gyaneshwar told him in his dream to remove the loop of Ajan-tree from his neck. Eknath

Maharaj located the Samadhi of Sant Gyaneshwar spotting the Ajan-tree near the Samadhi of Sant Gyaneshwar. He went inside the Samadhi place and saw that a branch of Ajan-tree was encircling the neck of Sant Gyaneshwar, who was seated in *Vrijasana*. Eknath Maharaj removed the loop and closed the door of the Samadhi. He remained there for three days and got inspiration to propagate Gyaneshwari. After returning to Paithan, Eknath Maharaj explained the principles of Gyaneshwari and interpreted Srimadbhagavadgita to people in accordance with Gyaneshwari.

Mahatma Eknath embraced both his slanderers, as well as those who praised him. In regard to slanderers, Eknath Maharaj used to say that they are the real well-wishers, who through their criticism afford an opportunity for one to reform. They are like Guru, who cleanses one of dirt. Thus Eknath Maharaj was liberal to all. He left this mortal world in the year 1656 Vikram Samvat and had predicted about his last. On the fateful day of Chaitra-Krishna-Ashtami he took bath in the river Godavari in the early morning. People were doing Kirtan. Great saints and Mahatmas had gathered over there and enchanting the name of the Lord when Eknath Maharaj took Samadhi.



Swami Dayanand Saraswati

Swami Dayanand Saraswati

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was not only a great scholar and philosopher but was also a great reformer, who preached against blind following of rituals of the Hindu religion such as idol-worship, caste-system, animal sacrifice and restriction against reading Vedas by ladies. He is the one who inspired people to turn the flow of their spiritual current towards the Vedas. He was an exponent of 'Swarajya' (self-rule), 'Swadesh-bhakti' (love for the nation) and 'Swadharma-Acharan' (following one's own religion). He was a Mahrishi, who exhorted people to come out of the darkness of ignorance. It was the time when the religious-messengers from other countries were propagating their own religious beliefs by making fun of the Indian cultural, religious and spiritual consciousness. Many new sects were emerging and people were going away from the Vedic Dharma. In such a difficult time he held high the flag of Vedic-Dharma and spent all his life in uprooting the non-Indian elements and bringing glory to the Vedic culture not only in Bengal, Bihar, Madras, Punjab, Sindh, Kashmir and the entire South and North India but also in a very large area of Africa, Europe and America.

He was born in Tankara of Morvi in Gujarat on 12 February 1824. His original name was Mool Shankar. His father Ambashankar was a rich, prosperous and influential person belonging to an eminent Samvedi-Brahmin family of the village. He used to collect revenue on behalf of the king. At the age of eight, sacred thread ceremony for Mool Shankar was performed. His father was a follower of Shiva. When Mool Shankar turned ten, he started observing fast on the occasion of Shivaratri on the insistence of his mother. On one of such occasions, he kept awake the whole night in order to please the Lord in a temple on the outskirts of the village. While the others fell asleep, he saw a mouse eating the offerings made to the Lord and running over the idol. After seeing this, a question about the real Shiva-Tatva arose in his mind. His father could not give him a satisfactory answer. He, therefore, narrated the incidence to his mother on returning home and sought her blessings to understand the Shiva-Tatva.

When Mool Shankar was fourteen, he had gone out of the house to participate in a function, where he got the message of illness of his sister. He returned home and within two hours his sister died of illness. He was shocked by the sudden demise of his sister, which made him think about the mortal-nature of the world. A few days later his uncle also expired. This made Mool Shankar thoroughly upset. On asking people suggested that yoga and *Vairagya* can provide relief to human beings from their sufferings. He, therefore, decided to leave the house. His father tried to convince him variously against *Sanyas* and even thought of getting him married, but Mool Shankar was firm on his decision. He then left his home in the search of a Sadguru. Mool Shankar wandered all over the country for around twenty years visiting temples and sacred places of religious devotion. He had discussion on Vedanta with Brahmanand Swami of Chaitnya *Muth* in Baroda and learnt yoga from Jwalanandpuri and Shivanandgiri. After being initiated in yoga, he named himself as Dayanand. Later he was known as Swami Dayanand. In Chanod he was initiated in the *Sanyas*-Ashram by Poornanad Swami.

Swami Dayanand wandered in search of a Sadguru. His search ended with Swami Virjanand in Mathura, who accepted Dayanand as his disciple. Swami Virjananda was not only a great scholar of grammar but also had deep in-sight of the Vedas. It had taken eleven years for Dayanand to reach Swami Virjanand, who by now was eighty and Dayanand himself was thirty-six. Before reaching the pious feet of Swami Virjanand, Dayanand had engaged himself in severe *Tapa* in Uttrakhand. The first instruction which Dayanand received from Swami Virjanand was to throw away all the books through which he had acquired knowledge in the river Yamuna. Dayanand complied with it and started receiving knowledge of Vedas at the feet of Swami Virjanand. Dayanand used to fetch water for Swami Virjanand to take bath and used to clean the Ashram. Once, however, a bit of dust was left out. Perchance the feet of Swami Virjanand fell on the dust. He was annoyed and started beating Dayanand. After the punishment was over, Dayanand stroked the hand of his teacher Swami Virjanand apologizing that the hand of his teacher is soft, which would be aching because of hitting at his tough body. Swami Virjanand was pleased with the devotion of Dayanand, who had passed this tough test and Swami Virjanand then blessed him whole heartedly.

Swami Virjanand was a strict teacher. He did not repeat the lesson once told. He had asked Dayanand that if Dayanand forgot his lesson then it would be better for him to go and drown himself in the river rather than asking him to repeat the lesson. Once it so happened that Dayanand could not recollect one of the lessons taught by his teacher-Swami Virjanand. He, therefore, sat below a tree at the bank of the river with the firm resolve that if he did not recollect the lesson he would give up his life in the river Yamuna. A little later Dayanand had a nap in which he saw some one appearing in his dream and explaining him that lesson. Dayanand narrated the incidence to Swami Virjanand, who was extremely happy and appreciated the devotion of Dayanand. Dayanand remained for about three years with Swami Virjanand, who then asked Dayanand to spread the Vedic-knowledge amongst common people. Dayanand was now Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

Swami Dayanand started his Vedic campaign at the Kumbh-mela in Haridwar. He then started spreading the message of Vedas at different places. He visited Prayag and Gaya. People were deeply impressed by the eloquence of Swami Dayanand and soon they started reciting Vedic verses at their homes. On 7 April, 1875 Dayanand Saraswati formed the Arya Samaj at Bombay. It was a Hindu reforms movement, meaning "society of the nobles". It generated a wave of Vedic revolution in the country. In Pune Mahadev Govind Ranade received and welcomed Swami Dayanand and soon Arya Samaj was established in various parts of the country. In Bengal he was received and highly appreciated by Devendranath Thakur, the famous leader of Brahmasamaj and Keshavchandra Sen.

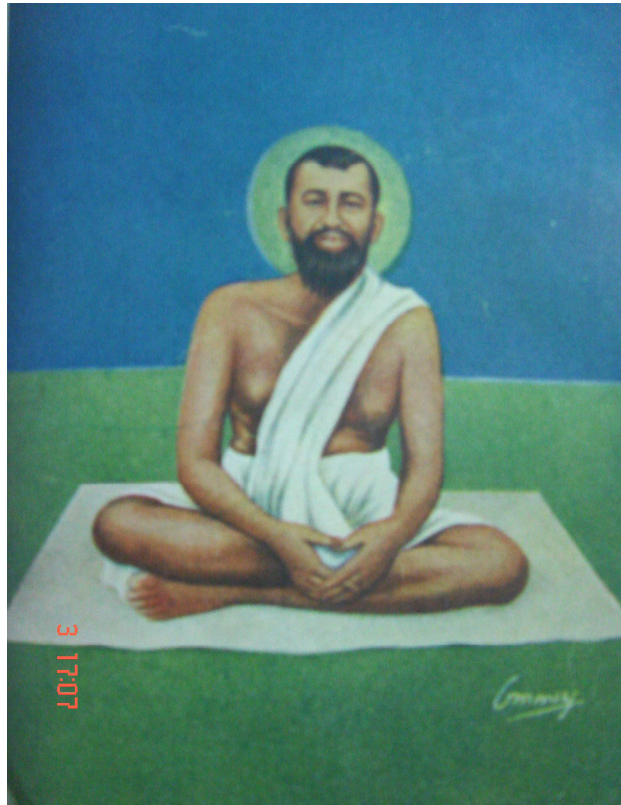
In 1877 Lord Lyuten had called a meeting of the leaders in Delhi. Swami Dayanand also visited Delhi and invited the leaders who had come to participate in a meeting at his residence. Sir Syed Ahmad and Keshavchand had also come to Delhi. Swami Dayanand requested all of them to support and spread the message of Vedic-

dharma. Swami Dayanand awakened the nation and asked them to read the Vedas. He was the Indian Luther for the spiritual awakening of India. As Luther propagated the message of Bible through the support of Eternal Truth, Swami Dayanand spread the message of Eternal Truth through the Vedic knowledge. He sowed the seed of love for the nation through living in accordance with Vedas. Swami Dayanand's devotion is entirely based on Vedas.

Various attempts were made to lure Swami Dayanand in order to distract him from propagating the message of Vedas. The Maharana of Udaipur offered him to be the Mahanta (head priest) of the Shiva temple, which had uncounted wealth but Swami Dayanand refused. Swami Dayanand's life and mission forms a glorious chapter in the reformation of Hindu religious movement in the 19th century. He reminded his countrymen of the egalitarian approach of the Vedas. He said that the *Smritis* and *Puranas* have misled people into practices such as untouchability and exploitation of women. He also revived the ancient Indian educational system of *Gurukula*, where students from different strata of the society studied together under one teacher without any discrimination. He forcefully argued that there was no untouchability in the vedic times. All Aryans were equal, and had to undergo disciplines or *Samkaras* as laid down in the *shrutis*, like *upanayana* (the ordaining ceremony), which was essential for women also. He propagated these reforms at a time when not even 2% of women in India were educated and the *Purdah* (veil) system was prevalent in most of the Northern part of India.

Swami Dayanand was very kind and liberal. He faced lot of opposition in his mission but he crossed all obstacles. In Anoopshahr, one of his opponents gave him poison in beetle leaf. Swami Dayanand through yogic exercises negated the effect of poison. The wrong-doer was caught and imprisoned. When Swamiji came to know of it he said that he had come to liberate people rather than getting them tied and desired the prisoner to be released. Accordingly that man was set free.

Due to his radical thinking and approach to the social issues and beliefs Swami Dayanand had created many enemies around him. In the year 1883 Swami Dayanand accepted the invitation of the king of Jodhpur, who had taken Swami Dayanand as his Guru and used to respect and honor him a lot. One day Swami Dayanand entered the royal court without prior intimation. The king was in the company of one Nanhi Jan, a concubine. Swami Dayanand did not approve of it and remarked that it was not appropriate that a lion and a bitch live together. The king felt embarrassed and sent back Nanhi Jan. Nanhi Jan, however, felt severely offended and decided to get Swami Dayanand killed. She bribed and persuaded the cook named Jaggannath to give poison to Swami Dayanand in his food. Around midnight, Swami Dayanand had severe pain in stomach. He realized that he had been poisoned. Though through yogic exercises he tried to vomit the poison but it was too late. He summoned the repentant cook, gave him money and asked him to flee, looking at the danger to his life which the news will cause. Swami Dayanand was taken to Ajmer for treatment but he could not be saved. He breathed his last saying, O The Merciful! Let Your Will be fulfilled!



Ramakrishna Paramhans

Ramakrishna Paramhans

Ramakrishna Paramhans is one of the most renowned saints of India. When the country was then reeling under the atrocities of the British rule, Ramakrishna Paramhans was a historical necessity for waking up the people and for spreading the message of equality of all religions. He occupies the highest place amongst saints who worshipped the Divine in the form of 'Shakti' (the Goddess Mother Kali or the Goddess of Energy or Power). He was a great Sadhak, great philosopher and a self-realized soul. He invited attention of the people towards the *Sanatan-Parampara* (the traditional way of worship), as the need of the hour was the soothing message of a saint.

He was born on 18 February 1836 in Kamarpookoor of Bengal in a poor but pious Brahman family. He was named as Gadadhar and his father was Khudiram Chattopadhyaya. In the words of the famous author Romyarolan, Ramakrishna Paramhans was born as a blessing flowing from over two thousand years of penance by the people of India. His father was an orthodox Brahman and a devotee of the Lord. The influence of his father was clearly visible in the upbringing of Ramakrishna, who right from his early childhood acquired religious inclination and got interested in serving saints.

At the age of seven, Ramakrishna lost his father. At the age of seventeen, he joined his elder brother at Calcutta. After a few days he had to shift along with his elder brother to the Dakshineswar temple of Rani Rasmani, which changed his life. He surrendered himself at the feet of the Mother-Goddess. After the death of his elder brother, the responsibility of performing Pooja fell at the shoulders of Ramakrishna. He got so engrossed in his devotion that people even started calling him mad. He at times sat for hours in Samadhi meditating on the Mother-Goddess. He got desperate to have a glimpse of the Mother in reality. In solitude he used to ask the Mother-Goddess whether She really existed in the idol or it was just an imagination of poets and feeling of devotees. One day he got so desperate that he picked up the naked-sword hanging on the wall of the temple and thought of sacrificing his life, if the Mother-Goddess did not show Her glimpse. Suddenly then an ocean of light started flowing towards him, which engulfed him in its fold and tears started rolling out of Ramakrishna's eyes. His prayer was answered; he became an accomplished saint. From Gadadhar he transformed into Swami Ramakrishna. The idol made of stone turned into the Eternal, Living and Loving Maa-Kali. She was the 'Param-Brahm' for him and he started having Her glimpse in the idol.

Ramakrishna had received the grace of Maa-Kali. He used to sit in Samadhi for hours together and people started calling him mad. This matter reached his village Kamarpookoor also. His wife Shardadmani Devi came to Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna told him that for him all ladies were a form of Mother Goddess and that towards her also he had the same feeling. If she desired him to be a worldly-man, he was prepared but for him the difference between man and woman was only at the physical level. At the level of soul, all are a manifestation of the Mother. Shardamani desired only to live with him.

Ramakrishna agreed and started imparting spiritual knowledge to her. On the other hand Shardamani fully cast herself in the mold of her husband.

One day Ramakrishna was standing at the bank of river Ganges in front of the Dakshineswar temple. Cool breeze was flowing, which had taken Ramakrishna in a state of ecstasy. Suddenly he spotted a boat deep inside the river. Ramakrishna saw a young lady wearing black clothes on the boat. She was a Yogini. Ramakrishna bowed at her feet. She was Master of Tantra and bhakti yoga. She taught Tantra and bhakti yoga to Ramakrishna and started living in the temple.

A Vedanti named Totapuri also contributed in Ramakrishna's spiritual progress. Impressed by the devotion and love of Ramakrishna, Sanyasi Totapuri stayed for eleven months in Dakshineswar temple and helped Ramakrishna to acquire the state of a Paramhans. Brahmsamaji Keshavchandra Sen and Narendra Dutt (Swami Vivekananda) received spiritual enlightenment in the company of Ramakrishna Paramhans, which helped them make a great contribution in the awakening of Indian masses.

Ramakrishna Paramhans prayed the mother to remove the thought of discrimination from his mind and that he should be able to see Her presence in all creatures. This was the basic principle of his saintly life. He neither propagated any new creed nor did he pronounce any new philosophy. In the last twenty years of his life, Ramakrishna Paramhans visited many places of pilgrimage in the North India including Kashi, Vrindavan and Prayag. Swami Vivekananda made a great contribution in spreading his message.

Towards the later part of the Nineteenth Century not only India but the entire world needed such a spiritual enlightenment. The Indian culture had gifted to the world a spiritual current in the form of Ramakrishna Paramhans. Both the orthodox and the rationalists accepted his preaching. The country looked upon him as a protector of the Indian culture. He was a great integrator, who showed that the essence of all religions was the same, to reach the Truth. He used to say that as many deserts are prepared from the same sugar, similarly the divine is worshiped in various forms in different societies. His attainment from his severe sadhana was to enter the state of ecstasy. He usually lived in that state of ecstasy. He used to say that as the needle of the direction-indicator instrument always points towards North and the sailors do not lose direction, similarly devotees, whose hearts are inclined towards the divine, they do not get distracted by the world. He also used to say that there was no better way to attain peace except complete surrender at the feet of the divine and that there was no better way to reach the divine than the self-less service.

Most of his time was spent in a state of Samadhi. In 1886 he took the Mahasamadhi.



Swami Vivekanand

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda was born on 12 January 1863, on the eve of Makara Sankranti in Shimla Pally of Calcutta. He was born at a time when the British Empire had firmly taken roots in India and the missionaries were at full flow in spreading their mission and were making fun of Indian culture and religion. Raja Ram Mohan Ray had established the Brahm Samaj. He was born in a reputed Kayastha family. His father was Vishvanath and mother was Bhuvaneshwari Devi. She was a pious and noble lady under whose shelter Narendra Nath, as Vivekananda was then known, started growing. From the childhood itself, Narendra had started exhibiting his divine inclination. While crying, if someone uttered the name of Lord Shiva, Narendra used to stop crying and would start laughing. He used to feel happy by seeing Sadhus at the door. Once he gave some garment to a Sadhu and on asking he fearlessly said that he had given that garment to the Sadhu, who had asked for alms. His mother used to recite Ramayana before him, which sowed the seed of Ram-bhakti in young Narendra. On the other hand right at this time Ramakrishna Paramhans was doing *Tapa* and praying for molding Narendra as Vivekananda. Vivekananda had the same importance in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhans as Arjun in the Life of Krishna and Anand in the life of Lord Buddha.

At the age of six, Narendra was sent to school for formal education. As he grew young, he got interested in Brahm-Samaj as well together with higher education. He also acquired knowledge of the western culture and education through his father. Narendra had developed a notion that one should not believe in the truth of anything unless one has known it through self-experience. He used to hold discussions with the scholars of Brahm Samaj but the dry *Upasana* of Nirgun-Nirakar Brahm could not attract him for long. He was thirsty to taste the nectar of devotion. He, therefore, started visiting Ramakrishna Paramhans in the Dakshineswar temple.

In the very first visit Narendra got deeply attracted towards Ramakrishna Paramhans. On the other hand Ramakrishna Paramhans was surprised to see a person like Narendra, who was far away from the worldly attractions and whose face was glowing with divinity. It is true that it is the longing of the Master that pulls the disciple towards him. This was the case here. Ramakrishna Paramhans used to pray before the Mother Goddess that he can not live without seeing Narendra.

Initially Narendra sought permission of his Guru Ramakrishna Paramhans to study Vedanta and started studying scriptures. His mind, which had already evolved through the interaction with Brahm Samaj soon grasped the essence of Advait-Gyan (non-duality).

Ramakrishna Paramhans once put Narendra through a tough test. He started ignoring him but Narendra kept on visiting Ramakrishna Paramhans. Ramakrishna Paramhans then asked him that he was ignoring him, yet he (Narendra) keeps visiting; why? Narendra replied that he loved Ramakrishna Paramhans and that was the only

reason for him to visit Dakshineswar temple. Ramakrishna Paramhans was extremely pleased with this answer. Similarly, once Ramakrishna Paramhans told him that he wanted to fill him with divine power and Siddhi. Narendra fell at his feet and said that his objective was to realize the Truth.

Narendra's father at times used to get worried that Narendra may not become a Sanyasi. He, therefore, used to ask him to not to go to Dakshineswar. Narendra would reply that the attraction of Ramakrishna Paramhans pulls him so much that he can not refrain from visiting him. Similarly, at times when Narendra was unable to come to Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna Paramhans himself used to visit Narendra in Calcutta.

The year when Narendra entered B.A., his father passed away. The responsibility of the entire family fell on his shoulders. He took admission in Law but had to look for a job to run the family. He, however, could not find a job. This had shaken his belief in the existence of God. It reached the ears of Ramakrishna Paramhans, who told people that Maa-Kali is assuring me that Narendra would never turn an atheist.

One day in the search of job, Narendra fell unconscious due to hunger and thirst. It was raining heavily. He felt that some invisible force touched him, which rejuvenated him. Narendra now thought of leaving the house. The same night Ramakrishna Paramhans came to visit him and took him to Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna Paramhans told him that he knew that he (Narendra) was born to fulfill the divine duty assigned to him and that he (Narendra) cannot live a worldly life for long but till he (Ramakrishna Paramhans) was alive, Narendra would have to live a worldly life. Saying this Ramakrishna Paramhans started crying. The next day Narendra returned home.

Once Narendra thought that his Master was an accomplished person and a devotee of Shakti, if he prays before the Mother-Goddess all his financial difficulties would be over. Narendra visited Dakshineswar and made a request to Ramakrishna Paramhans to pray before the Mother. Ramakrishna Paramhans told Narendra to pray himself before the Goddess, saying that the Mother would do what is auspicious for him. In the night when Narendra stood before the Goddess, he could not ask for the worldly needs, that thought did not come in his mind, instead he asked for Tyaga (detachment), *Gyan* (knowledge) and bhakti (devotion). Ramakrishna Paramhans sent him a second and then for the third time but Narendra repeated the same prayer. This gave him a firm belief in the existence of the Mother-Goddess in the idol. Ramakrishna Paramhans then blessed Narendra that he would not suffer from the lack of basic needs of life.

Ramakrishna Paramhans used to tell Narendra that he should not believe in anything simply because he (Ramakrishna Paramhans) has said so, but understand that and learn through self-experience. Ramakrishna Paramhans filled Narendra with all his spiritual vitality. Once in his dream Ramakrishna Paramhans asked Narendra to follow him to have a glimpse of Radha-Gopi. Narendra started walking after him and was surprised to see that Ramakrishna Paramhans himself turned into Radha. This completely transformed Narendra into a devotee.

When the family people of Narendra started talking about his marriage, Ramakrishna Paramhans used to pray Maa-Kali to not to entangle Narendra into the world. His prayers were answered and Narendra did not marry. He started acquiring spiritual knowledge at the feet of Ramakrishna Paramhans, with whom he spent six years in Dakshineswar spending his time in *Tapsya* and sadhana. Ramakrishna Paramhans was an accomplished saint absorbed in the self and Narendra was his mouth-piece. In 1885 when Ramakrishna Paramhans fell sick, Narendra took full care of him. A pleased Ramakrishna Paramhans gave him the Ram-Mantra, which was Maha-Mantra for Narendra. In 1886 Ramakrishna Paramhans took Mahasamadhi. From Kashipur his physical remains were brought to Badnagar. Narendra was elected as the head of the Badnagar *Muth* (monastery). Narendra and other disciples of Ramakrishna Paramhans vowed to take *Sanyas* in order to spread the message of their Master amongst people. Soon Badnagar *Muth* became a symbol of spiritual-sadhana, *Gyan* and bhakti.

Swamiji (Narendra) traveled to Banaras, Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra and Vrindavan. After staying for some time in Vrindavan, he traveled to Haridwar and Rishikesh. He also visited Allahabad and Gazipur, where he met the famous saint Payhari Baba. Thereafter he spent some time doing *Tapa* in Rishikesh.

Swamiji thereafter started the tour of Rajasthan. The Diwan (a high ranking official of the princely-state) of Alwar invited him at his residence. The king of Alwar also was present, who told Swamiji that he did not believe in idol-worship. A photo of the king was hanging there in the room. Swamiji asked the Diwan to spit on it. He did not do so saying that it was his king's photo, who was respected and revered by him. Swamiji then asked others to spit on the photo but they also refused. Swamiji then told the king that although the photo was merely a paper but in the mind of people it represented the king. Similarly, an idol is not a statue of stone in the minds of devotees. The Maharaja of Alwar understood the message and fell at the feet of Swamiji taking him as his Guru.

Swamiji then came to Ajmer where on the Abu-Pahari the king of Khetri met him. Swamiji came to Khetri along with the king. The king of Khetri also became his disciple. From Khetri Swamiji went to Ahemdabad and traveled through Gujarat from where he visited various places of pilgrimage like Rameshwaram, Madurai and Kanyakumari in South India spreading the message of Advait-*Gyan*. Day-by-day he was being elevated on the path of spirituality.

Once he entered a deep forest. He was tired because of hunger. He saw a hungry lion coming towards him. Swamiji thought that he was hungry and so was the lion. He had not realized the God so far and, therefore, there was no utility of his body. Swamiji, therefore, thought that it was better that the lion satiates its hunger by eating him. But surprisingly the lion could not move towards Swamiji, who spent the night in the jungle. Thereafter Swamiji traveled to Madras and Hyderabad.

The king of Khetri was blessed with a son. Swamiji went to Khetri on the invitation of the king. This was the time when an all religions conclave was to take place in Chicago. On the insistence of the king of Khetri, Swamiji agreed to participate in this

conclave to represent India. It was then that Swamiji adopted the title 'Vivekananda' on the suggestion of king of Khetri. He reached America via China and Japan. On 11 September 1893, Swami Vivekananda entered the conclave clad in saffron clothes. The divinity reflecting on his face had enchanted everyone present over there. When he addressed the gathering as 'Brothers and Sisters', their heads bowed down at the feet of Swami Vivekananda, an embodiment of Indian culture and spiritual treasure, in reverence with devotion, love and respect.

In his address Swami Vivekananda spoke of the magnanimity of the Hindu religion, which approves of the free-development of all religions and also about the integration of the Hindu religion and Buddhism. People of America received him with great enthusiasm and he was requested to visit various places in America. From America Swami Vivekananda traveled to Europe, where he was especially welcomed. People saw in him both the Jesus Christ and Mahatma Buddha. Thereafter Swami Vivekananda returned to India, where people were eager to receive him.

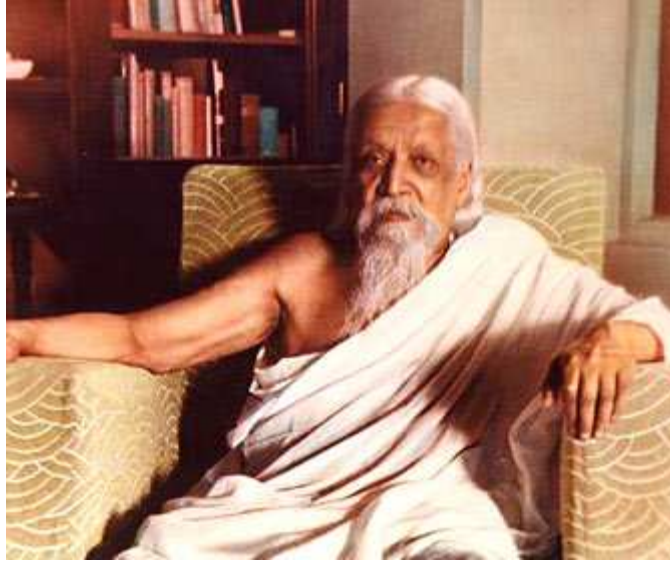
Swami Vivekananda then visited Madras and Bengal and later he went to Almora for health reasons. In the meanwhile Miss Margaret Noble, popularly known as Sister Nivedita, came to India on the invitation of Swami Vivekananda and started working on the publication of the message of Swami Vivekananda and on the integration of the Indian and Western thoughts. From Almora Swami Vivekananda went to Amarnath and visited the Shivalinga. Sister Nivedita accompanied him. From Kashmir, he came to Calcutta and from there he visited America and Europe again. Sister Nivedita accompanied him on this tour. Swami Vivekananda fearlessly asked the people to turn their minds towards spirituality. On return from there, he started living in the Belur-*Muth*, but his health started deteriorating gradually.

During this period an influential Japanese Okara came to Belur *Muth* and on his insistence Swamiji visited Bodhgaya and Banaras. This was his last outing. From Banaras he returned to Belur. In Belur, Swamiji once said- 'Brahm, Brahm is Omnipresent. Brahm is Here and Now. Brahm can be seen, can be known like an *Amla* kept on the palm.' He also said that one, who attains Self-realization, becomes center of spiritual energy. By his mere will, people receive spiritual enlightenment, which is called grace.

Throughout his life Swami Vivekananda advocated the principle of non-duality. He was a great self-realized saint, who laid a lot of stress on truth, stating that Truth is Eternal. Through the concept on non-duality he explained that it is you, who enjoy worldly pleasures in the form of a king and it is you, who beg for alms as a beggar. It is you who is wise or ignorant and, therefore, having understood this non-duality you should be compassionate towards all creatures. He considered the Gopi-Bhava as the highest expression of love, which according to him could not be understood without the complete purity of mind. He stated that the main objective of the Lord Krishna's incarnation was to give this message of the superiority of Gopi-Prem.

His health was now fast deteriorating but he was keeping himself engaged in his mission. A few days before his death people asked him whether he knew who he was.

Swamiji seriously replied-‘Yes. I know’. No one dared ask him further. His disciples from various countries used to come to visit him. Three days before his heavenly abode, he indicated the place on the bank of river Ganges to Swami Premanand where his last rites should be performed. Accordingly his Samadhi is situated at that place. His last day was very peaceful. In the morning till eleven, he spent time in solitude. With his permission Kali-Pooja was performed in the *Muth*. The evening he spent in contemplation facing towards the Ganges. On the fateful day of 4 July 1902 he took the Mahasamadhi. He lived for thirty-nine years five months and twenty-four days, as he used to say that he would not live for forty years. Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of Vivek and Anand, the Soul and Love.



Aurobindo Ghosh

Mahayogi Aurobindo

Aurobindo was a Mahayogi; he was not only a Hathyogi but also a Rajyogi and Layyogi-in fact all in one. He was at the spearhead of the spiritual thinkers of the Twentieth Century. He stated that the soul is eternal, which cannot be overpowered by external enemies. The aim of his yoga was not only rising above the body-consciousness and realization of the self but he wanted to fill the mind, intellect, *Pran* and the very life with divinity in order to bring on earth the spiritual and supramental existence

Born on 15 August 1872, Sri Aurobindo was an Indian nationalist, freedom fighter, philosopher, yogi, guru, and poet. He joined the Indian movement for freedom from British rule and for some time became one of its most important leaders before developing his own vision of human progress and spiritual evolution. Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta in a Kayastha family. His father Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose was District Surgeon of Rangapur, Bengal and Swarnalata Devi, his mother was the daughter of Brahma religious and social reformer, Rajnarayan Basu. Aurobindo spent his first five years at Rangapur, where his father had been posted. Dr. Ghose, who had previously lived in Britain and studied medicine at King's College, Aberdeen, was determined that his children should have English education and upbringing free of any Indian influences. In 1877, he therefore sent the young Aurobindo and two elder siblings - Manmohan and Benoybhusan to the Loreto Convent School in Darjeeling.

Aurobindo spent two years at Loreto Convent. In 1879, Aurobindo and his two elder brothers were taken to Manchester, England for European education. In 1884, Aurobindo joined St Paul's School. Here he learnt Greek and Latin, spending the last three years reading literature, especially English poetry. Dr. K.D. Ghose had an aspiration that his sons should pass the prestigious Indian Civil Service. To become an ICS official, students were required to pass a competitive examination, as well as study at an English university for two years under probation. With his limited financial resources, the only option Aurobindo had was to secure a scholarship at an English university, which he did by passing the scholarship examinations of King's College, Cambridge University. He stood first at the examination. He also passed the written examination of ICS after a few months, where he was ranked 11th out of 250 competitors. He spent the next two years at the King's College. By the end of two years of probation, Aurobindo got convinced that he did not want to serve the British, and, therefore, he did not present himself at the horse riding examination for ICS and accordingly was disqualified for the Service.

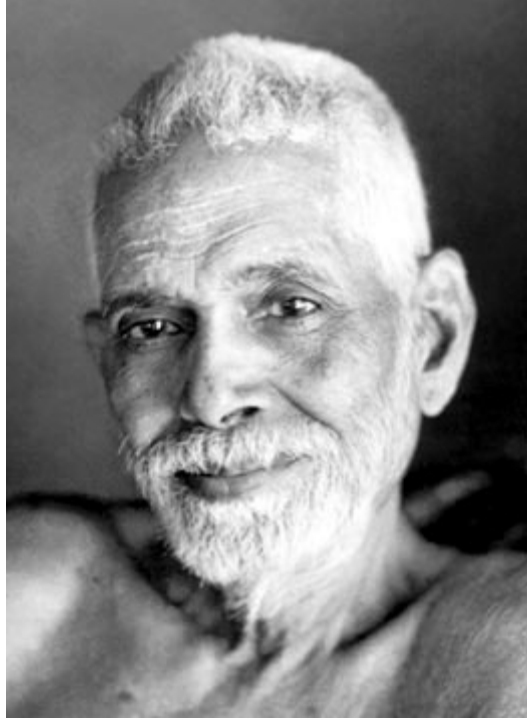
During his stay in England, he had developed love for the mother-land. He was also feeling that a great revolution is about to take place in which he had to play an important role. He learnt many foreign languages during this period. He also met Sayyajirao Gaekwad III, the king of Baroda in England, who was impressed by the young Aurobindo. At the age of twenty-one Aurobindo came back to India and started serving the king of Baroda. In 1905 he came to Calcutta and joined as the principal of Bengal National College. He also joined the 'Swarajya Andolan' (the freedom movement) and took part in politics for about the next five years. He was also associated with various

periodicals and magazines. Many a times he was also sent to jail. While he was in jail, he was allowed to come out of his cell for about half an hour or so. He used to stroll under a tree. One day he had the glimpse of Lord Krishna in place of the tree. In the jail also he started feeling the presence of the Lord in the prisoners, and in all beings. In the court also he felt the presence of the Lord. He, therefore, withdrew from politics and started concentrating entirely on his spiritual progress from the year 1910.

Sri Aurobindo chose Pondicherry as the place for his sadhana. He was already in yoga-sadhana but without a Guru. About two years before coming to Pondicherry, he came in contact with Marathi Yogi Vishnu Prabhakar and his guidance helped him to have firm faith in the Divine. The arrival of Mata-French Yogini in the Pondicherry Ashram proved greatly beneficial for the yoga-sadhana of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo has accepted great importance of Srimadbhagvad Gita and the Upanishads in his yoga-sadhana. He spent four years in severe sadhana and practiced solitude. Gradually the number of seekers and followers visiting the Ashram started increasing. The atmosphere of Pondicherry became very peaceful and pious because of Sri Aurobindo's sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo rejected a major conception of Indian philosophy of considering the World as Maya (illusion) and that renouncing the world was the only way out. He said that it is possible, not only to transcend human nature but also to transform it and to live in the world as a free and evolved human being with a new consciousness and a new nature which could spontaneously perceive truth of things on the basis of inner oneness, love and light. According to Sri Aurobindo man could evolve spiritually to a state of spiritual and supramental existence. This evolutionary existence he called a "Divine life on Earth", characterized by a spiritualized, supramental, truth-consciousness-oriented humanity.

Sri Aurobindo sat steadfast in Mahasamadhi in the midnight of 5 December 1950. His body, however, did not decompose even after one hundred eleven hours till 9 December when he was cremated in presence of thousands of visitors.



Mahrishi Raman

Mahrishi Raman

Mahrishi Ramana was born in a village called Tiruchushi in Madurai of Tamil Nadu on Arudra Darshanam day in the year 1879. His father Sundaram Iyer was an orthodox Iyer and his mother Ashgammal was a simple and pious lady. He was brought up in Madurai where his father used to practice as an advocate. Mahrishi Ramana was named Venkataraman at birth. His siblings were Nagaswamy, Nagasundaram and sister Alamelu.

Venkataraman was very intelligent and good at sports but lazy at school. He did have a few unusual traits. When he slept, he went into such a deep state of unconsciousness that he could be assaulted, without being woken up. He was very lucky for the team games, whichever side he played they won. This earned him the nickname 'Tangakai', which means 'golden hand. When Venkataraman was about 11, his father sent him to live with his paternal uncle Subbaiyar in Dindigul. He wanted his sons to be educated in English so that they could enter government service. In the village school only Tamil was taught. In 1891, when his uncle was transferred to Madurai, Venkataraman and his elder brother Nagaswamy moved with him. In Dindigul, Venkataraman studied up to fifth standard. Later he studied in the Smuts Middle School and in an American Missionary School.

Venkataraman was usually absorbed in some contemplation all the time. He was very charming and well behaved, as a result of which people used to get attracted towards him. He had read the biographies of the Sixty-three Tamil Saints (Naynar) and was deeply impressed by their character. He used to pray before the Lord that he may also become like them. 'Periyapuranam' also had deep impact on him. At the age of fifteen, an old man visited them. On enquiring from where he had come and learning that he had come from Arunachal, Venkataraman entered into a strange state as if he had recollected some lost memory. He got into an ecstasy. It appeared that he had some deep connection with the Arunachaleshwar-Shiva.

In 1892, Venkataraman's father Sundaram Iyer suddenly fell seriously ill and unexpectedly died at the age of 42. This sudden demise of his father had a deep impact on young Venkataraman. Similarly at the age of seventeen when once Venkataraman was on the roof of his uncle's house, he suddenly felt that he was going to die. He started contemplating whether it was going to be the death of his physical body or that of his self. He lied down on the roof and relaxed his body. He started thinking that in a short while his body would be taken for cremation and it would burn to ashes but whether with that the self residing in the body would also be burnt? His inner-conscious, however, answered that it can never happen; the death can kill the body but not the self as the soul is eternal, beyond the grip of death. This thought made him alert and removed the clouds of ignorance from him. He attained the knowledge of the self and this incidence aroused a feeling of detachment from the worldly affairs in him. He started visiting temple regularly and praying before Shiva-Natraj and Meenakshi to shower Their grace on him.

The time for Venkataraman to leave home had arrived. One day he left the house with three rupees with him. He left a letter behind for his family members not to go searching after him. He boarded a train for Tindivanam, which was the Railway Station nearest to Tiruvannamalai, the place where the Arunachaleshwar-Shiva temple was located. On the way he faced some difficulties and had even to mortgage his gold-earings for four rupees but ultimately he reached Tiruvannamalai. After getting down from the train, he straight went to the temple and prayed before the Lord to take him in His shelter. Then he came out of the temple and at the Ayamkulam pond threw away all his belongings and wore only a Kaupin (langot-strip of loin cloth). It started raining, as if the Lord had showered his grace on the young sadhu in the form of rains. Initially Venkataraman started his sadhana at the thousand-pillared Mandap but had to shift to the sanctum-sanctorum at the basement, which was dark and infested with insects in order to do his sadhana without disturbance in solitude. He, however, was so absorbed in his sadhana that he did not bother about his physical-body. Soon people started calling him 'Brahman-Swami'. His fame started reaching far and wide and people started visiting him unabatedly.

Once Tambiranji of Tiruvannamalai gave a lecture on the greatness of Balyogi Venkataraman. Per chance a child from the family of Venkataraman was present over there. He was convinced that this Balyogi is none else than their own Venkataraman. The news reached home. His mother along with his elder brother came to see him. She saw that her son was lying on a rock, his body had turned black but his eyes were shining with a divine glow in them. She asked him to return home but Venkataraman, who had taken Maun-vrat (vow to observe silence), did not answer her. On her insistence, he wrote: 'The Almighty decides the fate of people according to their deeds. Whatever has not to happen shall not happen. The best way is to observe silence.' Venkataraman's mother left but she used to come to visit him occasionally. After some time she started living in the Ramanashram itself.

After coming to Arunachal, Mahrishi Raman did not go anywhere else. He lived there for fifty-four years. During this period people from all over used to come to meet him. Mahrishi Raman held Arunachal Mountain in very high esteem, taking it to be a form of Lord Shiva, which encompassed in it the entire world. He did *Tapa* in Virupaksh and Amra-Guha caves of this mountain and composed 'Akshraman-Malai'. His disciples used to sing from 'Akshraman-Malai' while asking for alms. The life of Mahrishi Raman was full of *Tapa*. The monkeys, squirrels and other wild-animals, two white peacocks, a dog named Karuppan and cow named Laxmi were his beloved companions.

After leaving his home, Mahrishi Raman had spent eleven years in silence. Ganapati Shashtri, a great scholar and poet of Sanskrit came to meet him. He urged before Mahrishi Raman that he had studied Vedanta and other great scriptures but had not been able to understand the essence of *Tapa*. Mahrishi Ramana looked at him for about fifteen minutes and then breaking his silence told him that continuous engagement of mind in the quest of realizing the self is *Tapa*. Similarly, while reciting the mantra getting absorbed in the Mantra-Naad is *Tapa*. Ganapati Shashtri was fully satisfied with the

answer and he became a disciple of Mahrishi Ramana. It was he, who gave Venkataraman the name of “Bhagwan Raman Mahrishi”.

Mahrishi Ramana did not approve of exhibition of Siddhis and miraculous powers. For him the entire universe was pervaded by the same consciousness and, therefore, exhibition of such powers was meaningless. For him the quest for self-realization was the greatest *Tapa* and observing silence was the most powerful way of expression. People visiting him used to get answers to their queries through the silence of Mahrishi Ramana. Once Dr. Rajendra Prasad (the first President of India) had gone to visit Mahrishi Ramana. He asked him to give some message for Mahatma Gandhi. Mahrishi Ramana, however, replied that no message was necessary, as the power that is acting here, the same is acting there as well. Similarly, once a group of Muslims went to see Mahrishi Ramana and asked Mahrishi Ramana about the ‘aim of life’. Mahrishi Ramana spontaneously replied that the aim of life is Islam and then said Islam is to surrender one’s self at the feet of the Almighty. Islam alone can bring peace. His liberal and integrated approach surprised the people present over there.

Once Yogi Ranganathan had gone to meet Mahrishi Ramana. Mahrishi Ramana’s mother narrated him that about ten days ago she felt as if Mahrishi Ramana’s body was disappearing and taking the shape of the Shiva-Linga of Tiruchushi temple. She was afraid that Mahrishi Ramana may be leaving her but then she saw that his body was again regaining its form. Yogi Ranganathan looked towards Mahrishi Ramana, who smiled and confirmed his mother’s experience. Similarly once while doing *Tapa* in the Ganesh temple of Tiruvotriyur it occurred to Ganapati Shashtri that it would have been excellent if Mahrishi Ramana was near him. Suddenly he saw Mahrishi Ramana over there and he fell at his feet. Later Mahrishi Ramana confirmed this incidence. He said that some days ago he (Mahrishi Ramana) was lying down that suddenly it appeared that he was being lifted bodily. The world disappeared and a bright light engulfed him. A little later the world appeared and he saw that he was in the Ganesh temple of Tiruvotriyur. He gave some lecture but was unable to recollect it now. After this he returned to the Virupaksh cave.

Mahrishi Ramana’s mother lived for about six years in the Ashram. Mahrishi Ramana got her Samadhi made near Skandashram at the bottom of the hillock. He used to go to visit the Samadhi regularly for about six months. One day he sat near the Samadhi and did not move from there. He started living over there and later Ramanashram was instituted there itself.

On 14 April 1950, Mahrishi Ramana got absorbed in the Self.



Shirdi Sai Baba

Shirdi Sai Baba

Shirdi Sai Baba is one of the most popular saints of India. His followers considered him as an incarnation of Lord Dattatreya. He was an ascetic, who lived on alms but gave away to others whatever he got. People of all religions highly revered him. He was a highly accomplished saint, who always remained engrossed in the Divine. He was born in a Brahman family in the year 1856 in village Pathari of District Ahmadnagar. By the divine grace, he was given to a Sadhu for bringing him up. From the early childhood he was a sweet natured and well behaved child, as a result people used to say that he would be a saint on coming of age.

It is said that his Guru was Benkusa. From childhood he lived with his Guru in Chavadi and used to serve him with great devotion and dedication. When his Guru passed away, Sai Baba thought of living in solitude. He was then just sixteen. A Sadhu named Devdas was very famous those days. On the insistence of Chandbhai, Sai Baba started living with him in Shirdi. People started getting attracted towards him and soon his fame reached far and wide. Satsang started taking place daily and soon Shirdi became a center of bhakti, *Gyan* and love. The atmosphere of Shirdi got filled with spiritual current and Sai Baba became famous as the Sai Baba of Shirdi.

In the context of Sai Baba coming to Shirdi, an incidence is related. Chandbhai Patel had lost his horse and it was not traceable for about two months. By divine grace Sai Baba told him where to look for his horse. Chandbhai found his horse. He also witnessed some more similar miracles and impressed by them Chandbhai insisted that Sai Baba should live in Shirdi. In Shirdi Sai Baba started living in a mosque, which he named 'Dwarkamai' and started living on alms. He used to sit under a mango tree in front of the mosque and used to spend his time in Bhajan. He sported a beard and put on rags. People used to visit him the whole day. Those ailing used to get cured by smearing the ashes of his *Dhooni* (the sacred fire put on at a place of worship) and the helpless or poor used to get over their difficulties. People of Shirdi and nearby villages used to consider him as a mad or eccentric person. One day, however, their opinion changed and they became his staunch followers and devotees. It so happened that Sai Baba asked for some oil for lighting a lamp. As the people of Shirdi refused to give him oil, Sai Baba took some water and the lamp kept on giving light throughout the night. Next morning a lot of people gathered around the mosque and fell at the feet of Sai Baba.

Sai Baba told people to do the Bhajan while following the dictates of their religious scriptures. Sai Baba had a lot of respect for the Bhagvat and asked many of his followers to read the same and other devotional scriptures. He used to do his sadhana in the mosque. On special occasions he used to surprise people by his miraculous powers. Once it started raining heavily with severe thunderstorm causing risk to the lives of people and animals. People saw no other way except to take shelter of Sai Baba. They along with their animals reached the mosque. Sai Baba came out of the mosque and started staring towards the sky. In a little while the rains stopped and people took a sigh

of relief. Once a doctor, who was staunch Brahman saw Sai Baba appear before him in the form of Lord Ram.

The saint of Sakori, Upasani Maharaj was a special recipient of the grace of Sai Baba. He came to meet Sai Baba in Shirdi but could not convince himself to take shelter of a Muslim saint. Sai Baba allowed him to go back but asked him to return after eight days. Although Upasani Maharaj did not want to come back to Shirdi but some internal power was constantly pulling him towards Shirdi. On the eight day he reached Shirdi where Sai Baba asked him to do sadhana in the Khandoba temple near the cremation ground and told him that he would take four years in Self-realization after which he would become an accomplished saint. Upasani Maharaj followed the order of Sai Baba and started doing his sadhana in the depilated temple. After four years he was received by people as an accomplished saint.

Sai Baba tested him in different ways a number of times. Once Upasani Maharaj thought of offering food to Sai Baba. While he was going towards Dwarkamai with food in a dish, he saw a black dog near the temple. He thought that he would first go to Sai Baba and then come back and feed the dog but on the way his mind changed and he thought of feeding the dog first. When he turned back, the dog disappeared. On reaching Sai Baba, he asked him 'why have you come in the sun? I was waiting for you in front of the temple.' Immediately the dog struck to Upasani Maharaj's mind. As he was repenting, Sai Baba told him that he was taking his test. Similarly, the next day while Upasani Maharaj was taking food for Sai Baba, he saw a beggar but again he could not recognize Sai Baba in that form. Sai Baba told him that in the form of that beggar it was he, who was waiting there. He thus taught him a lesson that it is the same soul which resides in all creatures.

Sai Baba showered his grace equally on all his devotees. He laid a lot of stress on good conduct. He remained absorbed in the divine love and spread the message of love amongst his followers. The Muslims considered him a highly accomplished 'Auliya' and the Hindus considered him a saint of a high order. He also used to take upon himself the pain and sufferings of his devotees.

Sai Baba lived in Shirdi till his last. On the Vijyadashmi day of the year 1918 he left for his heavenly abode. Even after his departure from this world, he has been showing his glimpse to his devotees and helping them. Sai Baba was a remover of pain and difficulties of his devotees. A large number of his devotees gather on Dashara and Diwali at his Samadhi in Shirdi every year.

Sant Vamakshepa

Sant Vamakshepa was a contemporary of Ramakrishna Paramhans and an accomplished *Aghori-Tantrik* saint. He saw the manifestation of goddess Taradevi in every creature, all beings in the world. Tarapur is a famous place of Vir-Bhoomi district of Bengal, where the composer of Geet-Govind Jaidev and Avdhut Nityanand were born. At Tarapur the eye-ball (*Tara*) of Sati (consort of Lord Shiva) had fallen and thus this place was named as Tarapur and became a center for *Sakta* sadhana. (worship of the *Sakti* or the divine power as Devi or Durga). The temple of Taradevi was under the royal patronage and Mokshdanand, the Guru of Vamakshepa and his Guru Anandnath had been the head *Kaulik* (followers of the Sakta beliefs or practices) at the temple.

Vamakshepa was also a worshipper of Taradevi. His physic was a bit frightening but if some one dared to look into his heart, he was a kind-hearted and well behaved person. He used to behave like a mad in order to keep people away from him. He used to live in the cremation ground near the temple and spent his time in sadhana.

Vamakshepa was born in a village named Aatlagram near Tarapur in the year 1834 in a religious Brahman family. His father Sarvanand Chatopadhyay was a devotee and a man of piety and his mother was also a pious lady. He was given the name Vamacharan and in his childhood he used to make statues of goddess Kali and used to worship them. He was also having interest in Ramlila. In the early childhood itself he lost his father, as a result of which he could not get good education.

The responsibility of looking after the family also fell on his young shoulders. As his mother wanted to get him married, she asked him to look for some job. Initially he took the job of a priest but gave it up as he did not find himself qualified for the same. He was now about twelve. For some time he lived with his sister, but there also he did not feel satisfied. His inclination towards *Vairagya* and sadhana was pulling him constantly. He left his home and came to Tarapeeth where Mokshdanand then was the head Kaulik. In his company Vamakshepa started his Sakta-sadhana and started living in the cremation ground. At times he used to visit his widowed mother. After his Guru Mokshdanand had taken Samadhi, Vamakshepa was appointed as the head Kaulik.

One day while he was bathing in the river Dwarika, he saw his kith and kin were carrying a dead body and as the river was overflowing due to flood they wanted to cremate the body on the other side of the river instead of bringing it to the cremation ground near the Tara temple. Vamakshepa realized that it was his mother's body. His eyes got moist. Praying goddess Taradevi he jumped with the dead body of his mother into the river and brought the body of his mother in the cremation ground near the temple and cremated her with great respect. Two days before the day of Sraddh (the ceremony in the honor and for the benefit of the deceased) Vamakshepa asked his younger brother Ramchandra to get the ground in front of the house cleaned and to invite the Brahmans of all the nearby villages. Ramchandra did not pay much attention to the words of his brother Vamakshepa but when on the day of sraddh he saw loads of food items and other

things reaching there, he and the villagers were astonished. Many of the invitee Brahmans also arrived. Vamakshepa himself was also present. Just then dark clouds started gathering in the sky and it appeared that it was about to rain heavily. Ramchandra touched the feet of his elder brother and requested him to do something to save the ceremony from getting spoiled. Vamakshepa prayed goddess Tara and the clouds disappeared. Vamakshepa returned to Tarapeeth after the ceremonies were over.

Oblivious of the world, Vamakshepa used to behave like a child with the goddess treating her as mother. As a child he used to play in the lap of mother Tara and on a few occasions he even defecated in the temple, as a child does in the lap of the mother. In his eyes it was quite natural but the royal employees stopped giving him the Prasad and took over the care of the temple under their control. Vamakshepa was expelled from the temple and remained without food. On the third or fourth day goddess Tara appeared in the dream of the queen of Nator and told her that the Pooja in the temple was not being performed properly and that She (the goddess) was hungry for the last few days. On enquiry the queen came to know what had happened. She sent a high ranking official, who arranged for the Pooja of goddess Tara observing all rituals and offered Prasad and gave it to Vamakshepa as well. He told the priests of the temple that Vamakshepa is an Aghori saint par-excellence and dear to goddess Tara like Her child. Hence forth he would be given the Prasad before offering to Mother Tara. Similarly, once annoyed with the Mother like a child he made the lightening to strike the parapet of the temple.

Vamakshepa used to live in the cremation ground near the Tara temple and used to spend his time in the remembrance of Maa Tara. At times he used to sing the Bhajans composed by the famous Sakta saint Ramprasad. His mind did not agitate in any situation and he saw the presence of Mother Tara in all beings. He even drank wine but took it as the Charnamrit of Mother Tara (the sacred offering). He did severe penance in the Panchvati forest near the river bank and by the grace of Mother Tara he became an accomplished saint.

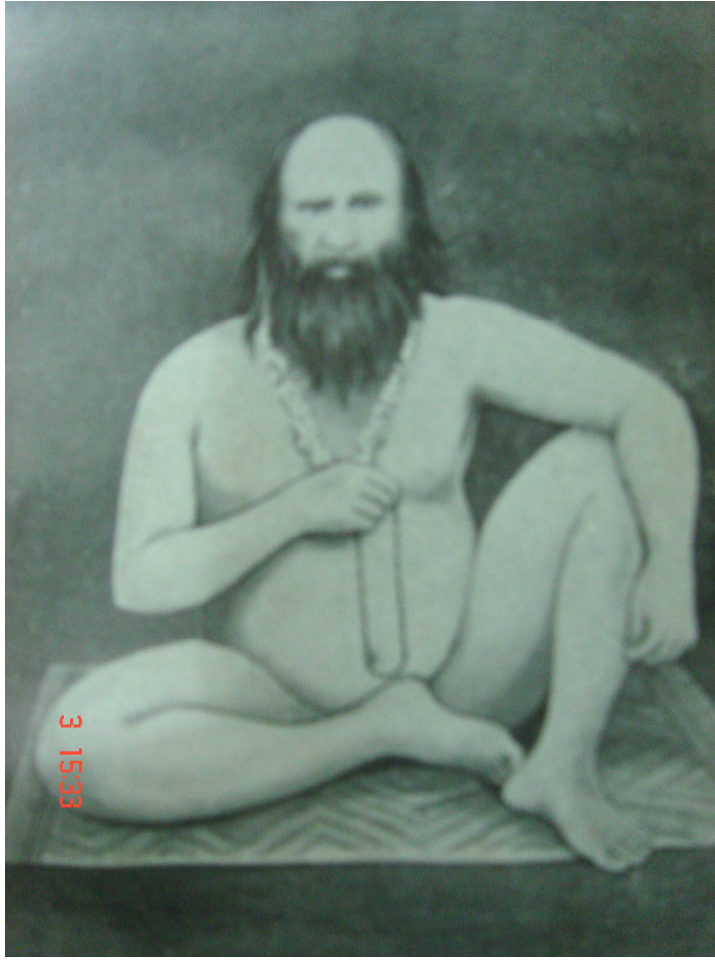
Once a person visited him and told him that he did not know anything about the greatness of Tantrik sadhana and that a Tantrik once visited his neighbor but he developed hatred towards him just by merely looking at him. Vamakshepa told him that you are a worldly person and cannot understand the matters concerned with an Aghori.

Vamakshepa kept a dog with him, whom he named Kalu. Once it was raining very heavily continuously for the last few days. In the evening after the Aarti, Vamakshepa returned to his hut, where he had collected many skulls, which were looking frightening in the dark thundering night. Vamakshepa started singing and dancing in the name of Maa Tara and entered into an ecstasy. Kalu was barking loudly and biting Vamakshepa. He stroked the dog many a times with affection but the dog kept on biting him so much so that Vamakshepa started bleeding. Just then someone entered the hut and prostrated before Vamakshepa. Vamakshepa asked him also to sing and he started singing a Bhajan composed by Sakta saint Ramprasad. Both of them entered a divine state of ecstasy.

Once a landlord was offering prayers at the bank of the river. Vamakshepa threw some water at him. On his objection Vamakshepa told him that you are offering prayers only outwardly as your mind is engaged in planning to buy shoes of Moor Company. The landlord was surprised that Vamakshepa could read his mind.

Once a person in Haridwar was told by a Sadhu that he would die in a week's time. He came to know that only Vamakshepa could help him save his life. He approached Vamakshepa, who took pity on him. It was the seventh day. Vamakshepa saw a snake coming to bite this man but the snake ran away when Vamakshepa looked at him. Vamakshepa told this man that his death was following him and that at the midnight that day the snake would bite him. Vamakshepa asked him to sit inside a circle drawn by Vamakshepa and to recite the name of Maa Tara, who could do everything. At the midnight the snake bit this man. The devotees present over there saw that Vamakshepa was praying before Maa Tara to save this man's life and his life was saved.

The essence of Vamakshepa's sadhana was remembrance and recital of the name of Maa Tara and unconditional love for the Mother Goddess. He had announced about his leaving the world in advance. He had become extremely kind towards everyone. In the year 1911 he took Mahasamadhi



Sant Naga Nirankari

Sant Naga Nirankari

Sant Naga Nirankari was a great Avdhut, who could travel through various lokas (myth. worlds) unobstructed because of his spiritual accomplishments. This is not an exaggeration but a matter of fact. His followers believe that he was a reincarnation of the great munificent 'Karna' of the Mahabharat period. He is considered to have been born in the 16th or 17th century of Vikram Samvat and though aged about 300, he always looked healthy and strong with no signs of ageing of his body. From his famous work 'Brahmavani' it is evident that when the Mughals were half-way through their rule, he having attained spiritual heights, was engaged in welfare of people. He has also mentioned about Sant Kabir and Nanak in his Brahmavani and has depicted the historical events of the Mughal period as if he has been watching them. In regard to Nanak it appears that he saw him and mentioned:

‘BHAJLE SRINAGA NIKHAN DIWANE MAN,
JAGO SHYAM AB BHOR HUA HAI,
GURU NANAK KARTE FERI DIWANE MAN’

Besides it is also certain that in the beginning he did *Tapa* in the Punjab and that he left this mortal world towards the last of the twentieth century of Vikram and, therefore, considering his long life, it appears quite feasible that he would have seen Guru Nanak in person in his earlier days. In his Brahmavani he has composed some verses which describe the medieval warfare indicating that he had witnessed the war. He has written:

‘CHADHA HAI NAGA LASGAR LEKAR,
FAUJE TAMBU SATH MEIN HAI’
RAVTI, TAMBU, NISAN GOLA DID MEIN GARE HAI’
CHARO AUR SE FAUJ CHADHI HAI’
HONE LAGA MAIDAN BADSHAH BEECH MEIN KHADA HAI’
AB LADE HAI DONO BADSHAH, YUDDH HUA HAI BADA GHOR,
AB UKHADE HAI JHANDA NISAN,
NAGA LAI UDARI JHANDA GADA MAIDAN’
TOP KHAJANA LOOT LIYE HAI, BADSHAH HAI NADAN’
AGE KHAJANA KHULA PADA HAI, LOOTE CHATUR SUJAN’
NAGA KAHE SUNO BHAI SANTO,
SAB PANCHI UD GAYE HAI, TU MURAKH LE JAN’

Though it is difficult to understand the real meaning of these verses but they certainly bear a testimony of the presence of the author at that time. Sant Naga Nirankari remembered many incidences of his previous births. He stood firm to his resolutions. Once he gave up all cereals and did not eat any cereals for many years. Similarly, once he resolved to live naked and did so thereafter. In meditation he used to travel to various lokas and used to narrate these to people close to him. Once he told his near and dear

disciple Sant Palak Nidhi 'Pathikji' Maharaj that goddess Laxmiji in meditation has blessed him to be a winner and that his hand bears a mark of the goddess, which allows him to go anywhere. Besides, he was given a cup of nectar to drink on behalf of the God, as a result of which he can not be killed by any one and would die when he so wished. The lords of the lokas below 'Kailash-Dham' (the loka of Lord Shiva) tried to lure him but he did not stay there. His disciples believe that in reaching the Kailash-Dham, Param Guru Shukracharya helped him. At different states of his life he came to be known differently by the names of Harnamdas, Ramdas, Naga, Nagagirdhari, Naga Baba and Naga Nirankari.

Sant Naga Nirankari was born in the beginning of the eighteenth century of Vikram in a royal family of Athilpur in Punjab at the bank of river Ravi. The queen begot him as a result of blessing by a saint. He was born with a very small physique, which made his father and grandfather worried as to how he would be able to manage the kingdom with such a physique. His mother, however, brought him up with great affection and care and said if he cannot take care of the kingdom, he can at least live the life of a fakir. Sant Naga Nirankari possessed a contemplative mind right from his childhood. Often he used to sit contemplating about something near a pond at the back of the royal palace. He had no attraction towards worldly possessions and gave away even precious belongings to others.

When he was about ten or twelve, his father died in a battle and his mother committed Sati. Sant Naga Nirankari left the palace and reached the Ashram of a saint. Here he was named Harnamdas. He lived for some time in the Ashram and thereafter started doing severe *Tapa* in secluded places. For the first twelve years he remained silent and seeing him naked people started calling him Naga Baba. He used to play with children. After this when he started speaking, he used to repeat the words uttered at him. For many years he kept on doing it and visited many places. He used to play with children and used to stay at the place where he was left by them, without caring for food or water. Most of his time was spent in areas between Prayag and Kanpur.

Sant Naga Nirankari visited many places and did *Tapa* over there. He did severe *Tapa* in a forest near a town named Asothar in Fatehpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Prior to this he had spent about half of his life doing *Tapa* in Ayodhya. Asothar is related to the famous character Ashvatthama of the Mahabharat epic. Sant Naga Nirankari did his *Tapa* in a very old and secluded cave. The famous saint Magananand Swami of Fatehpur had predicted that after his departure from this world, two saints from Punjab would come for *Tapa* over there and Sant Naga Nirankari had arrived there to prove the truth of this prediction. Another saint had also come with him, who took Samadhi after a few days. Here also Sant Naga Nirankari lived naked and observed silence. Only some fortunate people could come to see him. One of such fortunate persons was an ordinary family-man Shivmangal Singh (Bachana), who served Sant Naga Nirankari. Gradually his fame started reaching in the nearby towns. He came to be known as Naga Baba Asothar. The then queen had great faith in him. The liking of Sant Naga Nirankari for this place Asothar was symbolical of his friendship with Ashvatthama in the Mahabharat period in the form of Karna.

He spent his time in the company of children and made himself fully complying with their gestures. Once some children pushed him in the river Yamuna and Sant Naga Nirankari flew with the flowing water for many miles. Once he resolved to proceed in the direction where his feet turn and not to return. Traveling in the North direction he reached Nepal from where he reached Tibet and from there to China. In China he did not understand their language but if some one gave something to eat, he used to accept it. There he stayed in the garden of an English man, who took care of Sant Naga Nirankari. From there he returned to India via Assam.

Many miraculous incidences are related to Sant Naga Nirankari. Once some people sent a prostitute in the room of Sant Naga Nirankari in Barai villge of Kanpur to test his yogic powers. In the morning when people came there, they did not find Naga Baba and the prostitute was in an insane condition. On asking her, she told them that Naga Baba appeared in the form of a lady to her. Once he had gone to Jajmau for taking a dip in the Ganges on the eve of Sakranti with the royal family. While they were having food on the river bank, suddenly he uttered '*Bach Gaya*' (saved). On asking he told that a person was about to be drowned at the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, who has been saved. Later on people came to know that one of his devotees was about to be drowned that day, as his boat was caught in a whirlpool at the confluence of Gnga and Yamuna and that he remembered Naga Baba to save him whereupon some invisible force threw their boat out of the whirlpool. Once he was hungry for three-four days. In the jungle he spotted a Samadhi of a Sati. He sat there in meditation. In a little while the Sati appeared before him with food, fruits and dry fruits in a dish.

Once he was on a pilgrimage to Badrinath. Two persons were accompanying him. On the way Naga Baba jumped in to the river Ganges from the middle of Laxmanjhula. The river Ganges at that place is quite deep and the flow of the current is also strong. The persons accompanying him could not understand the matter. They informed about it telegraphically to a disciple of Naga Baba in Kanpur and left for Badrinath. After some days Naga Baba was spotted playing with children in Fatehpur. When people asked him, Naga Baba told them that when he was on the Laxmanjhula he felt that a group of Rishis was contemplating on some matter under the water of the river and he, therefore, jumped in to the water to meet them. On reaching there his foot fell on a chakra. The Rishis came to know of his presence. He talked to them and then returned.

Naga Baba was a great *tapasavi* (ascetic), who had acquired great brilliance. Once while he was on pilgrimage to Badrinarayan, one of his disciples Tyagiji was accompanying him. At one place Naga Baba sat in meditation. Tyagiji saw a bundle of light in a serpent like shape advancing towards Naga Baba and disappearing near him (Naga Baba). After the meditation, Tyagiji mentioned about it to Naga Baba, who later told that the Lord Badrinarayan had appeared in that form to bless him.

Sant Naga Nirankari used to remain engrossed in meditating upon the cosmic form of the Lord. The remains of his *Dhooni* (the sacred fire lit by a yogi) was also very powerful, which cured ailing people, brought life to dead plants and sweetened the salty

water of wells. He attached great importance to japa and meditation. He had crossed the six states of Kutichak, Bahudak, Hans, Paramhans, Turiyateet and Avdhut and had proceeded towards '*Kailash-Vijay*' or realizing the state of Param-Shiva. He worshipped the Attributeless, Formless, Eternal Supreme Soul. He used to have glimpses of the Lord in various forms in meditation. He also traveled through various lokas in meditation. He had seen the 'Kailash' in meditation. He has described that Alakh Ganga flows in Kailash in which saints take a dip and Lord Shiva utters 'Alakh-Alakh'. He also saw Guru Nanak in Kailash. In Brahmvani he has stated:

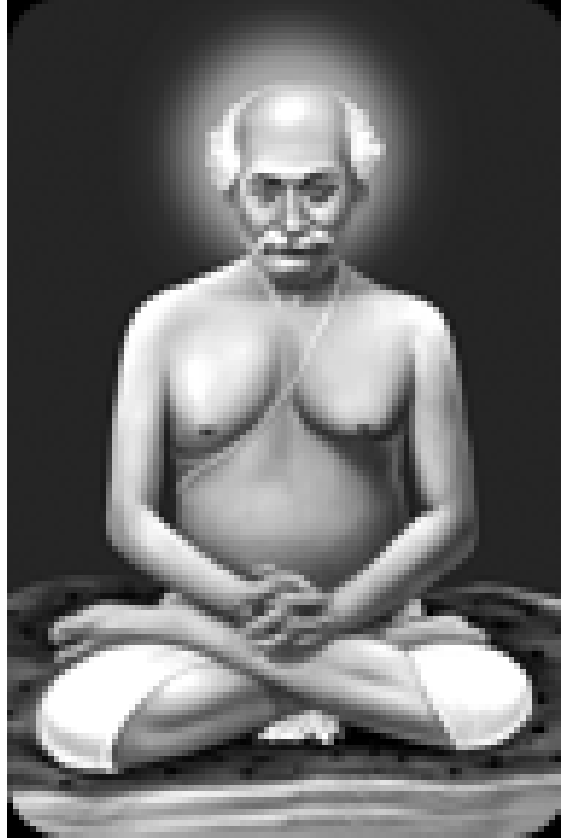
'AB CHALE KAILASH DIWANE MAN,
OONCHI KAILASH SHIV JATA FATKAR DIWANE MAN,
AAGE UNKE JHULA PARA HAI,
NANAK NAZAR NIHAL DIWANE MAN,
GURUJI KI MANDALI MEIN JA PAHUNCHE'
DARSHAN AGAM APAR DIWANE MAN'

He also saw Sumeru Mountain and Indralok (the abode of god Indra) in meditation. He has mentioned:

'BHAJLE SRINAGA NIKHAN GURUJI,
INDRA LOK MEIN NAGA GAYE HAI, CHAVI BARANI NAHI JAVE
GURUJI,
INDRA KILGI KACHHARI, KAVACH KUNDAL KAN MEIN SOHE,
SIS PE MUKUT BIRAJE GURUJI'
SRINAGAJI BAITHE SINHASAN DEV DARSHAN KO AYE GURUJI,
LAGI KACHHARI RAM NAM KI PARIYAN SHABD SUNAVE GURUJI'
'NAGA' KAHE SUNO BHAI SANTO DARSHAN AGAM APAR GURUJI'

There is no question of entertaining any doubt in the words of a saint, which are entirely based on their self-experience. Thus the words of Sant Naga Nirankari are as true as Naga Nirankari himself. Sant Naga Nirankari had also seen Sant Kabir in meditation. His 'Brahmvani' is an invaluable contribution to the bhakti-literature. He has shown great respect towards Guru Nanak and Sant Kabir in Brahmvani.

He had predicted about his last much before. In front of his hut in Pali (in Kanpur district) there was a field. He mentioned that he had seen in meditation that he was being cremated in that field. He had indicated that his Samadhi would be erected there in the field. In the year 1993 of Vikram Samvat he proceeded to Param Dham Kailash-Loka.



Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahashay

Yogiraj Shyamacharan Lahiri

Yogiraj Shyamacharan Lahiri was one of the greatest Yogis of modern times, who gave the doctrine of 'Kriya-yoga' to the world. He was born in a pious family of Ghurni, a place near Krishnanagar in the Nadia district of West Bengal in the year 1828. His father was Gourmohan Lahiri and mother was Muktkeshi Devi. As his mother died in his early childhood, Shyamacharan's father Gourmohan Lahiri shifted to Kashi. The spiritual atmosphere of Kashi had its impact on the child Shyamacharan. It left a profound impression upon his adolescent mind.

Shyamacharan was given good education and was taught Sanskrit, Persian and English languages. He also studied Hindu scriptures and Vedas under Nag Bhatt. He was also apt at Hindi and Urdu. At the age of eighteen, he was married to Kashimani Devi, who played an important role in his spiritual life. She proved to be an ideal wife for Yogi Shyamacharan. He joined the Public Works Division of the then Royal Indian Army at Danapur at the age of 23. After about two years his father Gourmohan Lahiri passed away in the year 1853, as a result of which the responsibility of the entire family fell on his shoulders.

While working with the Public Works Division of the then Royal Indian Army, Shyamacharan was posted at various places. At the age of 33 he had an occasion to visit Ranikhet in connection with some official work. This was an eventful year in his life when in 1861 'Babaji'-the Guru of his previous birth met him and took him in his shelter. Babaji was hundreds of years old but looked young. The young Shyamacharan Lahiri having finished his work was walking through the mountainous path surrounded with deodar and pine trees. The Nanda Devi peak in front of his eyes was getting engulfed in the darkness of evening. Suddenly some one called him by his name. He looked in that direction where a glorious yogi was standing at the threshold of a cave, who in a sweet voice told him 'Yes, it is me who is calling you'. As Shyamacharan was looking astonishingly towards him, Babaji told him about his father and grandfather. This made him further wonder as to how this yogi knew about him. Babaji then told him that 'all these places are well known to you but you are not able to recollect. In your previous birth you were my disciple. When you were rooted in a very high spiritual state, you died. You have been reborn to complete the divine work assigned to you and I have come here to re-initiate you. The telegram sent mistakenly to you to come here from Danapur was inspired by me. You would have to return to Danapur after seven days but in these seven days my purpose would be achieved.'

Shyamacharan was then led inside the cave where he was saw a piece of tiger skin, a stick and a *Kamandal* (an earthen or wooden water-pot traditionally used by hermits). By the divine grace of Mahavatar Babaji Maharaj, he could immediately recognize Babaji as his immortal Guru and the belongings as his own from the previous birth. From the next day Shyamacharan shifted his camp near that cave and started visiting Babaji regularly. After finishing his official work he used to spend his time at the feet of Babaji and used to eat as directed by Babaji. A day before his Deeksha, Babaji

asked him to drink a liquid lying in a vessel. At first Lahiri Mahashay thought that by mistake some oil like thing has been kept in that vessel but when Babaji insisted, he drank it without any hesitation. Babaji then asked him to lie down at the bank of a river Gagas flowing nearby. Lahiri Mahashay vomited and passed stool repeatedly, because of which he became extremely weak. Suddenly there was flash flood in the river, which drowned him and took him far away. Lahiri Mahashay felt like dead. The next morning he saw Babaji, who encouraged him saying it is good that all the impurity from his stomach had been cleaned. Babaji then fed him with good food and in the evening gave him Deeksha. Lahiri Mahashay absorbed all the spiritual irradiations spontaneously and gained deep insight. Lahiri Mahashay now wanted to renounce his family and society and dedicate himself fully at the lotus feet of his Guru Babaji Maharaj but Babaji did not agree and asked him to return to the society to propagate the doctrine of 'Kriya yoga', amongst the deserving persons. Babaji also asked him to keep on visiting him till he was there in Ranikhet. During this period Babaji also showed him a yogi five kilometers away from Dronagiri, who could cure people of incurable diseases just by a mere sight.

A week passed away and Lahiri Mahashay got marching orders back for Kanpur. On the way back he stayed in Muradnagar for two-three days. During chat with one of his friends Lahiri Mahashay mentioned that even now it is not impossible to come across great yogis. His friend asked him whether he could make him meet some such yogi. Lahiri Mahashay started meditating in a closed room and prayed Babaji Maharaj to appear. Babaji Maharaj appeared before him but told him that he had come there on his calling but he had not bestowed upon him this power to use it in this manner. In future he would not appear on his calling but only when he considered it appropriate. Lahiri Mahashay with great hesitation requested Babaji to allow people to see him in order that they may have faith. When Babaji agreed, people saw him.

Lahiri Mahashay used to finish his work quickly and the remaining time he used to spend in sadhana. He kept his spiritual attainments a secret from the people. Once, however, his British boss was very upset as his wife was seriously ill in England. Lahiri Mahashay was moved seeing him so upset and told him that he (Lahiri Mahashay) would obtain a message about his wife's health. In the nearby room Lahiri Mahashay sat in meditation and after rising from meditation he told this officer that his wife is well now and soon she is going to write him about her health. When he got letter from his wife, he was surprised to see that the letter contained exactly the same information and in the same language as told by Lahiri Mahashay. Many months later when this lady came to India she told-'I had seen this Mahatma (Lahiri Mahashay) near my cot when I was ill and by his grace I got well and got a new life'.

Once Lahiri Mahashay saw a sadhu in torn and dirty clothes and smoking hemp sitting in front of his house under a tree. On approaching him Lahiri Mahashay saw that his Guru Babaji Maharaj was cleaning the *Lota* (a small round pot) of this sadhu. Lahiri Mahashay was surprised and asked Babaji about it. Babaji Maharaj told him that he was serving a sadhu, as he sees the presence of the Creator in all creatures. This was a lesson for Lahiri Mahashay, who from then on started seeing the Lord in all creatures.

Lahiri Mahashay retired from service in 1885. His disciples were generally the householders and he discouraged people from renouncing family-life. Even then many Sanyasis also accepted him as their Guru. Sepoy Brinda Bhagat and Abdul Gafoor Khan made great spiritual progress. Yuktेशwar, the Guru of Yoganandji was a close disciple of Lahiri Mahashay. Lahiri Mahashay now started living in Kashi. He was always conscious about the welfare and spiritual progress of his disciples. Lahiri Mahashay had given life to a close friend of Yuktेशwar, named Ram after his death and similarly he saved the life of a newly born child by appearing in the labor-room of his disciple Abhaya. Some of his prominent disciples are spiritual luminaries like Shri Yuktेशwar Giri Maharaj, Shri Balananda Brahmachari, Shri Pranabananda Giri Maharaj, Shri Kealanandaji Maharaj, Shri Keshabanandaji Maharaj, Shri Panchanan Bhattacharya Mahashay, Shri Bhupen Sanyal Mahashay, Shri Ramgopal Majumdar Mahashay, Shri Ramdayal Majumdar Mahashay, Shri Bhagabati Charan Ghosh and Sri Brinda Bhagat.

Mahatma Tailanga Swami, Balanand Brahmchari and Bhaskaranand Saraswati were his great admirers. Tailanga Swami once expressed that "many a yogi would renounce everything to achieve the yogic stage that Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashay had so gracefully attained while continuing to remain a family man".

Once his wife suddenly got up in the night to see to her surprise that the room was lit with a divine light and the seat of Lahiri Mahashay was hanging in air. She was wondering whether she was seeing this in dream or it was an illusion. Just then she heard Lahiri Mahashay saying that it is neither dream nor illusion. Later she became his disciple.

Lahiri Mahashay was never seen sleeping. Kalikumar Roy stayed with him for weeks together and witnessed that in the middle of night many Sadhus would come for satsang and in the early morning would disappear.

Once a young doctor Chandramohan De came to seek his blessing. During the chit-chatting Lahiri Mahashay asked him who is considered dead by the medical science and then asked him to examine him (Lahiri Mahashay). Chandramohan De found that Lahiri Mahashay was neither breathing nor his heart beat was present. After a little while Lahiri Mahashay opened his eyes and told him that the modern science with its limited knowledge can not reach the depth of the attainments of the Indian Yogis.

Once his disciples wanted to take his photo but they could do so only after Lahiri Mahashay agreed. He encouraged people to indulge in welfare activities and never did ignore the worldly duties. He was conscious of social etiquettes and behavior. He had told about his death six months ago to some of his close disciples and his wife. On 26 September 1895, while he was sitting with his disciples, he adopted the Padmasana posture and breathed his last.



Yogiraj Gambhirnath

Yogiraj Gambhiraath

Yogiraj Gambhiraath was an accomplished saint. He attained perfection in Hathyoga, Rajyoga and Layayoga. Such an extra-ordinary yogi has not been seen in the last few hundred years in the Nathyoga tradition. He was a successor of both Patanjali and Gorakhnath integrated in one. He was born in a village in Jammu & Kashmir in the later part of the nineteenth century of Vikram. Although due to lack of facilities in the village he received ordinary education, but he was extra-ordinarily talented. He had interest in games, fine-arts and music etc. and the villagers had lot of affection for him.

He lived an affluent and happy family life yet he entertained thoughts of *Sanyas* in his mind. He felt happy serving Sadhus and in participating in spiritual discussions. Gradually he got more and more inclined towards yoga-sadhana and started thinking that there was no other way for him. Once an old yogi arrived in the cremation ground. Gambhiraath had great reverence for him and asked him to accept him (Gambhiraath) as his disciple. The Yogi told him that his (Gambhiraath's) Guru is Mahant Baba Gopalnath of Gorakhnath *Muth* and that he should take Deeksha from him. Accordingly Gambhiraath proceeded to Gorakhpur, where he surrendered himself at the pious feet of his Guru Baba Gopalnath and renounced his beautiful silken clothes. Under the shelter of Baba Gopalnath, who accepted him as his disciple, Gambhiraath started making fast progress. He lived with his Guru for some time and then spent some time in solitude at the bank of river Ganges. He also spent some years in solitude in a secluded cave near Jhansi, after which he visited many places of pilgrimage on foot and then finally he settled near Gaya on the mountain Kapildhara.

This was a beautiful place. On three sides this place was surrounded by series of mountains laden with trees and the old Kapileshwar Mahadev temple was nearby. In this secluded place none except one or two Sanyasis lived. It is believed that Gautam Buddha and Chaitnya Mahaprabhu both received Divine grace here at this place. Yogiraj Gambhiraath also chose this as the place for his sadhana.

A poor man named 'Akku' used to live in the nearby village, who used to collect wood from jungles in order to earn his livelihood. At times he used to visit the jungle of Kapildhara also. Once he had the fortune to have the Darshan of Yogiraj Gambhiraath. Thereafter he took upon himself the duty to provide wood and fire for the *Dhooni* (sacred fire) of Baba. He also used to look after Baba and used to arrange for fruits and milk. Gradually the entire family of Akku started visiting Baba and serving him. Yogiraj Gambhiraath also garnered the same affection for this family.

Two Sadhus Nripatinath and Siddhanath were in search of a Guru. On seeing Yogiraj Gambhiraath they were fully satisfied. Although Yogiraj Gambhiraath generally did not accept any one as his disciple but he could not refuse Nripatinath. In the day time Nripatinath used to serve Yogiraj Gambhiraath and stood at the door of the cave in order

to prevent any one from disturbing Yogiraj Gambhirnath, in the night he used to come down to Kapildhara and rested in his hut. Gradually the fame of Yogiraj Gambhirnath reached the ears of people in that area.

One Madhavlal Panda insisted upon getting a 'yoga-guha' (an artificial cave for doing yoga-sadhana) erected for Yogiraj Gambhirnath. Yogiraj Gambhirnath used to meditate in this cave and used to come out of the cave only when needed. Once he did not come out of the cave for three months. On Tuesdays he used to come out to bless the visitors. Besides Tuesdays he used to come out on the full moon day and on Amavasya (on the day of the dark-night). His presence had made that place divine. Once some thieves started pelting stones on the cave. Yogiraj Gambhirnath, however, blessed them and asked them to take food for their families from the cave. This resulted in a great revolution in the lives of those thieves.

Absorbed in divine grace, at times Yogiraj Gambhirnath used to play Sitar and sing Bhajan in night. His divine influence made even the wild animals to give up their violent-nature. Vijay Krishna Goswami used to come down from his Ashram in Akashganga Mountain on listening his Bhajan. He was greatly respected by Kathia Baba, Swami Sacchidanand and other renowned saints, who considered him as a fully accomplished saint.

Yogiraj Gambhirnath did not visit anyone's house. The Maharana of Udaipur and Maharaja of Kashmir requested him to visit their palaces but Yogiraj Gambhirnath did not oblige them. He, however, visited the house of Akku on learning that Akku was on death-bed and craved to have Darshan of Baba Gambhirnath. Baba visited him and blessed him, as a result he got a new life and started serving Baba again.

The Mahant of Gorakhpur-*Muth* started mismanaging the Ashram of Yogiraj Gambhirnath's Guru. When the complaint reached Baba and people requested him to take charge of the *Muth*, he took this as a duty upon him to ensure that the affairs of his Guru's *Muth* were managed properly. He accepted the responsibilities of the Mahant. The functioning of the *Muth* improved immediately. Although Baba was the Mahant but he lived like an ordinary person in a small room and spoke very little. A strange incidence is related to this period. The son of a rich widow had gone to London to receive the degree of Barrister. His mother, however, received no message from him for four months. She approached Yogiraj Gambhirnath, who took pity on her. He went in his room for meditation and after about half an hour told this lady that her son is safe and healthy and that he would return on Monday. By chance Raysahab Aghornath,, who was the Principal of the Govt. College and his colleague Atal Bihari Gupta were also present. Next Wednesday a young man went to Raysahab's house. Atal Bihari was also present there. Raysahab told him that this young man was the son of that widow. Raysahab and Atal Bihari took that boy to Yogiraj Gambhirnath. This boy saluted Yogiraj Gambhirnath and asked him when did he return. On asking this boy told them that he had seen Yogiraj Gambhirnath on his ship a day before the ship was to reach the shore of Bombay. Yogiraj Gambhirnath stood in front of his cabin and that he had talked to Baba for about five minutes but thereafter he did not see Baba on the steamer nor on getting down at

Bombay. On asking about the day and time of his seeing Baba on the steamer, it was exactly the same when Baba had gone to his room for meditation.

In Vikram Samvat 1973, when the First World War was on, some one asked Yogiraj Gambhiraath when the war would end. Baba told him that this war would end in about two years but after some time another war, which would involve all the countries would take place. This would affect the whole world in one way or the other. Some one asked him about the future of India. Baba answered that auspiciousness awaits India. Both these came true.

Once during the Kumbha Mela in Prayag the Naga Sadhus got annoyed on some matter and they started attacking yogis and Sanyasis with their sticks and *Chimtas* (tongs). Many of them were hurt. Yogiraj Gambhiraath was sitting in meditation. Some of the Naga Sadhus reached there and were about to hit him. One of his Bhaktas stood between them and Yogiraj Gambhiraath and shouted to alert Yogiraj Gambhiraath, who opened his eyes and pointing towards the Nagas asked them to be quiet. They all stopped immediately as if they were frozen.

Once Yogiraj Gambhiraath had gone to Udaipur with eight to ten other persons. While they had sat in an open ground after lighting their *Dhoonis*, it started raining. It was, however, a miracle that where Yogiraj Gambhiraath and his colleagues sat, it was dry and it did not rain there.

Similarly many other miraculous incidences are related to Yogiraj Gambhiraath. He gave Deeksha to the dead wife of a disciple; saved his disciples from severe accidents and so on. He never spoke ill of anyone nor did he criticize any faith or sect. He did not confine himself to any particular sect or group of people and showered his grace liberally on those who came in his contact.

Yogiraj Gambhiraath had indicated about his departure from the world. Accordingly on 21 March 1917 he took Samadhi in the morning at quarter past nine. His Samadhi is located near the Gorakhnath temple.



Sant Tyagraja

Sant Tyagraja

Sant Tyagraja is considered to be the Tulsidas of the South India, who sang in the praise of Lord Ram and colored the later period of medieval India in the color of Lord Ram, which also symbolizes the unity of social, cultural and spiritual India. He was a poet-saint or a saint-poet is difficult to say, as he was a poet par-excellence and a great devotee of Lord Ram. He was born in the year 1816 of Vikram Samvat in a Telugu Brahman family of Tiruvaror. His grand father Giriraj was a great devotee, scholar and musician, whose eldest son Rambrahm was the father of Tyagraja and Shanta was his mother.

Rambrahm's financial condition was not good. He, therefore, moved to Panchnad area and started giving lessons in music to earn a livelihood and spent his spare time in Bhajan. Gradually his fame reached far and wide. The then king of Tanjore encouraged Rambrahm to move to Tanjore. Rambrahm then shifted to Tanjore and sent his sons for studying Vedas and scriptures. Tyagraja right from beginning was curious to acquire knowledge of the Self and, therefore, used to enquire about Jeev, soul and Iswara. He used to enter into an ecstasy on hearing the name of Lord Ram. His faith and devotion were growing day by day. His father sent him to Shanti Venkataraman, who was a master of Veena (a large musical instrument of the type of the lute) and devotee of Lord. Tyagraja became apt in singing and started spending his time in sadhana. He acquired good knowledge of Telugu and Sanskrit languages.

Tyagraja was then married. His family life was very happy, which encouraged him more to devote to Lord Ram. He used to do his sadhana in a separate room. He was not much interested in the worldly affairs. After the death of his father, his property was divided between Tyagraja and his brother Jappesh. Tyagraja got the idol of Lord Ram that his father used to worship as a part of his share. Tyagraja now completely devoted himself in sadhana. He along with his wife used to visit the Dakshin-Kailash temple and used to recite the name of Lord Ram 180,000 times daily. His life was filled with bliss.

Once, however, his brother threw away the idol of Lord Ram in the river. Tyagraja was very upset and did not eat for many days. One day the idol came out of the river water and appeared at the bank. Tyagraja was extremely happy. He embraced the idol and brought it home with gaiety. People were astonished to witness this miracle. They applauded Tyagraja and conferred on him the title of 'Bhaktraj'. They were shouting in praise of Tyagraja. Lord Ram was the treasure of Tyagraja and he used to play Sitar and sing his own verses before the Lord for hours together. He resolved to compose twenty thousand verses in the praise of the Lord and it is said that Lord Ganesha blessed him that his vow would definitely be fulfilled.

Tyagraja used to sing in the streets in the praise of Lord Ram and used to live on whatever little he got in alms. Once the king of Tanjore, Sambhoji thought of giving a lot of money to Tyagraja. Tyagraja, however, not only refused to accept the money but also refused to go to the king. He sent a message to the king that he did not desire to be

wealthy. If that is what he wanted, he would have sold the idol of the Lord made of gold. He could not be lured by the worldly possessions but his heart has been won over by the inner beauty. The king of Tanjore was a lover of music. He wanted to listen to Tyagraja's music but Tyagraja refused to sing before the king. The king sent his servants to forcibly bring Tyagraja with them but just then he had severe pain in his stomach. The king understood his mistake and sought the forgiveness of Tyagraja through his Mantri (Minister-a high ranking official). After some time, the king once reached Tyagraja's house in a dark night and tried to listen to his music by making a hole in the roof. Tyagraja sang a Bhajan the essence of which was that why should one wander in the dark streets when the royal path for attaining liberation was well lit. The wordings were such that it appeared to the king that Tyagraja was addressing to the king and asking him as to why had he come there in the dark night through a secret route. The king got frightened that Tyagraja may not curse him. He, therefore, appeared before Tyagraja and sought his forgiveness. Tyagraja was pleased with the king. He not only sang for the king but also led him on the path of bhakti.

Sant Tyagraja was *Sanyas* and *Tyag* (sacrifice and detachment) personified. He spent all his time in Bhajan-Kirtan. A Sanyasi from Kanchi had given him the 'Ram-Mantra', which he recited throughout his life. It is believed that this Sanyasi was the Devrishi Narad, who had also given him 'Swarnava', a treatise on music. He also had Darshan of Lord Ram along with his consort Sitaji and younger brother Laxmanji, whose feet he had washed by the tears of his eyes.

The music of Tyagraja was divine; it melted the hearts of the listeners. Once Swati Tirunal, the prince of Trivandrum heard some of his songs and was greatly impressed by them. Similarly, Govind Marar of Rammanglam village, who was a famous singer desired to meet him but it did not materialize. Later in 1895 Vikram Samvat he met Tyagraja, who was on his way to Kashi. He requested Tyagraja to sing some of his verses but when it appeared to him that Tyagraja would not sing, he himself started playing on Veena and singing. Tyagraja was pleased by the style of his singing and he also started singing. He sang five songs, which became famous as 'Panchratna'.

Once on the invitation of Vankatraman of Baljapet, he agreed to visit him. On the way he visited Tirupati temple. He, however, could not see the Lord as a curtain was hanging in front of the Lord. Tyagraja said that that curtain was the veil of 'Maya' and the root cause of all sins. He got so eager to see the Lord that he started singing requesting the Lord to let him have a look at Him. The curtain fell down and Tyagraja had the Darshan of the Lord.

The next morning Tyagraja heard a woman crying, whose husband had fallen in a well and had died. Seeing her pathetic condition, Tyagraja's was deeply moved. He sang a verse in the praise of the Lord, whose touch had given life to a statue of stone (Ahalya-the wife of Rishi Gautam) and the Brahman came to life.

On return he stayed at Kovur on insistence of one of his disciples Suderesh Mudaliar, who kept some money secretly in Tyagraja's palanquin. When the palanquin

reached in the midst of forest, dacoits attacked the caravan. Tyagraja did not come to know of anything but the carriers were surprised to see that some people with weapons were walking both in front, as well as at the back of the palanquin. They were wondering whether they were soldiers to protect them or were dacoits. When the palanquin had crossed the forest, the leader of the dacoits stopped the palanquin and saluted Tyagraja. He told Tyagraja that he wanted to loot him but two princes with bow and arrows in their hands defeated them. Tyagraja embraced him praising his fortune that he had seen Lord Ram and Laxman. Tears then started rolling out of Tyagraja's eyes thinking that his Lord had taken so much of trouble for him. The dacoit leader fell at his feet.

Though Tyagraja was a devotee of Lord Ram but he had equal reverence for all the gods and goddesses, whom he considered as different form of his Lord. Once when he entered his house, he saw his wife talking to a beautiful lady whereas she was alone in the house. In a moment she disappeared. On asking his wife replied that she was talking to goddess Ambika, who had come to take her along. After a few days she became one with goddess Ambika. Tyagraja sent her daughter Sitalaxmi to her in-laws' house and thereafter he completely devoted himself at the feet of the Lord.

At the age of eighty-eight, Lord Ram appeared before Tyagraja and told him that he had to live for another ten days and thereafter in the next birth he would come out of the cycle of life and death. Tyagraja thought that the second birth could take place in this life itself and accordingly he immediately took *Sanyas*, which is considered to be the second birth in the same life. In the year 1904 of Vikram Samvat, on the fifth day of the dark nights in the Pausha (December-January) month he breathed his last. At the time of his death his skull got cracked and a beam of divine light was seen to go up towards the sky. His Samadhi is situated at the bank of the river Kaveri.



Swami Shivdayal Singhji

Swamiji Maharaj-Shivdayal Singh

Swamiji Maharaj-Shivdayal Singh was one of the great saints of the nineteenth century. He is the founder of the Radha-Swami sect. His father Shri Dilwali Singh belonged to a well-known Khatri family. The family originally belonged to the Punjab but later shifted to Delhi and then to Agra. His father had great faith in Guru Nanak Dev and used to recite Japuji, Rahiras and Sukhmani Sahib daily. This was their family tradition which continued from the time of his grandfather. Shivdayal Singhji also acquired this tradition from his childhood. The family thus was not only spiritually inclined but also received the grace of the accomplished saint Huzur Tulsi Sahab of Hathras (1763-1843), who was a great saint of his time and who gave the 'Naam-Deeksha' to Shivdayal Singhji. Tulsi Sahab was related to the Peshwa family of Satara, Pune but was known as 'Tulsi Sahab of Hathras' or 'Dakhini Baba' as he started his spiritual discourses in Hathras.

Tulsi Sahab during his visits to Agra used to stay with them. The grand-parents and parents of Shivdayal Singhji were great devotees of Tulsi Sahab, which sowed the seeds of spirituality in the heart of Shivdayal Singhji right in the early childhood. The devotion of the family to Tulsi Sahab is revealed by an incidence. In October 1817, Tulsi Sahab visited their house. It had rained a day earlier and the family had spread their valuable clothes, Pashmina shawls and woolen clothes on the roof in the Sun. Tulsi Sahab walked over them with his soiled feet. He then remarked, 'Oh! I have spoiled your precious clothes.' The family members, however, put their heads on his feet and his grandmother said 'nothing has been spoiled. On the contrary these clothes have turned auspicious for us by the touch of your feet. All that we possess is yours. By visiting us you have graced us.' This pleased him very much and Tulsi Sahab asked her to tell him what she wanted. His grandmother pointed out towards her daughter-in-law named Mahamaya (i.e. the wife of Dilwali Singhji) and requested Tulsi Sahab to bless her as she did not beget any child. Tulsi Sahab looked towards Mahamaya and said that she would beget son, but he should not be looked upon as a son. Thus Tulsi Sahab had indicated that she would give birth to a saint.

On 25 August 1818, Mahamaya gave birth to a son, who came to be known as Swamiji Maharaj-Shivdayal Singh. Later she gave birth to two more sons, who were named Brindavan and Pratap Singh. They were devotees of Swamiji Maharaj and used to keep his company. Swamiji Maharaj not only received grace of Tulsi Sahab as other members of the family but Tulsi Sahab had great spiritual love for Swamiji Maharaj-Shivdayal Singh. Tulsi Sahab used to address him as 'Munshiji' because Swamiji Maharaj taught Persian language and teachers of Persian language those days were addressed as 'Munshiji'. When Tulsi Sahab was about to breath his last, he summoned Swamiji Maharaj. On listening that Tulsi Sahab has called him, Swamiji Maharaj immediately rushed to him in the condition in which he was and covered the distance of about twenty miles. Tulsi Sahab left for his heavenly abode only after casting his graceful gaze at him with great kindness.

Swamiji Maharaj was spiritually inclined right from his early childhood. He used to sit in meditation from the age of about five years on the asking of his mother. While on the one hand his parents used to take care of him with love and respect keeping the words of Tulsi Sahab in mind, on the other hand Swamiji Maharaj used to happily obey and serve his parents. He did not show the naughtiness of children. When Tulsi Sahab used to visit their house, Swamiji Maharaj used to sit for hours together crossed-legged in the satsang. Not only in childhood but even later when he was revered by thousands of people, throughout his life, Swamiji Maharaj treated others with respect and politeness.

Swamiji Maharaj was apt at many languages including Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian and Arabic. As a result he was greatly benefited by Sufi literature and by the words of great saints like Kabir, Nanak, Jagjivan Sahab, Paltu Sahib, Goswami Tulsidas, Shams-Tabrez and Maulana Rum. He not only held them in high esteem but has quoted them in his writings.

Swamiji Maharaj initially served for some time in a kingly state but later left that job, as it did not give him enough time for his sadhana. Later he taught Persian to the children of the king of Ballabgarh, as this was a job requiring his presence for two-three hours. Besides money he used to get all his necessities like food etc., as remuneration, which he used to distribute amongst the needy and the major part of the money he used to send to his father. Though outwardly he was engaged in worldly affairs but in his heart he had adopted *Vairagya* and he used to remain absorbed in the 'Shabd' (the word or vibration-Satnam).

Swamiji Maharaj could see what was going to happen. When it appeared to him that his father Dilwali Singhji was about to depart from this world, like a true son, he left the job and returned to his father to serve him whole-heartedly. His father was extremely pleased with him and breathed his last in his (Swamiji Maharaj's) lap.

Swamiji Maharaj's father had started lending money on interest in order to earn their livelihood. Swamiji Maharaj, however, called all the borrowers and told them to return the principal, if they so desired and those who did not wish to pay even the principal, they were free from their debt. His younger brother Seth Pratap Singh destroyed the loan-deeds before them and stopped taking interest for ever.

Swamiji Maharaj was a family man. He was married to Narayani Devi, who was the daughter of Lala Izzatray of Faridabad in Haryana. She was a pious lady, who also got molded in the mold of Swamiji Maharaj, who initiated her and gave her the Satnam. Later Satsangis started calling her as 'Radhaji'. She took deep interest in serving the visiting Satsangis, whom she considered as her children and they also considered her as their mother.

Swamiji Maharaj's satsang used to be very influential. People including Sadhus thronged to participate in his satsang. His personality was also very impressive, as

brilliance used to radiate from his personality and people felt deep quietude in their hearts. Though he was a lean person but his voice was great. His words were full with deep meaning. He used to explain even complex matters in simple words, which used to penetrate deep in the hearts of the listeners. It was the effect of his satsang that people used to get distracted from the world and used to get absorbed in divinity. Swamiji Maharaj considered purity of conduct and mind, as the basis of sadhana and only those irrespective of their caste or status, who took a vow that:

- i) They would completely give up meat, fish, eggs, drinking and consuming any intoxicating material;
- ii) They would live on honest earnings; and
- iii) They would observe purity of conduct; men would consider other women as mother or sister and ladies would consider other men as father or brother.

Many miracles are related to Swamiji Maharaj. Once it did not rain for days together and people were afraid that it may result in a famine. They came and prayed to Swamiji Maharaj. He did not say anything but one of his servants Bishno said that it would rain tomorrow. When these people were gone Swamiji Maharaj enquired with her as to on whose strength she has said so, as the divine will was not to rain. Bishno accepted her mistake. Swamiji Maharaj told her to refrain from doing so in future and that for her sake it would rain tomorrow.

Swamiji Maharaj has described in great details various states of spiritual accomplishments and has given account of various 'Mandals' (spiritual levels). These have been compiled in the work 'Saarbachan Vartik'. Ray Sahib Saligramji, Baba Garibdasji and Baba Jaimal Singhji were his dear and principal disciples. On 15 June 1878 he took Samadhi.

The phrase 'Radhaswami' was first used by Swamiji Maharaj. 'Swami' means Master or the owner and 'Radha' means 'Surat' (soul or the consciousness). 'Radhaswami' thus refers to the Parmatma or the Supreme Soul or the Lord of the Soul. He has said:

RADHA ADI SURAT KA NAAM, SWAMI ADI SHABD NIJ DHAM;
 SURAT SHABD AUR RADHASWAMI, DONO NAAM EK KAR JANI;
 SURAT SHABD SANG KARE BILAS, YON RADHASWAMI DHING BAAS;
 RADHASWAMI DO KAR JAAN, HONY EK SAT LOK THIKAN.



Sahajanand Swami

Sahajanand Swami

Sahajanand Swami, who later came to be known as Swaminarayan and was the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampadray (sect), was born on 3 April 1781 on the Ram-Navami day when people celebrate the birth of Lord Ram, in Chhapaiya, Uttar Pradesh, a village near Ayodhya. He was born in a Sarvarya Brahman family. At the time of his birth he was named Ghanshyam Pande by his parents. His father was Hariprasad Pande (also known as Dharmadev) and mother was Premvati Pande (also known as Bhaktimata and Murtidevi). The ninth lunar day in the fortnight of waxing moon in the Hindu month of Chaitra (March–April) is celebrated both as Ram-Navami and Swaminarayan Jayanti by Swaminarayan followers. Ghanshyam had two siblings. His elder brother was Rampratap Pande and younger brother was Ichcharam Pande. At a young age of seven, Ghanshyam had learnt many scriptures including the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata

His parents died at an early age. After the death of his parents, Ghanshyam Pande left his home on 29 June 1792 at the age of 11. He took the name Nilkanth Varni and travelled across India and parts of Nepal in search of an ashram or hermitage that practiced what he considered the correct understanding of Vedanta, Samkhya, yoga and Pancharatra, the four primary schools of Hindu philosophy. To find such an ashram, Nilkanth Varni looked for the answer to the following five questions: What is Jeev; What is Ishvara; What is Maya; What is Brahman and What is Para Brahman.

On his journey, Nilkanth Varni mastered Astanga yoga of Patanjali (eightfold yoga) under the guidance of Gopal Yogi in a span of nine months. In Nepal, he met King Rana Bahadur Shah and cured him of his stomach illness. As a result, the king freed all the Sanyasis, whom he had imprisoned. On return Nilkanth Varni visited the famous Jagannath Temple in Puri as well as the temples in Badrinath, Rameshwaram, Nasik, Dwarka and Pandharpur.

Having visited many places of pilgrimage, his journey concluded in 1799 after seven years in Loj, a village in the Junagadh district of Gujarat, where he met Muktanand Swami, a disciple of Ramanand Swami. Muktanand Swami answered all the five questions to Nilkanth's satisfaction. Nilkanth decided to wait for an opportunity to meet Ramanand Swami, whom he met a few months after his arrival in Gujarat.

Nilkanth Varni met Ramanand Swami on 20 October 1800, who accepted him as his disciple and initiated him as a Sanyasi giving him a new name Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni to signify his status.

In 1802, at the age of 21 Ramanand Swami appointed Sahajanand Swami as his successor and the leader of the Uddhav Sampraday prior to his death. The Uddhav Sampraday later came to be known as the Swaminarayan Sampraday. According to sources, Sahajanand Swami proclaimed the worship of one sole deity, Lord Krishna or Narayan. He considered Lord Krishna as his own *Ista-devata*. He approved the

eneration of Lord Krishna as the Majestic Lord like the earlier Vaisnava teachers, Ramanuja and Yamunacarya, in contrast with the Radha-Vallabha Sampraday.

Sahajanand Swami was later known as Swaminarayan after he taught this Mantra at a gathering, in Faneni, a fortnight after the death of Ramanand Swami. This was a new mantra, known as the Swaminarayan Mantra given by him. The recital of this Mantra made many of them to enter a state of trance.

Swaminarayan also came to be known as Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shreeji Maharaj, Hari Krishna Maharaj and Shri Hari. As early as 1804, Swaminarayan, who performed many miracles, was described as a manifestation of God in the first book Yama Danda written by one of his disciples Nishkulanand Swami.

Swaminarayan strongly disapproved consumption of meat, alcohol or drugs, adultery, suicide, animal sacrifices, criminal activities and the appeasement of ghosts and tantric rituals. After assuming the leadership of the Sampraday, Swaminarayan worked to assist the poor by distributing food and drinking water. Swaminarayan arranged for food and water for people during times of drought. According to Raymond Brady Williams, "Swaminarayan is an early representative of the practice of advocacy of women's rights without personal involvement with women". To counter the practice of *sati* (self-immolation by a widow on her husband's funeral pyre), Swaminarayan argued that as the human life is given by God, it could be taken only by God, and that *sati* had no Vedic sanction. He went to the extent of calling *sati* nothing but suicide. Swaminarayan even offered monetary help to parents to meet dowry expenses in order to discourage female infanticide, calling infanticide a sin. He also encouraged and worked for the education of women.

Swaminarayan opposed animal sacrifices, which formed a part of the Vedic rituals and was also practiced in the Kaula and Vama Marg cults. The priests consumed "sanctified" offerings in the form of meat of these animals. Swaminarayan conducted several large scale Yagyas in which he invited priests from Varanasi. These Yagyas did not have animal sacrifices and were conducted in strict accordance with Vedic scriptures. Swaminarayan was successful in convincing people that animal sacrifice was not necessary for performing Yagyas.

He encouraged his followers to combine devotion and dharma to lead a pious life. The Swaminarayan sect believed in Hindu scriptures and rituals. Gradually it became a global organization with strong roots in Gujarat. Swaminarayan insisted on the separate sitting of men and women in temples.

According to Swaminarayan, adherence to Dharma, bhakti (devotion), *Gyan* (knowledge) and *Vairagya* (detachment) was necessary to achieve salvation. Doctrinally, Swaminarayan was close to eleventh century philosopher Ramanuja and was critical of Shankaracharya's concept of *Advaita* or monistic non-dualism. Swaminarayan's ontology maintains that the Supreme Being always has a divine form and that He is not formless.

He established two gadis (seats)-one in Ahmedabad (Shree Nar Narayan Dev Gadi) and one in Vadtal (Shree Laxmi Narayan Dev Gadi)-on Tuesday, November 21, 1825. Swaminarayan then appointed an acharya to these two gadis to pass on his message to others. The Swaminarayan Sampraday accepts the acharyas as spiritual successors. Swaminarayan Sampraday provides what followers of the Sampraday believe to be direct scriptural references in which Bhagwan Swaminarayan recognizes acharyas as the rightful spiritual successors. Swaminarayan also prescribed a Shikshapatri, which is a text of two hundred and twelve verses written in Sanskrit by him.

Followers of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) believe that Gunatitanand Swami was the spiritual successor to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Akshar Purushottam Upasana is an interpretation of the Philosophy set forth by Swaminarayan. They point to several occasions in which they believe that Swaminarayan revealed to devotees that Gunatitanand Swami was Aksharbrahm manifest. This philosophical difference led to the creation of BAPS in 1907, by Shastriji Maharaj, who was believed by the devotees of BAPS to be the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, when he left the Vadtal Gadi of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. Shastriji Maharaj was the founder of this organization though the philosophy and faith was founded by Swaminarayan.

Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi

Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi was born in the year 971 H (1557AD), in the village of Sihar Nidbasin (Sarhind in the Punjab, India). He is considered to be the reviver of Islam. He received his knowledge and education through his father and through many other Sheikhs of his time. At the young age of seventeen, he had been authorized to train followers in all three main *tariqats* of Sufis namely: Suhrawardia, Qadiria, and Chistia. Although he was guiding his followers, yet he felt that something was missing in him, which he was continuously searching for. He felt an interest in the Naqshbandi Sufi Order. His spiritual progress eventually brought him to the presence of Sheikh Muhammad al-Baqi, who had come for this purpose to India from Samarqand by the order of his Sheikh, Muhammad al-Amkanaki. Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi took the Naqshbandi Order from Hazrat Baqi Billah and stayed with him for a little over two months until Hazrat Baqi Billah bestowed on him the divine knowledge he had in his heart and gave him authorization to train his disciples in the Order.

It is said that the Prophet had predicted his advent in one of his *hadith*. Sheikh Mir Husamuddin said, "I saw the Prophet in one of my dreams praising Sheikh Ahmad as-Sarhindi". Amongst the saints who predicted his advent was Sheikh Amad al-Jami. He said, "After me will appear seventeen men of the People of God, all of whom are named Amad and the last one among them will be at the head of the millennium. He is going to be the highest of them and he is going to receive the state of Unveiling. He is going to revive this religion."

Another one to predict his advent was Maulana Khwaja al-Amkanaki, who asked his *khalifa* Muhammad al-Baqi Billah to go to India in order to train Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi. Muhammad al-Baqi Billah has said, "That is why I moved from Bukhara to India." When they met for the first time, Hazrat Baqi Billah told Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi, "You are the one whose appearance the Sheikh Muhammad Khwaja al-Amkanaki predicted. When I saw you, I knew you were the *Qutub* of your time. When I entered the region of Sarhind in India, I found a lamp, which was so big and so bright that its light reached up to the heavens. Everyone took from that lamp's light. You are that lamp."

It is said that the Sheikh of his father, Sheikh Abdul Aad, who was a Sheikh of the Qadiri Order, had been given a *jhubba* (cloak) from his Sheikh, which had been passed down from the great Sufi Master Abdul Qadir al-Jilani. Sayyidina Abdul Qadir had said about it to his successors, "Keep it for that one who is going to appear at the end of the First Millennium. His name is Amad."

There is another interesting story linked with the birth of Sheikh Ahmad Faruqi. Sarhind, where he was born was a deep forest those days. Before his birth, one night a platoon of the then Emperor in Delhi was passing through Sarhind area when the leader of the platoon saw a beam of light falling at a particular place. The leader was a wise person. He stopped over there and pondered over this surprising phenomenon when it was revealed to him that a great soul was to descend at that place and that the Emperor be

asked to build a town there. On reaching Delhi, the leader of the platoon mentioned this incident to the Emperor, who immediately ordered some masons to be sent to start building a town at that place. The masons started their work but whatever they built during the day used to get demolished by the next morning and no one was able to spot who was doing this. This continued for about fifteen days before the news reached Delhi. This was considered as an act of some super-natural power. The Emperor knew that the brother of platoon leader was a *wali* (saint). He, therefore, deputed him to look into the matter. The brother of platoon leader on reaching there saw that on the head of one of the workers the load was lifted up in the air. He understood that this man was a great fakir. In those days any person could be summoned to work for the Emperor. This fakir was a Sufi in the Order of great Sufi Master Abdul Qadir Jilani. The *wali* made out that the demolitions were his act. He immediately went up to him and begged for his pardon. The fakir, however, told him that the purpose of demolitions was only to call him (brother of platoon leader) to that place, as it was in his family that a great saint was to be born. In due course Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi descended in this family.

Sheikh Ahmad Faruqi is the Sun, said his Master Hazrat Baqi Billa, in whose light stars like himself become invisible. Such words from a Master for his disciple have perhaps never been heard of. On the other hand, the able disciple was so humble and respectful to his Master that once when his Master called him for some ordinary matter, he started shivering out of respect and fear (that his Master had summoned him), the color of his face changed and he was stunned. His Master placed him in the category of ‘*Murad*’ i.e. one with whom the Master himself has merged. Hazrat Baqi Billa Sahab got his sons and other family members initiated by Sheikh Ahmad Faruqi.

Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi has described one of his great experiences in his book naming it as “Dayra Gazab Ilahi” or the vision of the ‘Almighty in All Encompassing Form’ (Viraat Roop Darshan). In this he has described at length various appearances of the Almighty, including the furious and the alluring ones, similar to that described in the Srimad Bhagvad Gita by Arjun. Thereafter Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi has described in detail the journey further up from this vision and has mentioned that “I traveled to the highest destination, which is beyond description, for which I am profoundly thankful to the Almighty.”

Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi mentioned that the Heavenly Guardians facilitated for him passage through time and space. He realized the God to be the Essence of all matter and God in all matter without incarnation. Then he realized God together with all matter, God ahead of everything and thereafter following everything. Finally he reached a state where he saw God and nothing else. This is what he said to be Witnessing the Oneness, which is also the state of Annihilation (*fana*). Then he was lifted to the state of Subsistence (*baqa*), which is the second step in Sainthood after *fana*. Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi described that in the state of Subsistence he realized that the essence of all creations is the Almighty and ‘His’ essence is the ‘Essence of Myself’. He was lifted to the state of Annihilation, and then to the state of Existence, then he was brought back to be with people, in the Station of the common people. This he described to be the highest

state in guiding people to the Presence of God, as it matches the understanding of human beings.

Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi said that with the grace of his Master Sheikh Muhammad al-Baqi he received incredible blessings, and by his blessing he was granted a power of attraction that allowed him to reach every human being that the Almighty had created. He mentioned of attaining a state that combines the state of the Ending with the state of the Beginning and of achieving all the states of Seeding and the Ending. With the support of the great Masters he was raised further up to the state of the Throne, then to the state of Beauty and to the state of the Greatest Spiritual Poles (*al-qutubiyyati-al-cuzma*). Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi said that the Almighty's Heavenly Care then attracted him to ascend to a State that is beyond that of the *Qutubs*, the Special Original State. Here the support of great Master Abdul Qadir Jilani pushed him up to the State of the Origin of Origins. Then he was ordered to come back down, and as he descended he passed by all 39 *tariqats* other than the Naqshbandia and the Qadiria. The Sheikhs of these Orders threw on him all their treasures of divine knowledge, which unveiled to him realities, which had never been unveiled to any person in his time.

Once in the month of Ramadan, he was invited by ten of his followers. He accepted the invitation of each of them. At the time of breaking the fast, he was present at each of their houses simultaneously breaking fast with them.

His fame reached far and wide, which made some scholars jealous of him. They prejudiced the Emperor against him and pushed Emperor Jahangir until he put him in jail. He stayed in jail for three years. His son, Sheikh Masum Raza has mentioned that he was put under very strict security in jail. Yet every Friday he was seen in the mosque. In spite of reinforcing the security, he would disappear from prison and appear in the mosque. The Emperor realized that he could not be detained and, therefore, released him.

Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi wrote many books, the most famous is the 'Maktubat'. He departed from this mortal world on 17th of Safar 1034 H. (1620 AD) at the age of 63. His mausoleum is situated in Sarhind next to the famous Gurudwara.

Shamsuddin Habib Allah-Mirza Zanzana

Shamsuddin Habib Allah (Mirza Zanzana) was the disciple of Sheikh Nur Muhammad al-Badauni, a Sufi saint in the Order of Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi. He was a poet and used pen-name 'Mazhar'. He heard of Hazrat Nur Muhammad through someone and got so impatient that immediately he reached to meet him, who accepted him at once in the Naqshbandi Order and in the first meeting itself all of his spiritual chakras (energy centers- the loci of the Naqshbandi way of practice) were energized and activated. When he reached back home and saw himself in mirror, he saw the face of his Master Nur Muhammad in place of his own face. In four years he was fully accomplished and was conferred the status of *Satguru*.

Mirza Zanzana's father was a senior officer of the State but was detached from worldly affairs. Mirza Zanzana was taught arts, science, warfare and other traits in his early age. He acquired competence in all these branches. He was very polite and patient and a great swordsman too who could fight a number of persons simultaneously.

Nawab Asif Shah offered him thirty thousand rupees in those days, which he refused to accept. The Nawab then requested him to distribute this money among those in need. Mirza Zanzana, however, refused this also stating that he was not Nawab's servant who should be engaged in distributing Nawab's money.

He used to say that sheer constant remembrance of the Master fills up one's heart fully with light and spirituality. He stood fast in serving his Sheikh with complete truthfulness. He continued to progress by entering into seclusion in the desert and in the jungle on the orders of his Sheikh. His only food used to be grass and leaves of trees. He used to wear only that which would cover his nakedness. One day, after many of these seclusions when he looked in the mirror, he saw his Sheikh in place of himself.

When his Master passed away, he continued to visit his grave until his Sheikh directed him to visit some of the other Saints of his time, Sheikh Muhammad Afzal, Sheikh Safi Sacdullah, and Sheikh Muhammad Abid. He used to attend the sessions of Sheikh Muhammad Afzal, one of the khalifas of Sheikh Saifuddin, who was the grandson of Sheikh Ahmad al-Faruqi. He also benefited from the company of Sheikh Shah Kalshan and Sheikh Muhammad az-Zubair. He accompanied these Sheikhs for twenty years. He progressed further and further until he became an Ocean of Knowledge and *Qutub* of his time, shining like the Sun at high noon. Sheikh Muhammad Afzal said, " Sheikh Mazhar Habibullah was given the state of *Qutub* and he is the central pivot of this *tariqat* in this time."

Mirza Zanzana was a Master of four *tariqats*: Naqshbandia, Qadiria, Suhrawardia and Chishtia Orders. He said that he received the secrets and knowledge of these Orders from his Shaikh, Sayyid Nur Muhammad Badauni, who lifted him from the Ibrahamic Stage to the Muhammadan Stage. He said that he saw the Prophet sitting in his place, while he was sitting in place of Prophet. He then disappeared and saw the Prophet sitting

in the two places. Then he saw the Prophet disappearing and himself sitting in both places.’

Many miracles are associated with him. It is reported that once he traveled with some of his followers without any food or provision. When they needed food, he would call them and say, “This food is for you,” and tables of food would appear in front of them. One day during the trip there was a terrible storm. It was freezing making everyone shiver because of the cold. Their situation worsened until it appeared that they were going to die in that frozen desert. Mirza Zanzana then raised his hands in prayer to the Almighty. Immediately the clouds lifted from around them, and though the freezing rain continued to fall a little away, the temperature around them rose to a comfortable level.

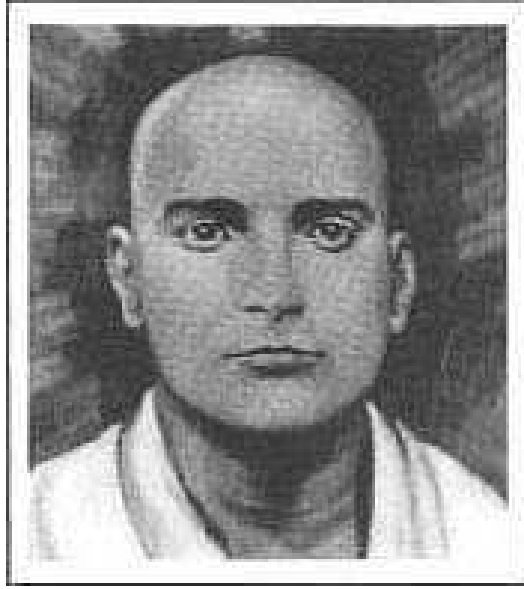
Mirza Zanzana said, “Existence is an Attribute of the Almighty alone. This world is a mere shadow of realities existing in the Divine Presence. The reality of all possible creations results from the action of the Divine Attributes and Qualities on the Void. The Real Existence of all that manifests in physical creation is confirmed as a light in the Divine Presence.”

He also said that all physical creation arises from a combination of Almighty’s Divine Qualities and the Void. The creation thus partakes of two origins of opposite nature. The dense qualities of physical substance that produce darkness, ignorance and evil, result from the nature of the void of non-existence and nothingness. Light, Knowledge and Good results from the Divine Attributes. Sufi sees all that is good in himself as a light from the Divine that is reflected on him, but that is not of him. Conversely, he sees himself as base substance, full of darkness and ignorance, with a nature worse than that of an animal. This dual perception helps him loosen his attachment and turn towards the Divine Source of all Good. With this turning, the Almighty fills his heart with love and yearning for the Divine Presence.

During his last days, thousands and thousand of seekers entered into the *tariqat*. Hazrat Mirza Zanzana had predicted his death and shortly before his death he was in a state of great emotion and intense love of God. He said that the Almighty had fulfilled all his desires and had accomplished him fully. He was so desperate to meet his Beloved, the Almighty, and to be in ‘His’ Presence continuously that he wanted ‘to go to ‘Him’ today, before tomorrow’. He, however, wanted to go to ‘Him’ not as an ordinary person but as a martyr, who is always alive, as Allah described in the Holy Qur’an.

On the fateful day of the seventh of Muharram, of the year 1195H/1781AD his servant came to him and informed him of three visitors seeking to meet him. He asked them to be brought in. One of them took a knife out of his pocket and stabbed him in the back, piercing his kidney. He fell to the ground. The King sent him a doctor but he sent him back saying, “I do not need him. As for the men who stabbed me, I forgive them, because I am glad to die as a martyr and they came as an answer to my prayer.”

His mausoleum is situated near Jama Masjid at ‘Chitli Qabr’ in Delhi and is known as ‘Shahid Sahab ki Mazar’ or the mausoleum of the Martyr.



Swami Ram Tirtha

Swami Ram Tirtha

Swami Ram Tirtha, a descendant of Goswami Tulsi Das, was born on 22 October 1873 at Muraliwala, a village in Gujranwala, Punjab. He was named Tirtha Ram and after taking *Sanyas* his name was reversed to Ram Tirtha. Astrologers had predicted that the child would renounce the world, live the life of an ascetic and that his life would be endangered by water at the age of thirty-three. His father Goswami Hiranand was a simple and straight forward man but a little hot tempered. His mother passed away after a few days of his birth.

His father was a strict disciplinarian. At times Ram Tirtha, however, used to go to temples with him or with his aunt and his heart used to get filled with bliss on seeing Pooja-Aarti of the Lord and tears used to start rolling out of his eyes. If a conch was blown, Ram Tirtha used to listen to it very attentively. He was married at the age of ten with the daughter of Pundit Ramchandra of Wajirabad.

He was sent to the primary school of the village at the age of five. His memory was extremely sharp. He was not only a very bright student but also a genius and laborious child. He soon learnt 'Gulishta-Bostan' and memorized many Urdu poems. As he was brought up on cow milk, bodily he was weak. He was not much interested in playing and used to spend his spare time in reading. He used to repeat whatever he learnt before his relatives.

He was later admitted in 1886 in the Middle standard in a High school seven miles away from the village, where he received education under the patronage of Bhagat Dhannaram, who was his father's friend. He passed the Entrance examination at the age of fourteen. His father was not willing to continue his studies but Ram Tirtha took admission in the Lahore College against the wish of his father, as a result of which he had to live on the meager amount of scholarship alone. He passed the F.A. examination in the first division and got government scholarship.

Ram Tirtha took admission in B.A. in the Mission College. Seeing that instead of joining some service, Ram Tirtha was still spending money on studies, his father left Ram Tirtha's wife with him. Ram Tirtha, however, faced all the challenges before him and managed his family and studies in whatever little he received as scholarship. Once the entire amount of scholarship was spent in buying books and as a result they spent a month on taking meals only once a day. Later even this scholarship was also discontinued. Ram Tirtha, however, got divine help. One Jhandumal, who used to cater sweets to the college, offered him free residence and food. At times he provided him clothes as well. The principal of the college also extended a helping hand.

In B.A., the Math's paper had thirteen questions and candidates were required to answer any nine of them. Ram Tirtha answered all the thirteen and left a note for the examiner to check any nine. He got 145 marks out of 150 and passed in the first division. He was awarded two scholarships and a gold medal. In 1895 he passed M.A. with

Honours and during this period he also taught as an honorary lecturer. After passing M.A. he was appointed as a teacher in Syalkot and later he was appointed as a lecturer in the Forman Christian College of Lahore.

Ram Tirtha was attracted towards nature. He used to get inspired by the natural beauty. He was also deeply influenced by Bhagat Dhannaram. Even while working as a Lecturer, Ram Tirtha used to observe silence, read Gita and meditate upon Lord Krishna. At times he used to get so engrossed in his Lord that forgetting about the subject, he would start uttering 'Krishna-Krishna' in the class and used to draw the sketch of the Lord on the black-board.

At his residence in Lahore, he had established a group in the name 'Advaitamritvarshini' comprising of Sadhus and saints. Soon Ram Tirtha was completely immersed in the flow of bhakti and *Vairagya*. The contemplation of Lord Krishna took the form of the quest of the Self. During this period he heard Swami Vivekananda in Lahore and was deeply impressed by him, as a result of which he developed greater interest in Vedanta and *Sanyas*. He got more detached and devoted himself completely in realization of the Self.

With Deen Dayal Sharma, the famous preacher of Sanatan Dharm Sabha, he traveled to many places of pilgrimage including Brij, Prayag and Kashi. He also visited Gangotri and at one place even jumped in to the Ganges but was thrown out on a rock. This gave him an insight and firm belief in the non-duality of existence. On return his worldly ties loosened even further. He now taught only for two hours in the Oriental College. Shortly thereafter he took *Sanyas*. He again traveled to the Himalayas and on the way leaving behind his wife and others parted his way from Tehri. At the bank of the Ganges he removed the sacred thread and at the age of twenty-eight became Ram Tirtha from Tirtha Ram.

Swami Ram Tirtha gave the message of awakening to the entire country like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayanand Saraswati. He propagated the message of the philosophical and spiritual character of the Indian culture within the country and abroad. He delivered lectures on Vedanta in Mathura, Faizabad and Lucknow. Thereafter with the help of the king of Tehri, he went to Japan to participate in the 'Vishva-Dharma-Sammelan' (World-Religion-Conference) but there was no such conference being organized there. From there he went to San-Francisco. On reaching San-Francisco he repeatedly climbed up and down the deck of the ship. The co-passengers had disembarked but Ram Tirtha was busy with himself. His personality was very attractive. Whosoever saw him got stuck with him. An American asked him about his belongings. Swami Ram Tirtha replied that whatever was there on his body that alone was his luggage and that he does not keep any money with him. He feeds himself on whatever food or water is offered to him. The American was surprised and asked him whether he knew someone in America. Swami Ram Tirtha smilingly put his hand on his shoulder tenderly and said-'Yes. I know at least one person and that person is you.' The American from that moment became his friend.

This American at one place has expressed his feelings about Swami Ram Tirtha in following words: “Swamiji is like the sun of knowledge rising from the caves of Himalayas. Neither fire can burn him nor can weapons destroy him. Tears of love keep rolling out of his eyes. His mere presence fills us with a new life. He lived in America for two years during which period people venerated him like the Jesus. Newspapers published his photos and propagated that Jesus has come alive. The then President of America made his life auspicious by bowing at his feet. Many atheists turned believers in no time.”

In America Miss Taylor was his personal secretary. Swami Ram Tirtha had to go to New York. She took him to the head of the ‘Great Pacific Rail Road’ and requested him to issue a concessional ticket for Swamiji. He, however, got so impressed by Swami Ram that he provided a pull-man car to Swamiji free. He said that Swamiji’s smile was enchanting.

In America Swamiji lived a life of austerity. In Shasta-Springs where he stayed with an American, he used to fetch wood from a hillock for his host. Besides America he visited Japan and Egypt where he propagated the message of peace, love and truth. On return to India he exhorted his countrymen to come out of the darkness of ignorance and to garner love for the country in their hearts.

In his last days he used to live in the Chandrabhawan of the Tehri king in Simlasu. Everyday he used to bathe in the holy Ganges. In the year 1916, at the age of thirty-three on the day of Deepawali, he immersed himself in the holy river.

Maulana Fazl Ahmad Khan

Maulana Fazl Ahmad Khan (Huzur Maharaj) was a great revolutionary saint, who through his boundless spiritual awareness and liberal approach spread the message of Sufism amongst all, including non-Muslims, without conversion i.e. without their accepting Islam. He distinguished religion (the outer or the material form of religion) and spirituality and held that for spirituality religion is no bar.

Huzur Maharaj was born at Raipur in district Farukhabad, Uttar Pradesh and spent most of his time in Raipur except for a few years when he served in Farukhabad. His father was Gulam Hussain, who was a great Sufi saint in the lineage of Maulana Waliuddin of Kashmir and his mother was also a saint in the Naqshbandi Order of Sufis. She was initiated by Maulana Afjal Shah, who used to say about her that 'my daughter has the capability of changing the destiny.' Huzur Maharaj's parents thus were great saints and true human beings. It is, therefore, no wonder that a person like Fazl Ahmad took birth in their family, which ushered in a new era of religious and communal harmony and brought about a spiritual revolution, a culmination of the spiritual advancement of the humanity.

Huzur Maharaj lived a very simple and pious life. He used to put on clean white clothes. He was very kind hearted and had no prejudice against any religion or caste. Persons from all classes and belonging to all religions including Hindu, Muslim and Christians used to visit him. To Hindus he used to say, "You have come to me to seek spiritual knowledge. Do that and live in accordance with the tradition of your society. Your relation with me is not worldly but spiritual." He was the first person in the Naqshbandi Sufi Order, who without any discrimination spread the message of Sufism amongst the Hindus. He was completely free from religious bias and never participated in any religious debates or disputes, nor did he ever criticise any religion. If someone criticised any religion in front of him, he would leave that place. He pronounced that spirituality is one but religions are many. One should follow the dictates of one's religion and should not be guided by religious prejudices. The social or religious rituals do not bind spiritual life. If anyone suggested that he would convert and adopt Islam, he used to feel very upset. He disapproved of conversion, rejecting it outright. He used to admonish the person concerned saying that now you are not worth visiting me. I shall not allow anyone to put a spot on me. Once one of his Hindu disciples adopted Islamic traditions. When he went to visit Huzur Maharaj, he told him that he was no longer fit to come to him and asked him to readopt the Hindu traditions, the religion in which he was born.

As untouchability was prominent during those days, Huzur Maharaj did not touch even dried chilies meant for the consumption of his Hindu followers. Separate food used to be cooked for them. He used to say that everyone must observe the discipline of ones religion. Though he had accepted many persons including Muslims as his disciples, but he declared Mahatma Ramchandrajji of Fatehgarh (Lalaji Maharaj) to be his successor. This is an unprecedented and unique example of a Muslim Sufi giving away his entire

spiritual treasure to a Hindu without conversion and appointing him as his chief vicegerent.

Huzur Maharaj has stated that this Sufi way of spiritualism was prevalent amongst ancient Hindu saints, which is now being reintroduced amongst them. Dr. Chandra Gupta, a Sufi Master of the Naqshbandi tradition, also used to say that this method of spiritual practice was prevalent amongst Hindus in the past. He related it to Lord Sri Krishna, who was known as 'Yogeshwar, being the greatest spiritual Master of the 'Anahat Nad'. 'His' flute in reality represented the 'Anahat Nad', which sprang in the form of 'heartbeat' in the hearts of thousands of Gopis and Gwalas, who were devotees and were fortunate to receive Lord's grace.

Huzur Maharaj was born in 1857. His life had been full of extra-ordinary events. His conduct was an example of practicing the dictates of Scriptures in one's life. He was always content and satisfied. His Master Maulvi Ahmad Ali Khan chose him as his main Khalifa (successor) and mentioned, 'One like you is better than thousands.' His Tavajjoh (spiritual radiations) resembled exactly to that of Hajrat Baqi Billah, who was the first Naqshbandi Sufi Master to visit India in the sixteenth century.

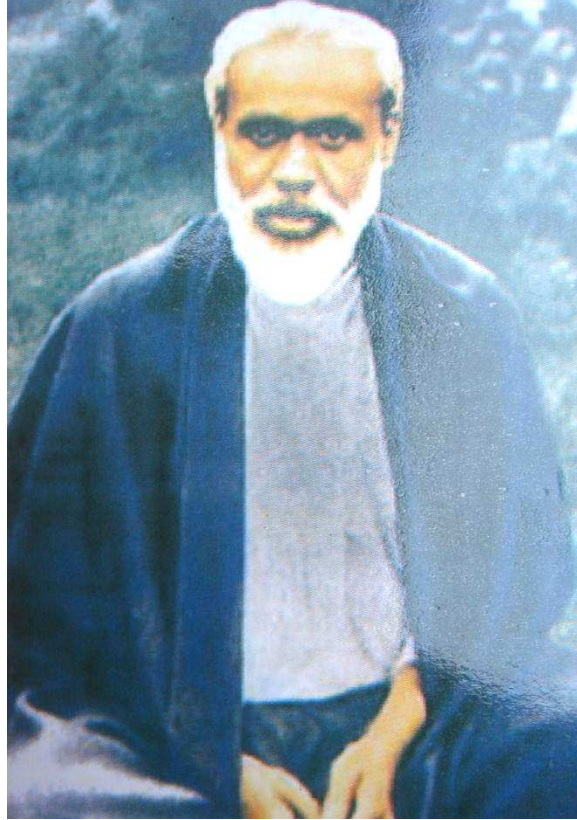
Huzur Maharaj did not accept offerings or did not allow anyone to touch his feet. Instead he himself often comforted his disciples by looking after their requirements. Often for days together his family lived on scanty food or with no food at all. Even then if he received some money from someone, he would distribute it to others. He spent most of his time in meditation. Once he started a dispensary and got some bottles filled up with water from a well. This water cured even those who were suffering for long. Whatever money he earned from this, 1/40th of that he kept for himself and the rest he gave to others. As the dispensary became very popular, he closed it after sometime.

Huzur Maharaj used to teach Persian. A young boy, son of a rich person, used to visit him to learn Persian. One day Huzur Maharaj asked him about his intention, as the boy was not interested in learning Persian. The boy did not say anything initially, but after sometime told Huzur Maharaj that he wanted to marry a lady and wanted to learn some 'Mantra', which could make her agree to marry him. Huzur Maharaj kept quiet. Later, one night he was sitting on the roof of his house and the light of the Moon was falling on him. This boy along with many others also was sitting in the satsang. Huzur Maharaj was wearing clean white clothes and had also applied some perfume. Some flowers were also lying there. Suddenly, he turned towards this boy and asked him, "My son, see towards me. Is that lady even more beautiful than me?" Huzur Maharaj was looking very enchanting. The boy looked towards Huzur Maharaj and was stunned. He was frozen like a statue. From that day the things changed entirely for him. In place of the desire for that lady, the boy's heart got filled with the love for Huzur Maharaj. In one moment, his destiny had been changed.

In the beginning, four persons used to visit Huzur Maharaj for satsang. One of them, a young person, used to visit a lady in a brothel. Some friends brought this to the notice of Huzur Maharaj, who told them to inform him next time when this young man

visits that lady. Next time when the young man went to visit the lady, Huzur Maharaj was informed of it. Huzur Maharaj took a bath, changed his dress, applied some perfume and proceeded along with others to the brothel. It was a small place and the lady also knew Huzur Maharaj. She was surprised to see Huzur Maharaj, who asked her to sing some song. She sang some songs, which to her understanding could be of interest to Huzur Maharaj. After hearing the songs Huzur Maharaj enquired about her charges for the night and paid her the fees. Huzur Maharaj was then around sixty. The lady and everyone else were taken aback that such a saint would stay in the brothel for the night. Huzur Maharaj, however, asked all others to return. After everyone else left, Huzur Maharaj told the lady, 'For tonight you are in my service and you will have to obey whatever I command. I do not like your jewelry, remove them first and then take bath.' Huzur Maharaj had taken with him a pair of his wife's clothes, which he asked the lady to put on after the bath. The lady complied with it. After that Huzur Maharaj asked her to offer Namaz with him. The lady thought for a moment what a trouble she had invited for herself by accepting the fees and then told Huzur Maharaj that she did not know how to offer Namaz. Huzur Maharaj told her, "You are in my service tonight and you shall have to obey me. It does not matter that you do not know how to offer Namaz. Repeat what I do." She started imitating Huzur Maharaj. When Huzur Maharaj put his head on the ground (in Sijda), she also did the same. At that moment Huzur Maharaj prayed, "O Almighty, with Your kind grace I have brought this lady up to this point. Now it is 'You' and she." Huzur Maharaj then left that place and came back to his house but that lady was frozen in that posture. Through out the night she lied in that posture. In the morning her mother woke her up. On opening her eyes, she was baffled. She looked around and told her mother, "Whatever I could earn for you, I have already handed it over to you. Your jewelry is lying there. These clothes are not yours and now I am going away." There was a neem tree in front of Huzur Maharaj's house. At around eleven in the morning she came there and sat under the tree. Huzur Maharaj spotted her and told his wife to bring her inside and to give her some food. After she had finished with the food, Huzur Maharaj enquired with her whether she wanted to come out of that life and spend a pious life in future. She immediately agreed to it. Huzur Maharaj then asked her to pray the Almighty to forgive her for her past deeds and called that young man and asked him if he liked that lady and wished to marry her. Huzur Maharaj then got them married and initiated both of them. They spent a pious life thereafter.

Huzur Maharaj proceeded on his heavenly abode on 30 November 1907. His mausoleum is situated in Raipur.



Mahatma Ramchandraj

Mahatma Ramchandraji

Mahatma Ramchandraji was the first Hindu Sufi saint duly authorized in the Naqshbandi Order of Sufis. He belonged to a highly respected Kayasth family of Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh. Emperor Akbar conferred the title 'Chaudhary' on Babu Vrindavan, one of his renowned ancestors and gifted him 555 villages amongst many other things. Babu Vrindavan named one of these villages as 'Bhoom-gram' and started living there. With the passage of time this village developed into a small town and its name got distorted to 'Bhogaon.' One of the descendants of this family was Ch. Harbaksh Rai, who though initially lived in Bhogaon but later after the mutiny in 1857 moved to Farukhabad. He was appointed as Superintendent-Octroi. His wife was a very pious and religious lady, who spent most of her time in prayers. She was fond of helping the needy, poor and orphan girls and spent lot of money in getting them married. No beggar ever returned empty handed from her door. She was gifted with a good voice and used to sing well. When she used to recite the 'Ramayana' people used to forget their surroundings and used to get absorbed in divine thoughts. Often she used to visit saints and sometimes they also used to stay at Ch. Sahab's house.

Once she went to visit a saint, who was explaining some of Sant Kabir's verses. She got completely absorbed in the satsang and tears started rolling out of her eyes. When after sometime she was about to leave, the saint blessed her to be filled with divine love. This blessing with the time showed its impact and as the days passed by she got more and more dedicated towards the Almighty and started sitting in trance (intense meditation). Although right from beginning she was not much interested in the worldly affairs, but after this incidence, she became more indifferent towards them.

After sometime, a Muslim Fakir (Avdhut) who all the time kept himself wrapped under a black blanket came to Farukhabad. One day he happened to pass through the street where Ch. Harbaksh Rai used to live. He asked for some food. She, with great respect and devotion offered him some food and sweets. The Fakir, however, told her that he wanted fish to eat. She was a vegetarian, but her husband Ch. Harbaksh Rai was a non-vegetarian for whom food was cooked separately. She enquired about fish and learnt that two fish, which were specially sent by Nawab Sahab, had been cooked for her husband. She immediately got both the fish and offered them to the Fakir. He gladly consumed them. An old maid, who was very much attached to the family, was present over there. She very politely, with folded hands mentioned to the Fakir that there was everything in the house with the grace of God except that Chaudhary Sahab did not have any child and requested him to pray to the Almighty for the same.

The Fakir laughed loudly and uttering 'Allah-o-Akbar' raised his hands in prayer. He then uttered 'one-two' and went away. The blessings of the Fakir materialized and after a year on 2nd February, 1873, on the day of Basant Panchami (a day of spring considered very auspicious) a divine soul descended in Chaudhary Sahab's house, who was later known all over as Param Sant Shri Ram Chandraji Sahab alias Janab Lalaji

Maharaj. After two years, on 7th October 1875 his younger brother, another divine soul arrived in Chaudhary Sahab's house, who was known as Mahatma Munshi Raghubar Dayalji Sahab alias Chachchaji Sahab.

Ramchandra was brought up with great care and affection. A number of servants were always in attendance to look after his needs. A transport also was provided to him separately. In his childhood he used to listen his mother reciting the 'Ramayana.' As a result he also developed a good singing throat and religious bent of mind. At the age of seven, however, he lost his mother. Thereafter a Muslim lady looked after and brought him up. Ramchandra used to respect her as his mother and looked after her throughout her life. A Maulvi Sahab (Muslim teacher) taught him Urdu, Persian and poetry. Thereafter he was admitted to the Mission School in Farukhabad.

During his education in Farukhabad, when he was in the Eighth standard, he had hired a room for his studies in Mufti Sahab's Madarsa. In the adjoining room used to live Maulana Fazl Ahmad Khan Sahab (Huzur Maharaj), who used to teach students privately for his livelihood. At times, Ramchandra used to seek Huzur Maharaj's guidance to solve his difficulties and Huzur Maharaj used to gladly help him. Huzur Maharaj used to treat him very affectionately, as his etiquettes, conduct and religious bent of mind had impressed him.

Ramchandra was later married in a good family. A few days later his father passed away. Although his father had already sold a lot of property, still Ramchandra had inherited some of it. Unfortunately, he got involved in litigation over property with the King of Mainpuri. This case went on for quite sometime and ultimately was decided against him. In discharge of the decree against him, Ramchandra had to sell off his house and other assets. Around this time he also lost his elder brother who was adopted by his father and, therefore, the entire responsibility of the family fell upon his young shoulders. There was no source of income and the financial condition of the family had started deteriorating very fast. The Distt. Collector of Fatehgarh, however, was known to Ramchandra's father and was very helpful to him. He called Ramchandra and appointed him as a paid apprentice for a remuneration of ten rupees per month. Fatehgarh and Farukhabad are at a distance of about four miles, which Ramchandra used to walk on foot, covering about 8-10 miles daily. The house was running entirely on this meager salary of ten rupees.

The spiritual training of Ramchandra had begun in the lap of his holy mother. Later Ramchandra with his friends often used to visit Swami Brahmanandji, who used to live on the bank of Holy Ganges. Swamiji was a great saint, who was supposed to be about 150 years then. Ramchandra used to try to follow Swamiji's teachings. Swamiji and Huzur Maharaj used to have meetings with each other. Often Swamiji made mention of Huzur Maharaj stating that he is the crown of saints in Farukhabad but Ramchandra did not know that the Sufi saint about whom Swamiji used to mention is the Maulvi Sahab living next door to the room he had taken for his studies in Mufti Sahab's Madarsa.

A few months after he had joined the service in Fatehgarh, Ramchandra returned from his workplace late in the evening. It was a dark winter night with thundering clouds and heavy rains. With his clothes completely drenched, Ramchandra was shivering. He was in a very pathetic condition. When he was going to his room, Huzur Maharaj happened to spot him. Huzur Maharaj took pity on him and remarked, “You have come at this time in this thunderstorm.” Ramchandra used to say that these words were filled with lot of love. He very politely greeted Huzur Maharaj who blessed him and told him, “Go, change your clothes and come to me. Warm up yourself before the fire and then go to your home.” These words were charismatic and were pulling Ramchandra towards Huzur Maharaj. Ramchandra after changing his clothes came to Huzur Maharaj. By then Huzur Maharaj had lighted up an Angithi (an earthen stove). Ramchandra saluted Huzur Maharaj, who raised his eyes and saw in his eyes. As both of them saw in to each other’s eyes, a current passed through Ramchandra’s body from head to toe, which stunned him. Huzur Maharaj very kindly asked him to sit in his bed and covered him with his quilt. Ramchandra used to say that he felt very light as if he was flying in the sky and the entire body was sparkling with light. For about two hours, he remained in this state, which was full of bliss. By that time it stopped raining. With the permission of Huzur Maharaj, he returned to his room. While entering his room, he felt light was spread in front of the room, which engulfed everything and in this light trees, animals, walls, everything was dancing. ‘Anahat Nad’ (Aum) was reverberating in each of the cells of his body. All his spiritual chakras were activated and energized and he felt as if Huzur Maharaj had taken his place.

When he returned home, he did not wish to eat anything and slept without having dinner. In dream he saw a group of saints, Huzur Maharaj and himself. A throne descended from the Skies on which a great saint was sitting. All the saints stood up in his honor. Huzur Maharaj presented Ramchandra before him. He looked at him attentively and said, ‘From his childhood his inclination is towards the Almighty.’ Next day Ramchandra mentioned about his dream to Huzur Maharaj, who was very glad to hear about it. He closed his eyes and meditated for sometime. He then opened his eyes and told Ramchandra, “What you saw was not a dream but was the truth. Your inclination right from the birth is towards the Almighty. You are very fortunate, as the great Masters of this line (the Naqshbandi Sufi Order) have accepted you. You have taken birth to show the path to others. Such souls descend on this earth after centuries. The experience you had in the first sitting itself, one can seldom achieve after practicing for decades. Whenever you passed through me, and greeted me, I used to feel an attraction and lot of love for you. Thus, you were continuously getting my attention (Tavajjoh). God-willing very soon you will not only be *Fanafil-Shaikh* (merger of the disciple with the Master) but *Fanafil-Murid* (merger of the Master with the disciple). If you do not have any objection and if you so wish, keep on visiting this Fakir (Huzur Maharaj) also. After this Ramchandra started visiting Huzur Maharaj regularly and benefited from his satsang.

Maulana Fazl Ahmad Khan Sahab was a Muslim and Mahatma Ramchandrajji a Hindu. In this context Mahatma Ramchandrajji in his dairy, which he used to maintain, has written: “My *Hazrat Qibla*-Maulvi Fazl Ahmad Khan Sahab Raipuri, my revered Master, is my guide and all in all for me. At one moment I felt that amidst all these

emotions, which absorb me in great joy, I do not know from where a false thought had got into my mind. I used to look for it but was unable to understand its existence. I got tired of looking for it but I could not find it. Exhausted, I gave up and felt as if I was losing everything. I started entertaining a thought that all my sadhana (effort) was a waste and the only reason for thinking so was the nurturing of the feeling of that false thought. There was none else to take me out of this dilemma except my wife. I felt that someone was reproaching me, hurting me and was laughing at my pain. I felt that there was no one weaker than me in this world. Amidst this scolding I also felt as if the thief within me was none else than my own inferiority complex, which I do not know how and when entered my mind in the form of a svedo-sect consciousness. I do not know from where this inferiority complex had entered in my sub-conscious mind that my revered Master, whom I considered as my all in all, my guide and on whom I have cast the burden of my both the worlds and on whose hands I have even taken the initiation, he is a Muslim also. This was not only a contradiction but the biggest sin of the world.

I because of my worthless intelligence kept on thinking of that great man, who was above all religious and communal prejudices, only as a Muslim; “Only a Muslim alone, a communal! Till then I had not understood Islam in its real sense. I was familiar neither with the Hindu philosophy nor with Islam. When I was exposed, in a moment it appeared that the entire philosophy was staring at me.” It was she, who is fortunately my wife, who exposed my falsehood towards him “whom I considered a strict communal”.

Till now it was my dilemma, the biggest falsehood of my life, the greatest sin. The thief within me used to say that the leader of the path chosen by you is a Muslim. Your beloved wife, except whom you have no one else in the world, is a person born and brought up in strict Hindu tradition. When she would come to know that her life-partner has accepted a Muslim as his Master, what would she feel? Engrossed in these thoughts, I was standing at such a juncture, where my mind was unable to help me.

Gathering all the courage that I could muster, I the greatest coward of this world, ultimately decided that whatever be the consequences now I would not let this secret to remain a secret any more. Converting all my cowardice into strength, when I appeared before my wife, my mental state was no different than that of a thief. Thief and that too such a thief, who was about to surrender. I like a child narrated my entire story to her and also what I had been thinking about her.

She was still the same, quiet and serious. She was perhaps not aware what was passing through my mind and behaved as if nothing had happened. She heard me like a wise judge and then she announced her brief judgment-“You have done a wonderful thing.” And then like a true companion she insisted-“Take me also to that ‘Param Sant’ (great saint). I am a servant at your feet. Let my birth be also fruitful. For a lady the biggest religion is her husband and nothing else. Without this servant your goal would not be achieved, this is what the scriptures also state.”

Forgetting about my guilt, now I was happy that she was happy. She not only saved me from sinking but in fact showed me the way. Her silent but lively expression

was getting engraved on my mind-“Saints do not belong to any caste, they do not belong to any race; they are above all such considerations”. What could not have been achieved even after taking several births, I was able to achieve that in a moment by the grace of God, although I did not deserve it. By the grace of my Master, I was taken out of this dilemma.

On her insistence when I took her to my Master’s residence in the morning, he was very happy. Unknowingly I had done some such thing which he had liked. The entire day we enjoyed his hospitality. All through the day he was telling our Guru-Mata (wife of the Master), “look our daughter-in-law has come; our children have come”. In spite of all his instructions being followed, he was saying-“how fortunate are we today that we are seeing our daughter and children. The Almighty has filled our house with joy. Bring bangles for them; fry Puris (deep fried pancakes) for them. She should remember that it is her mother-in-law’s house”. He was over-whelmed with love and that flux of love was engulfing me too in its fold. I had not seen him so over-whelmed with love before. Humanity had embraced humanity and the soul was eager to merge with its origin.

Now both of us had taken shelter at his feet in this atmosphere of love. Till now I was alone. It was the fructification of the entire effort of life. My *Hazrat Qibla* accepted and initiated her as well in the Order. This day was like a great festival in our life and the one never to forget.”

In regard to the authorization given to him to carry forward the mission of his Master, Mahatma Ramchandrajji has mentioned: “All the gestures of Huzur Maharaj were elegant. I came to know that on 9, 10 and 11 Oct. 1896, he was himself organizing an *Urs* (ceremony) wherein saints and Mahatmas from all religions and sects were invited to participate. The *Urs* ceremony started in the morning of the first day i.e. 9th Oct. 1896 as already decided in which Huzur Maharaj had made me his right hand (trusted lieutenant) and accordingly I was made responsible for the execution of many of the programs.

In the evening of the last day of *Urs* i.e. on 11th Oct. 1896, a meeting of specially distinguished persons was called in which the Pir-mushadna (Masters), great saints-Sadgurus, Mathadhish (heads of monasteries) and other accredited with such high status belonging to various religions and sects including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Kabirpanthis, Jains, Buddhists and others, who had arrived from distant places were included. Presenting this humble servant before them Huzur Maharaj announced – “this fakir has been ordered by the Buzurgan-e-Silila-Aliya Naqshbandia – Mujadiddia – Mazharia (great Masters of the Naqshbandia-Mujadiddia-Mazharia Order) that dear Ramchandra be conferred with full authorization (*Izazat-ta-amma*). So, the great ones! After testing him you may like to kindly concur in it or reject it.” Thereafter my lord (Huzur Maharaj) addressed me with my pet name and said- “My son Putulal! Give them ‘*Tavajjoh*’ and whatever questions they ask you, give them appropriate and satisfactory answer. The Almighty may give you success.”

I did not take any time in complying with the orders of my *Hazrat Qibla*. My eyes closed. Thereafter like fumes a stream of thoughts erupted from deep within me, which

possibly was a gross expression of my gratitude towards my Master. “It was enough that you gave me shelter at your feet and accepted me, a worthless person. The shower of your love on me, an undeserved person, comforts me every moment. I am getting immersed in the ocean of your boundless affection and love. Whatever has been done through me till now or ever since you have been showering your grace without any expectation from me, there is nothing that can be attributed to me; not even this attempt is mine. Whatever is there, it is only a fructification of your everlasting inspiration. Perhaps you would not have noticed. Whatever your love expected of me, I acted accordingly. The lord of my entire being! I am looking only at you. Thy will be done.”

Then the clouds of grossness started to disappear on their own and after a few moments it looked as if dawn had arrived. A dim light was seen and across that light, I had recognized, it was the subtle form of the guru of my Master, which had moved from the grossness of emotions and was now showing its glimpse on this side. It was my first encounter with such an enchanting and thrilling dance of the grace of Satguru. What did I know that these were the very moments of getting face to face with ‘*Pralay*’ (dissolution); it was beyond imagination. The state of thoughtlessness was now reaching new heights and had reached the state of ‘*Tam*’ (the state of darkness or non-being or non-existence). I felt as if my own existence and even its feeling were disappearing. In between when ever my attention returned to the state of being, I found there nothing except the existence of my Master. Slowly and slowly it (his existence) appeared to extend and to such an extent as if the entire creation would get merged in it. It was the state of a wonderful and divine bliss. All the Masters of this Order were being clearly seen twinkling across a transparent shield of light. It appeared as if the ‘*Prakriti*’ (nature) was in a state of full bloom and all over it was bliss and bliss alone. For some time ‘*Satnam*’ (the divine vibration) echoed in that scene with its charming and musical presence. Thereafter even that also disappeared. Whatever it was; there was neither light nor darkness; no color, no sound. Colorless melting light appeared to take the entire creation in its fold. Such a sparkling light in comparison of which the light of several suns would appear dim. In this ocean of love and bliss all of them were completely immersed. After about an hour it appeared that all of us were returning to our conscious state. Amongst all this, I felt that Huzur Maharaj was playing his role – and then I heard him saying – “It is enough now”.

Slowly everyone opened their eyes. On their faces an extra-ordinary happiness and satisfaction was clearly visible. Now my *Hazrat Qibla* was being profoundly congratulated. Words were falling short to express their feelings which were being communicated through wet eyes. The whole atmosphere was filled with ‘*Holi*’ (the festival of colors) like gaiety. All of them had given a combined verdict – “he (i.e. this humble servant) has achieved marvel. Not only has he gained access to the ‘*Satpad*’ (the abode of Truth) but he has established himself there and is absorbed in that state.” After these compliments, now the session of questions and answers had begun. The first question was – “Son, tell us what is the meaning of ‘*Shukr*’ (gratitude). I answered- “to use everything (given by the God) appropriately in accordance with the scriptures is ‘*Shukr*’. The next question was – “What is the meaning of ‘*Yaft*’”. This servant first explained the literal meaning of the word ‘*Yaft*’ which means a ‘benefit’ or ‘gain’ etc.

and then explained that this word is used in conjunction with some other word. The way, in which this question was asked, I had understood that it was asked in the context of just finished meditation. I, therefore, continued,—"Its Hindi (Sanskrit) translation is 'Samyukta' (joined-united), from which is derived the word-'Samyojta'. *Samyojta* is that spiritual state in which the lover and the one he loves i.e. the beloved, their existence becomes one, there is no difference (or separate identity) left between them. On reaching this state of 'Yaft' or 'Samyojta', there remains no fear of falling down. The true realization of 'Truth' occurs only in this state. In the sequence of questions and answers now it was the turn of – "*Tajjali-e-Joat*". *Tajjali* literally means light or brilliance. In the context in which the question was asked it referred to "*Adhyatm Jyoti*" (the spiritual light) or "*Noor-e-Haq*" (the Divine Light). It is that state of illumination where the '*Mayavi Prakash*' (the physical light) has no access. Such a bond of love exists only when one gets absorbed in true love. It is a way of Samadhi or '*Muraqaba*' (meditation) and the purpose is to evoke "*Jaukiya Prem*". '*Jauk*' is the name of a special state that comes after relishing something i.e. the state where one retains the memory of the thing relished and longs for it. Such a meditation takes one to his goal.

From ordinary questions it was now the turn of complicated and difficult questions about which ordinarily a person like me could not be expected to have first-hand knowledge or self-experience. The question that was put before me was "what is death? What is the state of affairs after death?" My *Hazrat Qibla* stroked my back and sat behind on one side. Our eyes exchanged a glance and like a machine I started to answer. Those were the most valuable moments of my life and I was feeling that behind my words it was none else except my Huzur Maharaj, who was speaking through me. I spoke for about one hour and every one was listening with apt attention. When the words started falling short of expression, their place was taken by charged emotions, and I do not know under whose influence and on whose strength, I had announced—"O Greatly revered scholars and saints! Whatever could be expressed through words about death I have mentioned before you. Now this humble servant is making an attempt to take you all through the experience of death -----". And while I was saying so, their eyes got closed and amidst total silence they all experienced the reality of death. The silence was broken by Huzur Maharaj asking them to open their eyes. It was indescribable; tears were rolling out of their eyes. What madness was this? What an obsession it was? The experience of and encounter with the 'Causal body' by the embodied soul while still in the gross-physical body, the experience of death while still alive and the experience of the state beyond death, it was all not only astonishing but a new and unbelievable chapter in the history of spirituality. People had once again become vocal. They were talking to each other and congratulating my lord. Yes, they were once again congratulating my lord, my Master. I was dumbstruck and not knowing what to do, was waiting for some such thing to happen that I, including all my physical existence may get completely merged in him. I do not know for how long this all went on.

After a little while the discussions took a new turn and now they all wanted to know in one voice not from me but from my Master. They were asking, what kind of love it was, what kind of madness it was, and what a strange transmission of energy this was that the one to whom a Naqshbandi Sufi is nominating his successor is a '*Vedanti*'. How

can this happen? Some *Vedantis* (scholars of Vedas) were also present there. They were desirous to know how such a practical knowledge of Vedas and Upanishads could be kept a secret with Sufis and that too in such a peaceful and quiet manner that no one had even an idea of it that why such a great necessity could not convert into a revolution so far?

It was the last and concluding session of the full three days conclave. The enthusiasm and happiness, which he was exhibiting all through these days, now had been replaced by stillness and then with great ease he addressed – “In all the human beings of the world, spirituality flows in the same manner but their way of living differs.” In his brief address he also revealed one more thing to them. It was an old incidence relating to the time when Swami Dayanand ji Maharaj had come to Karimganj. A lot of people had gathered. Besides *Aryasamajis*, scholars and saints belonging to other religions had also gathered to listen to him. He (Huzur Maharaj) along with his *Pir-O-Murshadna* (his spiritual Master) Hazrat Maulana Shah Ahmad Ali Khan Sahab (Raham. U. Al.) also had gone to listen to him. When both of them were returning after attending the last seminar, on the way Hazrat Khalifaji Sahab (my Master’s Master) had asked my Rev. Master (Huzur Maharaj) – “You must also raise a similar vibrant personality (*Jawan-Mard*) for the progress of the mission of this “*Silsila-e-Aliya*”. My Dada Guru (Master’s Master) had asked him to raise a person “exactly like Swami Dayanand”. In reply my Master bowing his head down had said – “This servant has grown only a ‘*Babool*’ tree (the acacia tree)”. The Rev. Dada Guru Dev had raised his hands towards the sky in prayer and then he made this forecast – “God willing, he would so bloom that he would take upon himself all the pains and difficulties of the world to bear them in his heart and would spread greenery and comfort all over.” Then after narrating this incidence, Huzur Maharaj once again said “*Amin*” and for about two minutes he kept silence, absorbed in the past. My Rev. Master then looked at his hands on both the sides and thereafter rubbed them well on his face. Then he murmured something, looked at me intently and after closing his eyes for a few minutes, he spoke in calculated words – “After that day, waiting for the arrival of dear Ramchandra had become my *Ibadat* (adoration). The evening when it had become dark because of thundering and raining, that day was very satisfying for me. It was winters. That day he (this humble servant)- had got late in returning from the Collectorate Office, perhaps due to bad weather and his condition was very pitiable. When he having entered from the gate towards Madarsa-Muft Sahab was proceeding towards his room, he was completely drenched and his entire body was shivering because of cold. This fakir (Huzur Maharaj) was anxiously waiting for him in that stormy evening. I remember it very well. My looking at him; him getting perturbed and looking down; stopping a bit; a little hesitation; then first turning away his eyes and thereafter saluting me with great *Shaistagi* (respect). All this is fresh in my mind even today. I had instantly remarked-“Oh! You are returning at this hour in this stormy weather?” I remember it well. I remember the satisfaction and peace I got when he had come to my room for the first time. He had gone to his room for changing his clothes on my asking and to please me he had come back again after changing his dress along with a cap on his head with full Sufi etiquettes; and how eager I too was for him. Hastily I had raked up the fire in my *Barosi* (earthen stove). Nothing has faded from my memory that how passionately I had covered him with my quilt. I do not know whether it was done to comfort him from the cold and shivering or whether it was because of the eagerness to

establish him in the eternity of my *Pir-o-Murshadna*.” And like this he was refreshing his memories of our past. Now, perhaps he was getting emotional too. I was unsuccessful in my attempt to gather courage to look at his moist eyes. Amidst this I was also not unaware of the emotions of the gathering. I was reminded of a line by a poet in which he had said it on behalf of a beloved- **“AB TUMSE RUKHSAT HOTA HOON, LO AAO SAMBHALO SAAJ-E-GAJAL; NAYE TARANE CHEDO, MERE NAGMON KO NIND AATI HAI.”** (I now take leave of you, come on and take charge of the floor; sing new songs, I want to take rest).

I can understand no one had expected that the reply of Huzur Maharaj to tell them what they were anxious to know would make everyone so emotional. I was feeling clearly that the blessing of the entire chain of the great Masters of this Order was drizzling like the pearls of dew, which while on the one hand covered the entire atmosphere with golden-moonlight, on the other hand it had filled every one’s heart with an ocean of divine bliss in which they were fully immersed and were thrilled.

After a little while the mood of the assembly started changing and now everyone was sitting peacefully and quietly. My revered Master called me to sit very close to him. A file was kept near him in which some letters and documents already written in very good and attractive handwriting were lying. Out of these, he took out two, which he considered to be extremely important; and started reading one of them, himself. This document was concerning this humble servant and contained details of those aspects of *Brahm Vidya* (esoteric knowledge) which were told by my revered Master to me and the details of spiritual chakras, which had been brought within my access and wherein I had been established firmly.

The letter had also indicated what ability and competence had been acquired by this humble servant for other seekers to take them to various chakras (spiritual centers) and to establish them there. The second document was an *Izazatnama* (letter of authorization) in favor of this humble servant, which was based on the narration in the first document. All the saints and great scholars present there endorsed both the certificates with unanimity and I was blessed profoundly. Since they were representing various sects and religions, they also having satisfied themselves, wrote *Izazatnamas* on their own behalf and requested Huzur Maharaj to give them to this humble servant. It was certified in all those *Izazatnamas* that this servant named Ramchandra has accessed and established himself in the state of ‘*Hirnyagarbh*’ (the golden cosmic egg). My revered Master Huzur Maharaj read each one of them, laying his finger on every word. Thereafter, he requested one of the *Vedanti* saints present over there to briefly describe the state of ‘*Hirnyagarbh*’. He explained-“**HIRNYAGARBHE ASTI YASYA SA HIRNYAGARBH**. Meaning thereby that one who has ‘*Hirnya*’ in its womb is ‘*Hirnyagarbh*’. *Hirnya* is the power of brilliance, superiority and sovereignty, which can be called ‘*Parmatma*’ (the Supreme Soul) or ‘*Paramsatta*’ (the Supreme Authority). This power is working in the Sun and in its nuclei because of which it is *Hirnyagarbh*.” The expression and glow on the face of my revered Master was now worth seeing. He said-“Ramchandra, today you have brought glory to your parents and enhanced the status of all the Buzurgan-e-Silsila-e-Aliya Naqshbandia-Mujaddiya-Mazhariya. If I would have

allowed you to accept Islam, you would have become merely an ordinary Muslim. But today what is being talked because of you relating to the heavens, the Sun and the Earth, I am exhilarated. My son a time would come and surely it would come that you would shine like the Sun. God willing, a new era would dawn with you. Your generations after generations, grandsons after grandsons would attain sainthood and Masterhood. My son, this is a great thing.” All those present there said “*Amin*”. Huzur Maharaj then stood up and with him I and all others also stood up. My *Hazrat Qibla* embraced me and then after clearing his throat said in a very sweet voice-“Take this my son. Be always happy. Be this be very auspicious to you” and handed over the *Izazatnama* (the letter of authorization) to me. All others were also getting emotional. Huzur Maharaj then continued-“My son, this fakir is handing over to you all that he has earned in his life. All the auspiciousness is waiting for your *Tavajjoh* (attention).” Thereafter he got a bit serious and said-“My son, from today, nay right from now onwards, there is no difference left between you and me. My existence has annihilated in your existence and your existence has annihilated in that Ajim Hasti (Glorious Being) where my Qibla-o-Kaba (revered Master) was looking for you for long.” And then after a while he said-“My son you must keep the following things always in your mind –

- Always try to avoid being a Makhadam (a lord or master) and be away from it;
- Try to be a servant and serve others;
- Never promise or make a commitment to any one that in so much time I would take you to such a spiritual state or experience. In stead always render whatever service you can render without any discrimination and never make any claim.

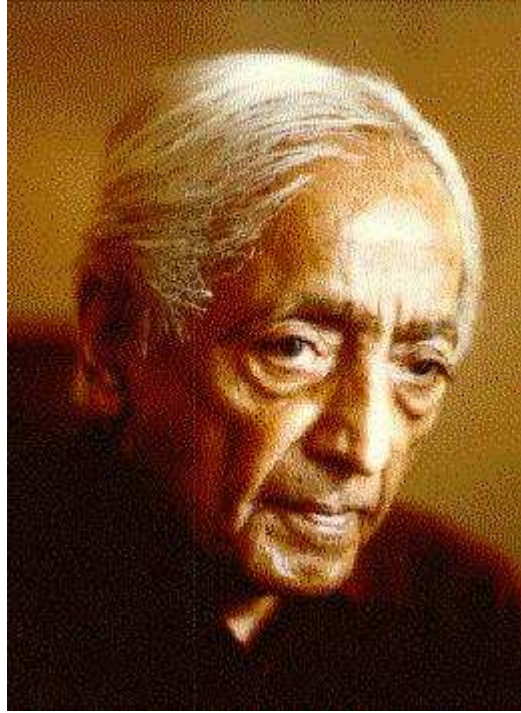
After saying all this he stroked his charming beard gently and then said further-“My son, one who wishes to seek the world, you should dispose him off as early as possible and you should not initiate him. God willing, this Order would never discontinue.” While leaving Huzur Maharaj handed over all those invaluable inheritances to me (cap, turban, sleeve of *Kurta* etc.) which he had received from Janab Khalifa ji Sahab (his revered Master). It was my fortune.”

It is an incidence of 1929. Mahatma Ramchandra was working as Record Keeper in the office of Distt. Collector, Fatehgarh. An important file was misplaced and could not be located in spite of all efforts. Being Record Keeper, it was the responsibility of Ramchandra to trace the file. In the evening at home he was thinking about the file that the face of a frightened clerk appeared before him. Ramchandra understood the matter, went to that clerk’s residence and asked for the file. In fact that clerk had taken the file home for some work and had forgotten about it thereafter. Now he was afraid that the Collector would not pardon him. Ramchandra promised him that he would not reveal his name to any one. The clerk then handed over the file to Ramchandra, who produced it before the Collector but did not reveal the name of that clerk to him in spite of Collector’s insistence.

Around those days some Satsangis came to visit him. He got busy with them and in the process forgot to go to the Collectorate. By chance on that day the Commissioner was to inspect the office of the Collector. In the afternoon when it struck to him, he

almost went running to the office. He enquired one of the staff members whether the inspection was over. That person was surprised and said, 'Are you joking with me. You were yourself presenting all the files immediately on asking.' Ramchandra understood the matter that in his place his Master had attended to his duty. Ramchandra was in tears. He submitted his resignation to the Collector and left the service for fully devoting himself to the mission of his Master.

Mahatma Ramchandraji proceeded on his heavenly abode on 14 August 1931. His Samadhi is situated in Fatehgarh, UP.



Jiddu Krishnamurti

Jiddu Krishnamurti

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born on 12 May 1895 in an orthodox and religious Telugu Brahman family of Madanapalle in Chitoor district of Andhra Pradesh. His father was Jiddu Narayaniah, who was employed with the British Administration and his mother was Sanjeevamma, who died when he was ten. He was a sensitive but vague and uncertain child, who was shaky and dreaming, often taken to be mentally retarded, and was scolded both at school by his teachers and at home by his father. He, however, had a generous and religious bent of mind.

Krishnamurti's father Narayaniah retired in the year 1907 and being of limited means wrote to Annie Besant, the then President of the Theosophical Society, seeking employment at its Headquarters at Adyar. Narayaniah was not only an orthodox Brahman, but also a Theosophist since 1882. He was eventually employed by the Society as a clerk, and he along with his family moved to Adyar.

A few months later, Theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater, who proclaimed clairvoyance, noticed Krishnamurti and was impressed by the "most wonderful aura he had ever seen, without a particle of selfishness in it." Leadbeater believed that the boy would become a spiritual teacher and a great orator and likely to be used as the "vehicle for the Lord Maitreya". Lord Maitreya, according to Theosophical doctrine, is an advanced spiritual entity that periodically appears on Earth as a World Teacher to guide the evolution of humankind. This would happen, Leadbeater added, "Unless something went wrong". The World Teacher, according to various scriptures, takes a human form from time to time to bring salvation to mankind. To prepare the world for His coming, an organization called the 'Order of the Star in the East' was formed in 1911 and the young Krishnamurti was put at its head. He was then taken to England in the same year to be privately educated and trained and in general for preparing him as the likely vehicle of the World Teacher. Within six months Krishnamurti was able to speak and write English fluently.

Krishnamurti developed a strong bond with Annie Besant and considered her a surrogate mother. There was a time when Krishnamurti believed that he was to become the World Teacher. His public image as originally thought by the members of the Theosophical Society "was to be characterized by a well-polished exterior, a sobriety of purpose, a cosmopolitan outlook and an otherworldly, almost beatific detachment in his demeanor", which in fact characterized Krishnamurti's public image. However, as he was growing up, Krishnamurti showed signs of rebellion and emotional instability. He did not feel comfortable with the public attention he was receiving and entertained doubts about the future prescribed for him.

Krishnamurti traveled to many European countries and in 1922 he traveled from Sydney to California on way to Switzerland. While in California he stayed at a cottage in the relatively secluded Ojai Valley where he underwent certain mystical experiences, which altered his vision of life. A few years later, he renounced the role that had been

thrust on him, dissolved the Order with its huge following and gave up all the money and property collected for this mission. In 1929 he delivered a historical speech explaining why religious organizations cannot lead man to Truth. He declared that Truth is a pathless land, which could not be approached by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect... Truth being limitless, unconditioned and unapproachable by any path whatsoever cannot be organized, nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path. He also said that his only concern was to set man absolutely and unconditionally free.

Thereafter he started traveling all over the world giving talks and interviews and wrote extensively, not as a guru, but as a lover of truth. These have been compiled into several books, translated into more than fifty languages and recorded on audio and videotapes. He did so for more than fifty-five years, until his passing away on 17 February 1986.

Krishnamurti earned the reputation of being world's foremost spiritual teacher. He dedicated all his life to awakening man to his own sorrow and the possibility of freedom. He did not stay at any place for more than a few months at a time. He did not consider himself as belonging to any particular country or religion. His lectures were attended by thousands of people from all sections, beliefs and nationalities. He used to ask them to focus on the working of their own minds, which according to him was the source of all problems, the nature of the human mind and the significance of Creation itself. What he taught stemmed from his personal realization that Truth cannot be reached by any path, religion or sect. To realize the Truth one must strive to ascend to it through one's own effort by casting aside past conditioning of mind.

The essence of Krishnamurti's thoughts is revealed in the following passages:

“Can that, which is immeasurable be found by you and me? Can that, which is not of time be searched but by that thing which is fashioned of time? Can a diligently practiced discipline lead us to the unknown? Is there a means to that which has no beginning and no end? Can that reality be caught in the net of our desires? What we can capture is the projection of the known; but the unknown cannot be captured by the known. That which is named is not the unnamable, and by naming we only awaken the conditioned responses. These responses, however, noble and pleasant, are not of the real.

The mind moves from the known to the known, and it cannot reach out into the unknown. You cannot think of something you do not know; it is impossible. What you think about comes out of the known, the past, whether that past is remote, or the moment that has just gone by. This past is thought, shaped and conditioned by many influences, modifying itself according to circumstances and pressures, but ever remaining a process of time. Thought can only deny or assert; it cannot discover the new. Thought cannot come upon the new; but when thought is silent, then there may be the new, which is immediately transformed into the old, into the experienced, by thought. Thought is ever shaping, modifying, coloring according to a pattern of experience. The function of thought is to communicate but not to be in the state of experiencing. When

experiencing ceases, then thought takes over and terms it within the category of the known. Thought cannot penetrate into the unknown, and so it can never experience reality.

Discipline, renunciation, detachment, rituals and practice of virtue—all these, however, noble, are the process of thought and thought can only work towards an end, towards an achievement, which is ever the known. Achievement is security, the self-protective certainty of the known. To seek security in that which is nameless is to deny it. The security that may be found is only in the projection of the past, of the known.

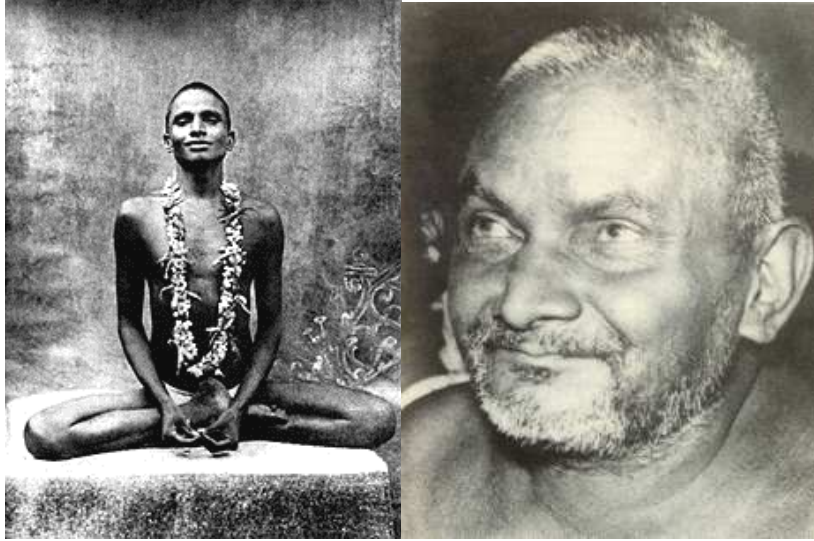
For this reason the mind must be entirely and deeply silent but this silence cannot be purchased through sacrifice, sublimation or suppression. This silence comes when the mind is no longer seeking, no longer caught in the process of becoming. This silence may not be built up through practice. This silence must be as unknown to the mind as the timeless, for if the mind experiences the silence, then there is the experiencer which is cognizant of a past silence and what is experienced by the experiencer is merely a self-projected repetition. The mind can never experience the new, and so the mind must be utterly still. The mind can be still only when it is not experiencing, that is, when it is not terming or naming, recording or storing up in memory. This recording is a constant process of the different layers of consciousness, not merely of the upper mind. But when the superficial mind is quiet, the deeper mind can offer up its intimations. When the whole consciousness is free from all becoming, which is spontaneity, then only does the immeasurable come into being. The desire to maintain this freedom gives continuity to the memory of the becomer, which is a hindrance to reality. Reality has no continuity; it is from moment to moment, ever new, ever fresh. What has continuity can never be created.

The upper mind is only an instrument of communication; it cannot measure the immeasurable. Reality is not to be spoken of; when it is, it's no longer reality. This is meditation.

With most of us, the struggle of pain and pleasure, the urge of activity, gives us the sense of life; and if that urge were taken away, we should be lost and soon disintegrate. But this stillness and its movement was creation ever renewing itself. It was a movement that had no beginning and so had no ending; nor was it a continuity. Movement implies time; but here there was no time. Time is yesterday and tomorrow; but in this stillness all comparison ceased. It was not a silence that came to an end to begin again.

If this silence were an illusion, the mind would have some relationship to it, it would either reject it or cling to it, reason it away or with subtle satisfaction identify itself with it; but since it has no relationship to this silence, the mind cannot accept or deny it. The mind can operate only with its own projections, with the things, which are of itself; but it has no relationship with things that are not of its origin. This silence is not of the

mind, and so the mind becomes identified with it. The content of this silence is not to be measured by words.”



Baba Nityanand

Baba Nityanand

Nityanand was found as an abandoned child in Tuneri village of Kozhikode by a lady named Uniamma Nair, who was married to Chathu Nair. The couple took pity on the child and adopted him. They already had their own five children with whom this child also started to grow. His foster parents named him as Raman. His foster father died when Nityanand was only three years. After another three years his foster mother also died. Before dying, however, she handed over her responsibility of Nityananda to Ishwar Iyer, who was a rich farmer and whose fields the Nair couple used to look after. Right from his early childhood Nityanand exhibited his spiritual inclination and it appeared that he was a great soul.

Soon Nityanand left his foster home and started wandering. It is believed that he spent his time in the Himalayas practicing yoga and thereby acquiring miraculous powers. Little is known about Nityanand's Guru and some even believe that he had no Guru. His main disciple Baba Muktanand, however, once mentioned that an accomplished saint of Kerala was Nityanand's Guru.

Nityanand returned in around 1920 and then started building an Ashram in Kanhangad in Kerala. Since there was no visible source of income for Nityanand to undertake such a project, the local police suspected that Nityanand had indulged in producing counterfeit money to pay for the building. Nityananda took them to a pond in the jungle, which was infested by crocodiles. He dived in the pond and came out with lot of money. Seeing this miracle, the local police gave up their idea to investigate the matter any further. The beautiful hill temple and Ashram in Kanhangad are now centers of pilgrimage. The Guru-Van, a forest in the hills where Baba Nityanand did his sadhana is also a pilgrim retreat.

By the year 1923, Nityananda came to the Tansa Valley in Maharashtra, where his reputation as a miraculous Sadhu attracted people to visit him though he never took credit for any miracles. He said, "Everything that happens, happens according to the will of God." Nityananda extended a helping hand to the local tribal people and built a school for their children and provided food and clothing for them.

Baba Nityanand did not believe in preaching or giving sermons. His devotees would generally sit quietly near him and if they asked any question, Baba would reply. Occasionally only he spoke something on his own. In 1920s one of his devotees Tulsamma wrote down some of his teachings and his answers to her specific queries. Later, these notes were compiled and published in the Kannada language and came to be known as the 'Chidaksha Geeta'.

Some believe that Baba Nityananda had the power to transmit spiritual energy (shaktipat) to people. At times his behavior was extremely fiery and intimidating even to the extent of throwing pieces of stones to shun away visitors. This was his way of

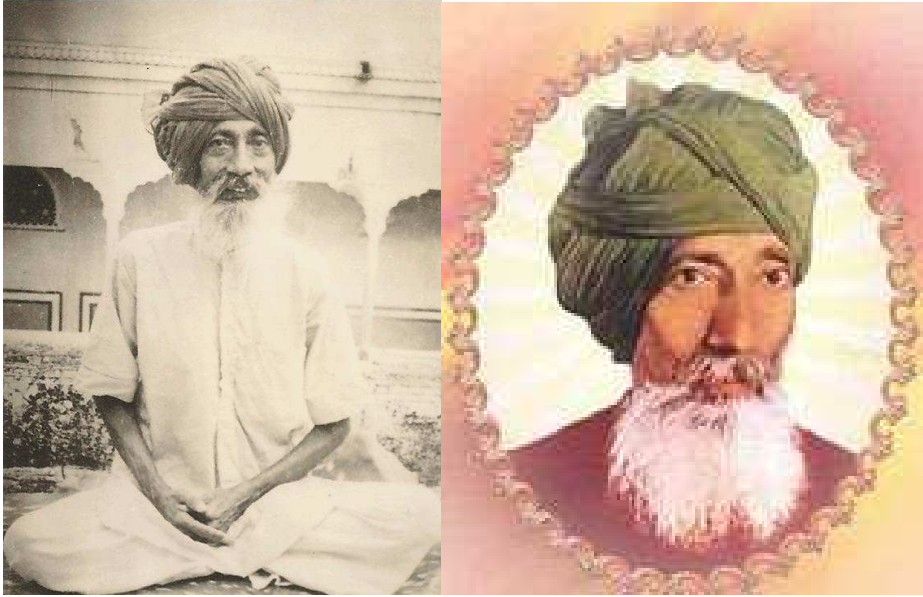
detering people, who were not serious in their spiritual aspirations or who visited him with some ulterior motive.

In 1936, Baba Nityanand visited a Shiva temple in Ganeshpuri and expressed his desire to stay over there. He was permitted by the caretakers of the temple and they also built a hut for him. Gradually the hut converted into an Ashram as the number of visitors started swelling.

Baba Muktanand was the chief disciple of Baba Nityanand. Muktanand visited Ganeshpuri in the year 1947 and met Baba Nityanand in the early morning of August 15. Baba Muktanand often said that his spiritual journey had not till then truly begun until he received shaktipat from Baba Nityananda. According to his description, it was a profound and sublime experience. In his own words:

“August 15, 1947. Nityananda stood facing me directly. He looked into my eyes again. Watching carefully, I saw a ray of light entering me from his pupils. It felt hot like burning fever. Its light was dazzling, like that of a high-powered bulb. As that ray emanating from Bhagavan Nityanand's pupils penetrated mine, I was thrilled with amazement, joy, and fear. I was beholding its color and chanting Guru Om. It was a full unbroken beam of divine radiance. Its color kept changing from molten gold to saffron to a shade deeper than the blue of a shining star. I stood utterly transfixed. He sat down and said in his aphoristic fashion, "All mantras... one. Each... from Om. Om Namah Shivaya Om... should think, Shivo'ham, I am Shiva... Shiva-Shiva...Shivo'ham...should be internal repetition. Internal.is.superior to external".

Baba Nityanand breathed his last on August 8, 1961. His Samadhi is located in Ganeshpuri at the ‘Samadhi Mandir’. There is also a shrine dedicated to him in the Gurudev Siddha Peeth Ashram at Ganeshpuri.



Thakur Ram Singhji

Param Sant Thakur Ram Singhji

Param Sant Thakur Ram Singhji established the ideals of Sufi conduct and devotion by setting his example. He was born on 3rd September 1898 in the village Manoharpura in a Raulot Bhati family of Rajputs. His father Thakur Mangal Singhji was a religious and devoted person. He served the Jaipur State in the capacity of the 'Guardian of the Fort' (*Kiledar*). The then King, Maharaj Madho Singhji had a lot of regards for him. Thakur Ram Singhji's mother also was a very religious and pious lady. The religious bent of the mind of his parents had its influence on their son. Thakur Mangal Singhji used to have glimpse of Lord Ram and Sita in meditation. He once mentioned this to his son, which aroused a desire in his son also to obtain a glimpse of Lord Ram. He, thus, right from the childhood got deeply interested in religion.

Thakur Ram Singhji was admitted to the Nobles School in Jaipur, where he learnt Urdu, Persian and English besides Hindi. Later he was employed in the Police Deptt. of Jaipur State. He joined as a constable and through his honesty, sincerity and hard work rose to the post of '*Thanedar*' (Station-in-charge or Sub-Inspector of Police) before retiring from the police service in the year 1944 at the age of 46 to devote himself completely for the mission of his Master. The Police Department those days was known for its atrocities with hunters and shoes decorating the walls of Police Stations. Thakur Ram Singhji, however, was an exception, who treated all, including those locked up in his Police Station, with all humility and dignity. He would cook his food himself and would offer the same first to those in the lock-up, before eating himself. On tours often he spent his own money for the food for his subordinates. He would not allow them to use any unfair means or to ask any one to arrange for their needs. He did not even hesitate in cleaning the work place. He had developed a habit of refraining from accepting any service from others but he himself always served others with no expectation whatsoever.

Bribe was unknown to him and he would not let any of his colleagues to indulge in any corrupt practices. He never indulged in beating or applying force against any accused. His cordial behavior had made his personality so impressive that even the cruel criminals were not left unmoved and accepted their guilt voluntarily. He had such a firm faith in the divine order that even in the toughest situation he never lost his cool, nor he ever got disappointed. He always followed the path of his duty with utmost simplicity and self-confidence. He did not allow his subordinates or any one else to carry even his luggage. If any one offered him lift, he would insist on payment of the fare or otherwise not to take lift. If someone refused to accept the fare, he will insist on being dropped back from the point from where he was picked up and thus compelled one to accept the payment.

Thakur Ram Singhji never used any force or coercion or induced any accused. He was a man of integrity and courage, always standing for truth and honesty. Often he had to come to Jaipur for appearing in the Court. On the days, when he used to go to his residence in Sanganer, he did not claim the daily allowance. He always spent money with

great care and the money thus saved was spent for helping others. If any counterfeit coin came to his hand, he used to bury that under the ground. He never used any improper method for any purpose. Until he was fully convinced, he never took anyone as guilty and produced a guilty in the Court only after he had gathered all evidence and satisfied himself of the guilt of the accused.

He had become a legendary figure during his tenure in the Police Department. No one ever expected such a person to be serving in the Police Department. The influence of his personality was also visible on his camel, which, it is said, also did not eat anything offered by others. It had become famous for him that he would not drink water, even from a well, unless he had paid for it and had left some money there.

Thakur Ram Singhji had a heart full of compassion. He took a lot of interest in growing trees and in feeding birds. He turned his village green. Even in the compounds of Police Station where he was posted, he grew lots of trees and looked after them. If anyone damaged trees, he used to feel pained. Feeding birds was his daily routine. In Sawai-Madhpor, birds even used to pick up raisins from his hands. A part of his income was regularly given for the use of poor and this was done so secretly that no one would know of this.

One Shri Kishan Chandra Bhargava who was PWI in the Railways gave him a photograph of Mahatma Ramchandrajji of Fatehgarh (Janab Lalaji Maharaj). He was posted in Palsana those days. He started meditating on that photograph and started receiving spiritual radiations. He wrote a letter to Mahatma Ramchandrajji expressing his inability to personally visit him. Quick came the reply. Mahatma Ramchandrajji wrote back to him that he himself was coming to Jaipur and would meet him then. A few days later Mahatma Ramchandrajji arrived and when he saw Thakur Ram Singh, he remarked, 'Ram Singh, you are exactly the same as I had seen you', though they had never met before. Mahatma Ramchandrajji stayed in Jaipur for three days and during this stay he also visited Manoharpura. Thakur Ram Singhji used to say that his condition after his first meeting with Mahatma Ramchandrajji was explained by a couplet sang by the tongawala on his return in a tonga:

*'AJAB TERE ISHQ KA YEH ASAR DEKHTAN HOON,
KI TARAKKI PE DARDE JIGAR DEKHTAN HOON,
SAMAYA HAI JABSE TU MERI NAZAR MEIN,
JIDHAR DEKHTAN HOON TUIHE DEKHTAN HOON.'*

(I see a strange effect of your love that the pain of love in my heart is ever growing. Ever since I have seen you, wherever I see, I see you alone.)

Thakur Ram Singhji used to say that this couplet exactly described his condition. In the first meeting itself he had become 'one with his Master.' When after three days

Mahatma Ramchandrajji Maharaj was returning back, Thakur Ram Singhji presented him a bouquet of roses. Mahatma Ramchandrajji blessed him to be a '*Fanafil-Murid*' i.e. 'a disciple with whom his Master has merged' and that his fame would spread like the smell of roses.

His devotion to his Master was such that many a times he forgot his own existence. At times he could not even recall his name. Once he was to give evidence in the Court. When asked for his name, he could not recollect his name. The Court-clerk reminded him of his name. The Judge also was surprised to see such a person.

He was a man of few words and did never speak a lie. Only once did he speak a lie in his life, in Sawai Madhopur to save a Police Constable and he used to say that his Master turned this lie too into the truth. Whatever he had said thinking it to be a lie, had turned out to be the truth.

The saintly behavior of Thakur Ram Singh left an unforgettable impression on every one who came in his contact. Many officers from the Police Department were deeply impressed by him, some of whom changed their way of living. These included Dy. Supdt. of Police Kushal Singh and Supdt. of Police Mool Singh. Dy. SP Kushal Singh Rajawat was a colleague of Thakur Ram Singhji. They used to study in the same school in their childhood. They also had their Police training together in the Police Lines, Fateh Tiba, Jaipur. Kushal Singh was the first person who had the opportunity of having the benefit of satsang with Thakur Ram Singhji. Shri Rajawat was an honest and straightforward officer. As both Thakur Ram Singhji and Shri Rajawat had lot in common, their friendship grew day-by-day. Shri Rajawat however, had only one bad habit of drinking. He was born in a royal family of Mahalan and it was common in that environment to gather friends and relatives and start drinking right from the evening through night. Thakur Ram Singhji one day saw him doing so. He politely told him not to drink. Shri Rajawat, however, laughed it away and in the evening started drinking. After some time Thakur Ram Singhji once again told him not to drink. Shri Rajawat retorted, 'You are not aware of the fun of drinking, as you have never taken it. Drink one day, the sky will come down to the earth.' Thakur Ram Singhji replied, 'I do drink, but without spending any money and it is much more inebriating.' Rajawat was surprised and enquired whether there was any such drink. Thakur Ram Singhji invited him to come in the evening to taste the same. The same evening Rajawat visited Thakur Ram Singhji who asked him to wash his hands and feet. He did so and then sat before Thakur Ram Singhji. They started talking and Rajawat started getting inebriated. His eyes closed and voice silenced. He forgot about himself. A divine light engulfed him deep within. Such bliss encompassed him that his life changed. When his eyes opened, he saw Thakur Ram Singhji smiling. Shri Rajawat caught hold of his feet. It is said that Shri Rajawat continuously for seven days and nights had this feeling. His friends started asking him whether he was drinking even during the day. Shri Rajawat was the first person to receive the grace of Thakur Ram Singhji. He never drank thereafter. With the passage of time his fame also traveled far and wide and reached the ears of Young Sahab, IGP, Jaipur, who started calling him the second Ram Singh.

Shri Mool Singh Shaikhawat was the Supdt. of Police for Jaipur city for long. Whenever Thakur Ram Singhji used to visit Jaipur, he generally stayed with him, which brought both of them quite closer. Mool Singhji was a cheerful person and used to think Police Service to be a 'tree full of fruits' that could be shaken any time to fill the pockets. Often he used to tell Thakur Ram Singh, 'What kind of an officer are you. You have not made any money even in police service.' Mool Singhji was a strongly built person and a daring officer. He had earned a name for himself in the Jaipur State as a brave officer. Thieves and dacoits used to shiver hearing his name. Once a dreaded dacoit was surrounded by a Police party but no one dared to catch hold of him fearing for one's life as the dacoit could have attacked the Policeman not caring for his own life. Mool Singhji, all by himself came forward, challenged the dacoit and caught hold of him from behind. Such a brave person, however, fell a victim to drinking which had overpowered him. Mool Singhji used to feel sorry and helpless, as he could not restrain himself from drinking.

Once he mentioned about his inability to get rid of this habit to Thakur Ram Singhji. Thakur Ram Singhji told him, 'Kotwal Sahab (SP Sahab), there is one more inebriation, which is more powerful than liquor. The inebriation of liquor has ups and downs but this inebriation once on would never be down.' Mool Singhji requested him 'Thanedar Sahab, if an affectionate and kind person like you cannot take care of me, who else would do it for me. Kindly give me also a bit of the inebriant that keeps you on.' The arrow had hit the target. The same evening both of them set facing each other on a wooden *Deewan*. The meditation started. After about one hour when Shri Mool Singhji's eyes opened, he said with folded hands 'Today you have given me that nectar which has made me forget myself.' SP Mool Singhji later used to describe his experience in these words, 'I felt as if waves of bliss were rocking me. I had no sense of time and was totally engulfed by that bliss. When (after meditation) I started moving, I was trembling, which had never happened to me before even after consuming a bottle of liquor. I do not know what that godly man had done to me in a day that changed my life. The habit of drinking was over for ever and I started passing my time in remembering the Almighty.'

Thakur Ram Singhji had become a living legend in the Police Department. His reputation as an honest and sincere officer with absolute integrity had reached far and wide in the entire Jaipur State. Even the Courts were not left untouched by it. The Nazim-Ikram Hussain of Shaikhawati was also impressed by him and to such an extent that if Thakur Ram Singhji presented any inquiry report before him, he would deliver his judgment based on that report without any further investigation. He would not even call many witnesses. Those days, the Nazim of a Nizamat was considered to be a very senior officer for both civil and criminal matters. In one such case the Nazim Ikram Hussain of Jhunjhunu, announced a sentence against a thief only on the basis of the statement of Thakur Ram Singhji. An appeal was filed against this order in the Chief Court of Jaipur State. The famous Chief Justice Shri Sheetla Prasad Bajpai of Jaipur State heard this matter. After hearing both the sides, Chief Justice Bajpai maintained the sentence, disagreeing with the defense argument that a person cannot be punished on the basis of a

statement of a Police Officer alone and that there was no provision for such an action in the Criminal law. He discarded this argument saying, “The statement in this case has been made by Thakur Ram Singh. Those who made Criminal Procedure Code had not imagined of such a Thanedar whose statement carries more weight than the provisions of the CrPC.”

Once Thakur Ram Singhji was proceeding for Reengus from Jaipur. He had hardly reached the Railway Station that the train started moving. Somehow he could manage to board the train but could not purchase the ticket. At Chomu-Samod Railway Station, he met the TTI, explained him the matter and requested him to issue a ticket, and if thought fit charge him double the fare, as per the Railway rules. The TTI, however, told him to be comfortable and that he would do the needful. At Reengus Station again Thakur Ram Singhji requested the TTI to issue the ticket. The TTI knew him well and used to respect him as an ideal person. He somehow managed not to issue the ticket in spite of his insistence. Seeing no other way out, Thakur Ram Singhji came to Khatu Shyamji where he was posted. After sometime, he was to go to Jaipur. He came to Reengus Railway Station and asked his camel-rider to buy two tickets for Jaipur. The Camel-rider was confused and could not understand why he was asking for two tickets. However, he bought the tickets and handed them over to Thakur Ram Singhji, who kept one ticket carefully in his pocket and torn away the other ticket then and there. A person knowing him was standing near-by. He asked him about it. Thakur Ram Singhji smiled and said, ‘I have paid the money due to the Railways.’

A young man from Shaikhawati used to visit Thakur Ram Singhji at City Palace, Jaipur. Once when he reached City Palace, he was not available. Whenever Thakur Ram Singhji used to go out of Jaipur, he used to indicate this on a slate. The young man noticed that Thakur Ram Singhji had written on the slate that he is going to his village, but it was not mentioned when he will return. The young man was upset. When he was going back, he came across an acquaintance, a Police Officer. He also did not know the address of the village of Thakur Ram Singhji but he recalled that opposite Jaipur Railway Station and near the Old Powerhouse, Shri Har Narayan Saxena resides, who may perhaps know the address of Thakur Ram Singhji’s village. Next morning the young man reached Saxena Sahab’s house where satsang was about to start. The young man also participated and sat for the meditation. When he opened his eyes after the meditation was over, he found to his surprise Thakur Ram Singhji sitting over there. Saxena Sahab also noticed him, welcomed him and requested him to bless all those present. The satsang continued for some more time in the presence of Thakur Ram Singhji. When he was about to leave, he called the young man, took him to a corner and told him, ‘I have come here because you remembered me.’

One Satsangi mentioned an incidence concerning Thakur Ram Singhji in his diary as under: In the diary he has referred Thakur Ram Singhji as ‘Ram-Mahashay.’

“11 June, 1963. It is evening; Ram Mahashay is sitting quietly on the floor with an expression of peace on his face. Satsangis are enjoying his company. One by one all of them then left. Today is Tuesday. Satsang takes place on Tuesdays at Judge Sahab’s

residence. Ram Mahashay is reminded of Tuesday. He says ‘Come on, we shall go to Judge Sahab’s place.’ From City Palace, walked on foot to Subhash Chowk at Judge Sahab’s residence.

It is summers. The satsang is being held at the open roof on second floor. The entire roof is occupied by Satsangis. Ram Mahashay climbed up the stairs and as he was about to sit in the back that Judge Sahab spotted him. Judge Sahab stood up with folded hands and with him all other Satsangis also stood up. Seeing this Ram Mahashay very politely requested ‘Please take your place. There is no need to get up in His court.’

Judge Sahab smilingly replied, ‘If a courtier of His court comes, one has to stand up.’ By then Judge Sahab had reached near Ram Mahashay, who for some time with folded hands looked at Judge Sahab. This was a rare scene to be witnessed. He was humility personified, which filled the heart with an unexplainable joy. A couplet of Saint Kabir occurred in mind:

‘KABIR CHERA SANT KA, DASAN KA PARDAS,
KABIR AISE HO RAHA, JYO PAON TALE GHAS.’

Judge Sahab requested Ram Mahashay to sit in the front but he did not agree and sat in the back behind all Satsangis. Judge Sahab also sat down there and requested all Satsangis to turn towards Ram Mahashay. There was silence for some time. These moments of silence were more valuable than any spiritual discourse. Every one was quiet and Ram Mahashay was getting absorbed deep within. The satsang went on like this for sometime.

Ram Mahashay participates like this only at times. His arrival had suddenly sparkled everything. A little later Judge Sahab requested him to say something for the benefit of those present. Ram Mahashay told a story and then mentioned that one should try and bring about his wife to think alike and make her a companion. Then there was a silence for sometime. Thereafter he said, ‘The One we are searching is inside us. One has to develop love for Him. If we move two steps towards Him, He moves four steps towards us, as He is the *Param-Pita* (Creator of all). One has to look within and develop love for Him. His remembrance should be continuous.’

Shri Sambandh Bhushan Mittal, one of the persons who received the grace of Thakur Ram Singhji, then used to live in Shastri Nagar, Jaipur. He once had an occasion to go to a hair-cutting saloon, a small shop run by an old person and saw there a photo frame of Thakur Ram Singhji. He was pleasantly surprised and enquired about it. The old person revealed that he had an old acquaintance with Thakur Ram Singhji, who at times made use of his services. He had taken Thakur Ram Singhji as his Master, who used to address him as Partapa. He had shifted from the City to Shastri Nagar, which was not so much developed those days and used to live in a small hutment. With the passage of time, Shastri Nagar developed into a good colony and a main road was constructed passing in front of his hutment. One day two officers visited him. The senior one of them called him and told him ‘a road from the hillock joining the main road will pass through your hut.

You are given three days time to remove your hut.’ He with folded hands told the officer “*Hakim Sahab Garib Maar Ho Jasi*” (Sir, this will be like killing a poor), but the officer showed him the map according to which the hut was falling on the way. At home, he told this to his wife, who started crying. Seeing this he told her not to worry, as their Master (Guru Maharaj) is capable of doing everything. After that he set before the photo of Thakur Ram Singhji in prayer. The officer could not sleep that night. As soon as he tried to sleep, the words of the old person “*Hakim Sahab Garib Maar Ho Jasi*” started echoing his ears. He started roaming about in his verandah. A sketch was drawn in his mind. He took out the Road map and changed the path of the road a little bit that saved the old man’s hut.

The entire family of Mahatma Dr. Chandra Gupta in Jaipur received the grace of Thakur Ram Singhji. Mahatma Dr. Chandra Gupta was initiated by Mahatma Radha Mohan Lalji, who was a Badshah Fakir (a kingly saint) through whom the Naqshbandi Sufi Order reached the West and whose followers have established the Golden Sufi Center in America. Thakur Ram Singhji, however, on his own came looking for Dr. Chandra Gupta and showered his grace on him and his entire family and at one point of time declared about Mahatma Dr. Chandra Gupta that ‘You are my blood now’ and asked him to carry on the mission of the *Buzurgan-e-Silsila*.

Shri Durgaram a Satsangi has written: “When Guru Maharaj used to stay at City Palace, I often used to think that I may see him on the way to City Palace as it used to take time to reach City Palace. Many a times I used to meet Guru Maharaj on the way in between Chhoti-Chopar and Bari-Chopar. At times, I used to visit some other place for work and Guru Maharaj used to meet me there. This became my habit to desire to see Guru Maharaj on the way. I could not understand this. Once Guru Maharaj remarked on the way, “I appreciate that person, who in spite of being disabled (referring to one of his Satsangis, who had lost one of his legs), reaches me wherever I am.” He had hinted at Bholu and mentioned further, “He (Bholu) in return lost one of his legs.” No sooner Guru Maharaj uttered these words, I got a sort of shock that I had both the legs in place and even then I always desired Guru Maharaj to meet me on the way and he fulfilled my desire.”

Mahatma Krishna Kumar Gupta, the eldest son of Mahatma Dr. Chandra Gupta also had similar experiences. He was quite young those days. The house at Baba Harish Chandra Marg, where this family lived had two built in stone seats at the ground floor. He at times used to sit there with a desire to see Thakur Ram Singhji and often Thakur Ram Singhji very kindly fulfilled his desire by appearing in person.

Thakur Ram Singhji used to attend the annual Bhandara of his Guru Bhagwan Mahatma Ramchandraji at Fatehgarh. He used to carry two new towels, a big towel and a small towel. With the bigger towel he used to clean his Guru Bhagwan’s Samadhi and then used that towel for himself. When this towel was worn out, he used to convert it into a rope and used for hanging clothes on it. The smaller towel he used to keep on his pillow as if he was sleeping in the lap of his Master, whom he addressed as Guru Bhagwan. He

also used to pull water from the well for the bath etc. of other Satsangis through out the day not allowing anyone else to share this burden.

An incidence relating to Thakur Ramsinghji was mentioned in a magazine published by Swami Muktanandji's Ashram. One of Swami Muktanandji's followers, who had not seen him, had a desire to obtain a glimpse of Swami Muktanandji. He once happened to visit Thakur Ram Singhji's Samadhi at Manoharpura, Jaipur and sat there for meditation. After a little while, he had a glimpse of Thakur Ram Singhji. He thought him to be Swami Muktanandji but Thakur Ram Singhji told him 'I am Ram Singh and not Swami Muktanandji. If you want to obtain a glimpse of Swami Muktanandji, you should go to Fatehgarh at the Samadhi of my Guru Bhagwan Mahatma Ram Chandraji Maharaj where all the saints grace their devotees by making their appearance.' This man then went to Fatehgarh and sat in meditation in front of the Samadhi of Mahatma Ram Chandraji Maharaj. During the meditation he felt Swami Muktanandji having blessed him by touching his back with a bundle of peacock feathers, which was his (Swami Muktanandji) style to bless his followers.

Thakur Ram Singhji graced the humanity with his physical presence till 14 January 1971. His Samadhi is situated in a farm near Jaipur Airport in village Manoharpura, Sanganer, Jaipur.