

ABOUT THE BOOK

Through the ages, great souls have appeared who have seen God face to face and have walked with Him during their lives. They may belong to different times and they may have been born in different lands. But they are, all of them, Pilgrims to the Eternal who lived, moved and had their entire being in God. Some of them had this instinct for God implanted in their hearts even from birth. The souls of some others, which they had ignorantly mortgaged to the enticements of the world, were miraculously redeemed by God and they turned a new leaf in their lives. A few others had to struggle the hard way against obstacles to their devotion and had to face privation, poverty and even persecution. But like the true devotees that they were, they transformed these hindrances into opportunities to strengthen them in their resolve not to be deflected from their quest for God. Some of these God-intoxicated Saints often broke forth in strains of devotional poetry in which they proclaimed the glory of the great Original from which everything has sprung.

This book attempts to give glimpses of the way that God confronted these saints and how they were annexed them to Himself. It is written with the hope that they will inspire in us a greater intimacy with these great souls and with the universal God.



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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

**HOW GOD CAME
INTO MY LIFE**
SERIES I

GENERAL EDITORS

K. M. MUNSHI

R. R. DIWAKAR

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BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I-89-i

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HOW GOD CAME INTO MY LIFE

SERIES I



1963

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Bhavan's Book University volumes had rare success. About a million and a quarter volumes have been sold in about eleven years. However, there is an insistent demand for the stray volumes which the Bhavan has issued from time to time at a lower price. In order to meet this demand, it has been decided to issue the new One-Rupee Book University Series side by side with the Book University Series.

I hope this new One-Rupee Series will have the same good fortune which the other Series had, of being useful to those who are interested in the fundamental values of Indian Culture, and of reaching out to a wider audience.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
Chowpatty Road, Bombay-7.
Vijaya Dashami
September 28, 1963

K. M. MUNSHI

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Saints and Seers are scientists in the realm of the Spirit. They have 'experimented' with God and they have experienced Him. They have seen God face to face as clearly as the scientist sees the things which he deals with.

Such Saints are birds of Heaven and bards of the Spirit. They come to Earth for a brief sojourn. When their day is done, they fly back to the regions of the Immortal. Detachment and Devotion are the wings with which they soar. Soaring still, they sing the Name of God; and singing still, they soar higher and yet higher, high above the wastes of mortal life.

When man walks towards God, God runs towards man. Religion is a two-way traffic. It stands for man's *ascent* to the footstool of God. It also means the *descent* of God into the soul of man.

Sometimes God comes to man *invited* by his prayer. Not unoften too, He *invades* man, lays siege to his rebellious heart and annexes it to Himself. None so depraved or derelict as to be totally undeserving of God's grace. He blocks the errant course of the sinner's life, cleanses his mind, purifies his heart and regenerates his soul. To some others, He comes as a Voice or a Vision inveigling them to find their heart and home in His own Self. One cannot foresee how He will come, or limit the manner of His coming. But sure as anything, "He comes, He comes, He ever comes" if only man will keep his door open; why, even if man should shut his door against God.

If the world today is not more sordid than it is, and if there is still hope of the survival of the vital values of Truth, Goodness and Beauty which are the substance of God, it is because of the procession of saintly persons "who have walked with God" and

showed the way for others to follow. And, praise be to them, such Personages are not in short supply even in these decadent times. The lives of these holy ones keep on reminding us, if only we hearken to their call, that we too can make ours sublime.

The pages that follow provide glimpses of "How God came into My Life" as told by some of such Saints and Seers or as gathered from their writings. They describe how God transformed their entire being and oriented it to Himself.

Verily, every one of them is a Pathfinder in the Adventure of the Spirit; and all paths ultimately converge towards One Goal. For, the roads were not *made by man*; they were *laid by God* for His children to reach Him from wheresoever they may start.

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JAIDEO

(10th Century A.D.)

[A musician and poet of rare eminence, Jayadeva, who belonged to Puri in Orissa, poured forth the lovely lilts of the *Gita Govinda* portraying the throes and thrills of bridal mysticism. He was a great *bhakta* of Sri Krishna. The Radha and Krishna episode treating about their *vislesha* and *samslesha*, with its longing, pining, despair, jealousy, anger and final re-union, is sung in this poem in its graphic detail, ensuring the lyric a high and lasting place in Sanskrit hymnology. Jayadeva's name is inscribed in gold on the portals of Divine Love leading to the sanctuary of the God of Vrindavan.]

The Lord Wrote Poetry For Him

JAIDEO was born to Narayan Sastri and his devoted wife Kamalabai in a village of Bengal as a result of their devotion to Lord Jagannath of Puri.

Here is an interesting anecdote bearing on his birth.

Sastriji was so fully immersed in worshipping the Lord that he hardly had time to think of any progeny to perpetuate his family. But Kamala, being a woman, longed for a son if only to liberate them from their debt to the *pitrus* and for the continuity of the Lord's worship.

As a result of her deep longing, Lord Jagannath appeared in Narayan Sastri's dream and said: "My son! I am delighted by your devotion and I

am happy to grant your wife the longing she entertains!"

Sastriji woke up with a start, his whole frame aglow with the delight of the divine sight. He lay down again and tried to sleep in the hope that the Lord would appear once more. But his wish was not fulfilled. Rising uneasily he called: "Kamala, Kamala!" when she awoke startled.

"Why?" asked she.

"Kamala! I saw the Lord in my dream and He said He had granted your desire. What can it be, my love?"

"O, my! Is that so, my Lord? I am blessed indeed. My desire? What can a wife like me desire? A son, just one, to release us from our three-fold debts. And the Lord is pleased to grant me that boon!"

Sastriji's face became grave as he said: "What a fool have you been? Was that all you could ask? Ought not you have asked for union with His blessed feet? Whoever would ask of a measure of paddy-husk from a monarch?"

Kamala's face fell. She felt miserable that she had asked the Lord for something that her husband disapproved of. From that time onwards a wide gulf opened between the husband and wife. While Narayan was immersed in the Lord's devotion, Kamala started worrying. Life thus flowed for them.

Very soon, however, the Lord as though penitent on creating this unsuspected cleavage between this devoted couple, once again appeared in the dream of Narayan as a Brahmin and said: "My son! You are wrong in thinking that a son is un-

necessary. Don't you want to repay your debt to your ancestors? My main purpose in granting Kamala's wish was to give her a son who would spread My *bhakti* the world over in an unprecedented manner. Do you understand? Be a good boy now!"

Narayan had no doubt whatever about the identity of the Brahmin who appeared in his dream and as the explanation satisfied him, he became reconciled to his wife's desire. Soon a son was born to them who later became famous as the composer of *Gita Govinda*.

Further, there is a tradition which holds that Sage Veda Vyasa, not content with the creation of even the *Bhagavata*, desired to propagate the *bhakti* cult more intensely and with the Lord's concurrence, reincarnated as Jaideo.

Jaideo's devotion to the Lord started, among other ways, in flowering into songs in praise of Krishna. Its result was the immortal *Gita Govinda*.

While this *kavya* was in the process of creation, a line, where the words चारुशैले ... occurred, had the meaning that Krishna in the pangs of separation asked Radha to quench the fire in him by placing her cool lotus feet on his burning head.

As soon as the line had shaped Jaideo was startled to find that it was downright blasphemy and this thought sent him into a paroxysm of sorrow as to why it should occur. For the moment, however, he scored out that line and went to the river to take oil bath.

Padmavati, his wife, who had seen him off hardly a few moments before was agreeably surprised to see him return with oil rubbed all over his body.

"Padma, bring that manuscript. I just had a brainwave. Lest I should forget, I have hastened to write it down."

Saying this Jaideo wrote down some lines on the manuscript brought by her and went back to the river.

Later that day Jaideo wishing to rewrite the song asked for it. No sooner did he see the last page, than he noticed an altogether new poem. He called out: "Padma! Did you, by any chance, write anything in this note-book?"

"No, my lord, I am neither competent nor have I the temerity to write in your book, my lord!" replied she.

"But I well remember leaving the song unfinished when I went to the river after scoring a line which gave me not a little cause for worry as it shaped defaming my Lord, and I am seeing it only now after that and I see a fresh poem!"

"But, my lord, you returned soon after and wrote something, saying that you did so lest you should forget a brainwave!" replied Padmavati.

"What, Padmavati, are you talking? Are you dreaming? I became a worried man since the moment that fateful line appeared and have never been able to reconcile it. I scrapped it on the spot and went away!"

"No, my lord, you came back with oil rubbed all over you and wrote some lines on the book with

your own hands. Look, this oil mark is witness to it!"

Jaideo read those lines once again and the thought, the expression and the lilt were so unexceptionable that tears started streaming down Jaideo's eyes. He had no doubt whatsoever that it was Lord Jagannath who must have impersonated him and written those lines to help him from the dilemma. He danced with joy seeing how merciful and solicitous the Lord was towards his devotee.

"Padmavati! You are indeed blessed having seen the Lord in person. It was He who wrote down those lines. I am blessed in having you as my partner in life. Glory to the Lord!" Saying this Jaideo danced ecstatically.

The stanza referred to in the above account starts with वदसि यदि किञ्चिदपि in the tenth canto of *Gita Govinda*.

The then King of Puri was himself a great composer and devotee of Lord Jagannath. When the entire country started singing *Gita Govinda* individually and in groups in *bhajans*, the King was chagrined to find that not one sang his compositions.

One day a huge crowd was singing *Gita Govinda* ecstatically within the premises of Lord Jagannath's temple. Although the King too sang them, his ego sense burst out saying: "How is it that all of you sing Jaideo's composition and not mine? Is mine inferior in worth?"

The devotees assembled there would not ex-

plain or justify their preference. In the end they said: "King! Let us for once decide the relative merits of your composition and Jaideo's by placing them at the feet of the Lord Himself whom both praise."

The King agreed and accordingly both the compositions were placed at the feet of the Lord and after sealing the sanctum, all dispersed.

Throughout the night, the King prayed to Lord Jagannath: "Lord! Am I not your devoted servant? Why this partiality of the people for Jaideo's songs? Please have mercy on me!"

In the morning before a huge concourse the sanctum was opened and what did it see? On the manuscript of Jaideo was written: "We are pleased!" with the Lord's *imprimatur*, and the King's manuscript lay scattered about. Covering his eyes with both hands the King returned to the palace.

Noble hearted as the King was, he did not cause any reprisals or otherwise injure Jaideo. On the contrary, he continued praying to the Lord: "In what way, my Lord, have I failed in my devotion to Thee?"

A few days after, the Lord appeared in the King's dream and said: "King! Your compositions are equally good, but because of your ego sense I wanted to teach you a lesson. Be of good cheer. I have accepted the first thirteen poems of yours!"

The King's eyes opened and from that day, he gave up his ego and became one of the Lord's devotees.

On another occasion Lord Siva appeared be-

fore Jaideo and restored to him his limbs which had been severed by a band of dacoits. Later still, God appeared in his life and brought back the life of his beloved wife, Padmavati.

Indeed Jaideo had the good fortune of not merely seeing the Lord himself but showing Him to his devoted followers and to the King of Crowncha, till at last, he along with his devoted wife Padmavati, left their mortal coil at Banaras singing *Gita Govinda*.

NAMDEO

(1270 to 1350 A.D.).

[Namdeo was the son of a tailor in Narsinghpur, in Maharashtra. A robber turned saint, he became a devotee of the Lord of Pandharpur and composed a large number of devotional poems known as *abhangas*. He was so filled with God-experience that he saw God everywhere and in all things. He bade others forget their hunger and thirst, as he did, in the pleasure of God's Name. "A single utterance of the name of God", said he, "creates panic among sins". Namadeva propagated the Vitthala Sampradaya and, mainly due to him, Pandharpur gained in importance and became a popular place of pilgrimage.]

God Ate From His Hands

SAINT NAMDEO was born in a tailor's family in Shake 1192 on Kartiki Ekadashi day at Pandharpur. His father's name was Damasheti and mother's name was Gonai.

It was the practice of Damaji to go to Vithal's Temple at Pandharpur and after performing Pooja, he used to offer food (Naivedya) to the deity.

Once Damaji had to go out of Pandharpur, so he asked his son to perform the Pooja and offer Naivedya to the deity. Namdeo performed the Pooja and offered Naivedya food to Vithoba.

Now it was a stone idol and would not partake of the offerings. Namdeo thought that Vithoba

used to accept the Naivedya at his father's hand and so became worried why the idol should refuse to take food from his hands.

He implored the deity to listen to his prayer and accept the food at his hands.

Very naturally the stone idol could not accede to his request.

In utter desperation, Namdeo tied a piece of cloth round his neck and tried to end his life.

At this, the deity partook of all the food that was offered!

When Namdeo returned home, his mother asked what had become of the Naivedya. Namdeo told her that God had eaten the food from his hands. Disbelieving his story Gonai thought that the food must have been dropped on the way. Next day she again sent Namdeo for Pooja. The same thing happened and Namdeo gave the same explanation.

On the third day Gonai stealthily went behind Namdeo and she was greatly surprised to see the stone idol actually eating the offerings!

When Damasheti returned, he also watched and realized that Namdeo was an extraordinary child.

But the adolescent years of Namdeo's life were in great contrast with this. He came in contact with thieves and became an expert dacoit. He committed several murders.

He used to ride a horse and wear fine clothes. But he had one good trait. He visited the temple of Aundhya Nagnath every day.

One day Namdeo saw a widow beating her child as the child was asking for sweetmeats that

were offered to God. Namdeo asked her who she was and why she was beating the child. She told Namdeo that she was a poor woman and her husband was killed by a wicked dacoit, depriving the family of the only support.

Namdeo suddenly remembered that he was responsible for the death of her husband. Remorse took hold of him.

Realization came to him that since he had committed so many murders, the expiation of his sins could only be brought about by placing his life at the feet of the deity.

So he whipped out his sharp knife and thrust it into his hand and poured all the blood on the deity.

God Shiva took pity on Namdeo and, convinced that the repentance of Namdeo was genuine, decided to give a chance to him to open a new chapter in his life.

So Shiva inspired the Pujari to take out the sharp weapon from the hand of Namdeo which he did.

Namdeo then heard a divine voice in the temple of Shiva directing him to go to Pandharpur.

So becoming an altogether different man Namdeo went to Pandharpur. There he prostrated himself before Vithoba. He implored the mercy of Vithoba and expostulated with Him that He had forgiven Ajamil, prostitute Pingala, Sishupal and a host of other sinful lives. He begged he was not a worse sinner than they and asked for God's forgiveness. Soon he became saintly.

Namdeo became thus a completely changed man. On one Kartiki Ekadashi day, Namdeo

stood at Garud Par, the Seat of Garud in the temple of Vithoba.

On gazing at the deity he completely forgot himself and saw all his previous lives. He forgot where he was standing. He lost all sensitiveness of his limbs, his mind completely absorbed in divine thought; he lost all speech. He felt as if his body was occupied by the divine spirit. The sense of dualism vanished. His body was profusely perspiring on account of the new sense of joy and happiness. He forgot the pangs of death and the miseries of his present life.

Namdeo thus transformed felt that since God was with him like a playmate, he had hardly anything else to do and he needed no Sadhana.

To wipe out his ego, Vithoba asked Namdeo to go to Aundhya Nagnath and to approach Visoba Khechar, for direction of Sadhana: Namdeo went to Aundhya Nagnath.

He went to a Shiva's temple and to his great surprise he found an old man lying with his feet on top of Shiva's Pindi. Namdeo could not bear the sight and requested Visoba Khechar to lift his feet from the top of the Pindi. The old preceptor said that he was too old and weak to lift his feet; so he requested Namdeo to lift his feet and place them where there was no Pindi.

Namdeo lifted the feet several times and tried to place them where there was no Pindi. But Namdeo found that there was no place where there was no Pindi.

So Namdeo fell prostrate at the feet of Visoba Khechar and told him that he had realized that

God was everywhere and there was no space without Him.

Since then Namdeo followed the great teaching of *Bhagavad Gita* which says:

“One can attain knowledge only through complete surrender and asking the Guru in all humility.”

Namdeo sought the advice of his Guru Visoba Khechar who taught him as follows:

“Namdeo, remember, God is without form and name. God is in water, space and solid material. God does nothing Himself. He is only a witness to the working of the universe.

“Happiness is within oneself and does not exist in outside world. Brahman could be realized only through renunciation. It is equally necessary to divest oneself of the ego. As long as the idea of self and possessions of self are lingering in one's heart, there is no hope of divine manifestation.

“So Namdeo, apply your mind wholeheartedly in search of the Divine Forces. By thy mouth sing His songs without break. Mere bodily penance has very little value.

“Complete renunciation of the self and complete surrender are the only means of reaching the Ultimate—Moksha.

“The ocean of Samsar is vast. It is impossible to survive this ocean through your own efforts. You must have a strong boat and the best sailor to take you to the other side of the ocean. So consider the musical songs in praise of the Almighty as your strongest boat and Vithoba your safest sailor. He will safely land you to the other side.”

Visoba Khechar gave Namdeo the most correct definition of happiness.

He said that every soul is ceaselessly struggling in search of happiness. The musk-deer does not know that (musk) lies in his stomach and wanders till death in search of it. Even so every human being thinks that happiness is somewhere beside himself. So like the poor deer, he wears himself out in search and never comes across it. He never realizes that happiness is within him.

Said Visoba Khechar:

- (1) Happiness is in peace, happiness lies in mercy.
- (2) Happiness lies in negation of desire.
- (3) Happiness is in complete surrender.
- (4) Happiness is in faith in Him. Happiness is in the company of saints.
- (5) Happiness is in singing songs in divine praise.
- (6) Happiness could not be found in crowds or in solitary places.
- (7) Happiness is disgust of public praise or censure.
- (8) Happiness is being one with the infinite.

Ultimately God blessed all the members of Namdeo's family.

LILA SHUKA (BILWAMANGAL)

(14th Century of Vikram Era)

[A paramour given to great profligacy, converted by his courtesan into a *bhakta* of Sri Krishna. His *Krishna Karnamrita* of 300 verses depicts the story of Sri Krishna in sweet cadences of soft music. The poem is an exquisite piece of lyric poetry in Sanskrit, taking the reader back across the centuries to the Yamuna banks where the Lord sported with the Gopis and Gopalas.]

God Made A Courtesan Open His Eyes

A SHIVA worshipper: a paramour of the courtesan Chintamani: a composer of songs for unworthy clients: a hanker after sensual enjoyment—such were some of the activities that mark the early life of this great poet-saint of India, Lila Shuka (or more popularly known as Bilwamangal) who is said to have lived in Deccan on the banks of the Krishnaveni in 1300 A.D.

The light that converted his dark heart, and as if in a flash, changed it into the effulgent abode of Lord Sri Krishna, came from his deeply beloved courtesan Chintamani, whom after his enlightenment he worshipped as his first *guru*, dedicating a beautiful verse to her:

चित्तामणिर्जयति सोमगिरिर्गुरुर्मे शिक्षागुरुश्च भगवाञ्छिषिपिञ्छमौलिः ।

I bow to my teachers, the first of whom is

Chintamani, and to Somagiri and Lord Sri Krishna, I offer my salutations.

How it all came about and the erstwhile sinner became the greatest saint of his time—of whom even Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu says, “I treasure *Sri Krishna Karnamrita* as the very jewel that decorates my heart”—was the effect of a simple exhortation.

In the matter of enlightenment, it is the ‘moment’ that matters. The great Lila Shuka was so infatuated by the charms of Chintamani, that even on sacred days, when he was observing a fast on the death of his father, on a stormy night he crossed the river on a dead body mistaking it for a plank sent by his beloved Chintamani, and in climbing on to the roof to reach her he caught hold of a cobra hanging there.

The noise of his jumping from the roof into the courtyard aroused the sleeping Chintamani who, observing her paramour’s infatuation, was suddenly fired by the latent memories in the recesses of her heart covered over with unholy *prarabdha-karmaphalas* (destiny) which were responsible for this unholy love.

Her exhortation at the time was simple but it pierced his heart. Pointing to the lovely picture of Sri Balgopal hanging on the wall she said, “Behold, ye, the picture of Gopal! How beautiful and heart-captivating! If the devotion you confer on me were given to Him, easily would ye cross the ocean of metempsychosis and forever dwell in the realm of Eternal Beatitude.”

Bilwamangal rose, as if impelled by a Divine Power, and proceeded immediately—renouncing

all—to Brindaban—with the beautiful song “Govind, Damodar, Madhav” on his lips.

On reaching Brindaban, his night-long vigils, wails and terrible privations aroused the mercy of Sri Krishna and He appeared before Bilwamangal.

The soft touch of Krishna’s hands sent a thrill in the poet’s body, and as Krishna withdrew His hands, came the pathetic yet bold verse from the lips of Bilwamangal:—

हस्तमाक्षिप्य यातोसि बलात्कृष्ण किमद्भुतम् ।
हृदयाद्यदि निर्यासि पौरुषं गणयामि ते ॥

What bravado! in this wrenching off Thine hands my feeble grasp? Deservedly shalt Thou be praised if Ye can slip off my heart i.e. I bind Thee fast to the pillar of my heart.

Full with the divine joy of *sakshatkar*, day and night Bilwamangal was singing of the exploits of Balkrishna as also his personal experiences with Him.

All these are recorded in elegant verses of the great poem—*Sri Krishna Karnamrita*.

KABIRDAS

(1440 to 1518 A.D.)

[A child of undetermined parentage was brought up by a childless Muslim and his wife, who were weavers by profession. Of great spiritual precocity, this child grew with intimations of Ramabhakti in his inmost being. Knowing that *upadesa* by a guru was necessary for spiritual unfoldment, he begged the great Ramananda to initiate him into the Taraka Mantra. Upon being put off by reason of his caste, the youth Kabir managed to attain the *upadesa* from him by a stratagem. Seeing his earnestness, the guru conferred his discipleship on the earnest seeker. Kabir then developed into a great Ramabhakta. He married a wife who was as pious as himself, and he lavished all his wealth in feeding Bhajan parties singing Rama's Name. At his passing away, both Hindus and Mussalmans claimed him as their own saint.]

The Lord Rescued His Wife

A BAND of over a hundred *fakirs* sought the house of Kabirdas one day and prayed to him: "*Bhai Saheb*, we have gone without food for a whole day, for nobody would give us food; people say that you are a *dharmatma* and no one who comes to you goes away hungry."

Kabirdas was at the end of his tether. Not a particle of food or grain was left in his house. There were no valuables with which to raise money

either. How was he to feed the hundred mendicants? To turn them out was out of the question. He wrung his hands in agony when his wife Sundara* called him inside for a minute and said, "Lord! I have a suggestion to make and if you do not scold me for that and if you approve of it, I think we can feed these *sadhus*."

"Why should I scold you? Do I not know your sterling worth? Anything you suggest for the feeding of these *sadhus* is welcome," replied Kabir.

"I have noticed a *sowcar* in the bazaar keeping an eye on me. One day he threw a pebble on me to draw my attention and when I turned back and reprimanded him, he laughed sheepishly and offered to give me gold and jewels if I agreed to his wishes. I spat on him and came away. Now that we are in an embarrassing situation, if I speak to him, he is sure to pay us a lot of money with which we can satisfy the hunger of all these *sadhus*. I do not know if you like this suggestion," said she.

For a short while Kabir knit his brows. Placing his faith implicitly in the Lord whom he cherished in all his waking and sleeping hours, he replied, "My dear, your suggestion is excellent. I do not know who that *sowcar* is. I shall accompany you to his house. In the meantime, I shall ask these *sadhus* to wait here."

Asking the *sadhus* to wait, Kabir followed his wife to the *sowcar*'s place. Seeking him Kabir said: "Sir, I understand that you are keen on having my wife's company. I shall make her over to you; but

*Also called Loi.

you must give us in return enough provisions to feed a hundred *sadhus*. You must send them right now. After feeding them, I shall personally bring her over to you."

The *sowcar* who could not believe his ears and eyes eventually agreed to the proposal and despatched the necessary provisions straightaway. With all that stuff Sundara prepared the food, and Kabirdas fed all the *sadhus* to their hearts' content.

When the *sadhus* had departed, Kabir, true to his word, took his wife through the drizzling rain to the *sowcar* who was looking out into the street for her, all the while thinking if he was not a fool to have given away a lot of provisions on a man's word, particularly in the present context. He was therefore completely taken off his feet when he saw Kabir leading his wife through the pouring rain to keep his promise.

Nevertheless, he received them; and after leaving his wife with the *sowcar*, Kabir returned to his house with no thought in his mind.

The *sowcar*, on the other hand, closed the door behind him, took Sundara into his apartment, gave her costly robes and jewels and asked her to wear them. While she was changing her clothes, the *sowcar* was pacing the floor up and down when both sides of his nature apparently wrestled.

However much a man may be depraved, it takes a lot to face a situation of this kind quite unconcerned, and anyone with even a partial awakening of his higher nature would have awakened to a sense of his guilt.

At that psychological moment, someone rapped the door at which the *sowcar* jumped up with a guilty conscience. Closing the inner apartment, he cautiously turned the handle in order to see who the intruder was, but to his consternation he found a *kotwal* standing at the gate.

"What do you want here?" asked the *sowcar* with mock-courage at which the custodian of law flaunted a search-warrant at his face and demanded, "I want to search your house for stolen property" and without waiting for his permission, walked straight into the inner apartment, and whom should he see there but Sundara attired in the costly robes the *sowcar* had given her.

"What are you doing here? Are you not Kabir's wife Sundara? Has this fellow confined you here illegally? I shall deal with him properly," said the official, and turning to the *sowcar* who had by now started shaking like a reed, roared. "I came here to search for stolen property but I find here another man's wife. Why have you brought her here, you devil? Don't you know that this virtuous lady is the wife of Saint Kabir?"

"Er...er...er" started the *sowcar* explaining.

Without waiting for any explanation, the *kotwal* escorted the lady out of the house and took her directly to her home and left her at the gate.

Kabir was astonished to see her return so soon and Sundara explained to him the circumstances under which she had to come back.

"What business had the *kotwal* to intervene in my affair? It was with my full knowledge and your

own volition that you went to his place. There was nothing illegal about the affair. I have now become a sinner for not fulfilling a promise. I shall presently go and take the *kotwal* to task," said Kabirdas and directly went to the *kotwal's* residence.

When Kabir knocked at the *kotwal's* place, the latter started up from his sleep. When he came out rubbing his eyes, Kabir asked him, "What made you take my wife away from the *sowcar's* house?"

"Me? Your wife? From the *sowcar's* house? Which *sowcar*? Are you drunk?" asked the *kotwal*, completely baffled as he knew nothing about it at all.

"Having done it, why do you lie? Don't you know it is perdition to speak untruth?"

Soon the argument grew hot and when Kabir raised his hands to deal a blow with a stick on the *kotwal*, there was a lightning flash in that room and Lord Hari stood behind him in all His splendour.

Said He: "Kabir, don't blame the *kotwal*. He knows nothing. It was I that rescued your wife from the *sowcar's* home and it was I who came to your house at the head of the *sadhus* asking for food. I wanted to test your devotion. Punish Me, if you must!"

On seeing the Lord and hearing His words, Kabirdas fell at His feet praying:

My Lord hides Himself, and my Lord wonderfully reveals Himself:

My Lord has encompassed me with hardness, and my Lord has cast down my limitations.



*My Lord brings to me words of sorrow and
words of joy, and He Himself heals their
strife.*

*I will offer my body and mind to my Lord:
I will give up my life, but never can I for-
get my Lord!*

This is only one of the many occasions when
the great saint saw the Lord in person.

SAKKUBAI

(14th Century A.D.)

[A woman saint of Maharashtra, born in Alandi in Poona District. She was the sister of the famous Jnaneshwar. Though subjected to sufferings in her domestic life, she bore everything with equanimity, resting her mind firmly in the God of her heart, the Lord of Pandharpur. She has sung over 100 *abhangas* in Marathi in which she pours herself in spontaneous strains of intense devotion.]

The Lord Played The Duplicate Wife

“You devil! You want to go to Pandharpur with those vagabonds? Aren’t you, a married woman, ashamed to go out with other men? Who do you think you are? I will strangle you by the neck if you dare to move out of the house. Let Ekadasi go to hell and you with it!” roared a man holding a woman by her hair and wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

“Beta! I told you from the beginning, she is an unreliable brat. Whoever has heard of a woman like her seeking the company of sadhus, eh? I am not at all happy,” shouted his mother, and drawing him away, whispered something into his ear. The man apparently approved of what she said and together they dragged the first woman to a dingy room and fastened her to a pillar with a hardy rope and locked the room behind them.

The woman who was thus tied was Sakkubai, the great woman-devotee of Maharashtra, and the persons who tied her up were her husband and her mother-in-law.

Poor Sakku who had by then become indifferent to the treatment meted out to her by her husband and his people—it had become a routine—lamented: “Lord! Why are You so unkind as to prevent me from seeing You at Pandharpur on this holy occasion? If you but bestow on my husband and his people Your grace, they will come round and proceed to see You and they will take me too along with them when I can see You to my heart’s content!”

Lord Vithal who was instrumental in initiating young Sakku in the ways of God-men, felt a moral responsibility to see that this devotee’s wish was fulfilled. And He decided on an ingenious course of action.

Soon after, a young woman came and opening the room in which Sakku was locked, went near her and said: “Sakku, your devotion to the Lord is such that it is folly to prevent you from proceeding to Pandharpur. I know you, but you do not know me. That does not matter. I am so taken up with compassion for you that I have decided to do duty for you by agreeing to remain tied to this pillar in your place till you return by daybreak from Pandharpur after Vithal’s *darshan*.”

Sakku’s eyes let drops of tears and her voice became choked with gratitude. Allowing herself to be released, Sakku tied the new lady in her place and started moving.

Enjoined the new lady at that time: “The

Party of *bhaktas* you saw, is not far off yet. Right now you go and join them. Have no fears about me, but return quickly!"

Sakku, with grateful eyes, took leave of her and literally running reached the party of *bhaktas* whom she had contacted earlier.

Kabirdas who led that party of Sadhus to Pandharpur smiled on seeing Sakku, whom he greeted and with yogic eye learned how she was able to join him. Wondered Kabir: "I thought Sahadeva of yore was the only one who had tied up the Lord with *bhakti*, but now, here is a woman who has done so! Whoever can describe the Lord's *lila*?"

At Pandharpur, Sakku completely lost herself in the adoration of Lord Vithal. She forgot all about her home, her husband and the woman who did duty for her. She was only conscious of Vithal and her anklets jingled to the timing of cymbals and tunes of the Sadhus as she sang and danced the praise of Vithal ecstatically. She had lost all sense of time and place.

At home on the following day, Sakku's husband opened the door of the room where he had confined her. As he entered, he asked mockingly, "How now, dear, did you find the Lord at Pandharpur?"

Sakku who stood tied down to the pillar replied: "Loosen the chord, my lord, it pains me. I promise I shall abide by your wishes and hereafter never demur!"

The husband felt glad that the punishment he had meted out had its effect and accordingly untied

the chord that bound the duplicate Sakku to the pillar.

From that time, the entire village, not to speak of Sakku's home, became astonished at the way she had reformed. She was the model house-wife and model daughter-in-law.

At Pandharpur, it so happened that during the course of picking flowers for the worship of Lord Vithal, Sakku was bitten by a snake and thinking that she was dead, people had removed her outside and the priests were preparing to purify the precincts of the temple.

News of her death spread to the village where Sakku's husband, hearing it exclaimed: "Tut! People have become jealous of my happiness! Sakku is right here!"

While the people of Pandharpur had treated Sakku's account as closed, the Lord did not. A *vaidya* reached the place where her body was thrown, and learning about her accident, revived her.

When she awoke, the *vaidya* advised her: "Do not stay here any longer. I shall conduct you safely to your village and leave you at your place. Serve your elders and husband. Life in a family is equally capable of leading you to God's feet."

Sakku agreed, though reluctant to leave Pandharpur.

The *vaidya*, accompanied Sakku to her village. On reaching the banks of the lake flanking the village, he left her.

Just then Sakku saw the woman who offered to do duty for her during her absence, coming

before her with the water-pitcher.

Sakku ran to her and said: "Sister! Please forgive me for staying away longer than the promised time. Did you have any trouble? Have they beaten you?"

"No, not much, Sakku," replied the woman. "Now, take this pitcher and resume your duty. I am begone!"

"But tell me, sister, that you have forgiven me for my failure. I won't leave you till you say so."

So saying Sakku caught hold of both the hands of the woman.

At that moment there was a lightning-like flash and who should stand before her, but Lord Vithal, instead of the woman, with the four hands holding the *Sankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada* and the lotus—all wreathed over with smiles!

"So it was You, Lord, who did duty for me!" exclaimed Sakku, as she fell down unconscious.

NARASIMH MEHTA

(1414 to 1481 A.D.)

[The pioneer Gujarati poet. Extremely poor and indigent, and turned out by his brother from his home, his heart anchored in God, he became a wandering minstrel, singing the praises of Sri Krishna. His devotion, equalled by his *vairagya*, made him a God-intoxicated soul and he gave up the sophisticated forms of "respectable" life. He declared the highest *sadhana* in the trenchant song, *Sab taj, Hari bhaj*: "Renounce everything; but worship Hari".]

The Lord Accepted His Hundi At A Premium

POET-SAINT Narasimh Mehta was born of a rich Nagar Brahmin family of Junagadh.

Although in the normal course he would have had little to worry financially, his great devotion to Lord Krishna and innate charity had made him spend his entire wealth on *sadhus* and needy people.

And caste had ceased to have any meaning for him, for he saw God in every one. This irritated his community which was orthodox and hidebound.

With the result that when his daughter had to be married, he was left without a pie or friends and relatives to help him.

This worried Manekbai, his wife most while apparently Narasimh bestowed little thought on it.

One day, however, Manekbai's patience came to an end when she took her husband to task: "Deva! How long do you think we can keep our daughter unmarried? You are always singing the praise of the Lord and never think of the home. All the money has been spent and there is no one to help us. Without money, who will marry her? When do you think we can send our child to her husband's home?"

Narasimh looked at his irate wife for a second smiling and replied: "My dear! Why should you worry? Leave it to Dwarkadhish. Would you listen to me for a second? Lord Krishna appeared in my dream yester-night and said: 'My son! Do not worry about your daughter's marriage. She is Mahalakshmi herself. I shall arrange for her marriage. You have no money? Look, pass a *hundi* to Seth Samaldas of Dwarkapuri for as much as you may need for the purpose. He will accept it and pay.' Now, aren't you being foolish in worrying your head over it all?"

Manekbai was pleased beyond measure to hear it and regretted having wounded the Bhagat's feelings.

While Narasimh was writing out the *hundi*, Manekbai looked out for a trustworthy person for sending to Dwarka for cashing it. Selecting their Rabari (cowherd) for the job, she handed over to him the *hundi* which was for Rs. 1500 for encashment from Seth Samaldas of Dwarka.

It so happened that at that very time four or five pilgrims bound for Dwarka were staying with that cowherd and they had a surplus cash of

Rs. 1500 which they hesitated to carry with them for fear of robbers.

So when they knew of the *hundi* for an identical amount for encashment at the same destination, they thought it wise to exchange that cash for that *hundi*, and approached Manekbai for that purpose.

When Manekbai heard it she was only too pleased and took them to her husband who endorsed the *hundi* in their favour and received the cash from them.

The marriage of Narasimh's daughter took place very soon after, and the pilgrims bound for Dwarka too reached their destination.

When, however, they sought to cash Narasimh's *hundi*, they tired themselves out in searching Seth Samaldas, for no one from the place knew him!

For a moment the pilgrims felt that Narasimh's *hundi* was bogus, Narasimh was a fraud and Seth Samaldas was a fictitious person. One can only imagine their plight at that time.

Not long after, however, there appeared a man before the pilgrims saying he was Seth Samaldas and offering to pay the cash against the *hundi*. The pilgrims literally regained their lost breath.

"How much is the *hundi* for, by the way?" asked Seth Samaldas casually.

"Fifteen hundred rupees" replied the pilgrims in chorus.

"But I have come with Rs. 2000!" replied the Seth. "Never mind!" continued the Seth, "I shall accept Narasimh's *hundi* at a premium!"

"O, no, Sethji! How can we take the extra

money belonging to Bhagat?" protested they.

"Leave that to me. Let me have the *hundi* and take the money," said the Sethji showing them the money.

"We haven't got a pen with us; how can we discharge it?" asked they.

"Do not worry! All transactions with me are done in good faith!" replied the Seth and laughed.

The pilgrims counted the money carefully before tucking it up and found there were Rs. 2000 and they parted with the *hundi* with not a little surprise.

Little did they realise then that the Lord had appeared before them as Seth Samaldas.

EKNATH ·

(1533 to 1599 A.D.)

[Disciple of Janardanapant of Devaguda, he practised a very strict spiritual routine. So great was his adoration of his *guru* that he coupled his name with every *abhanga* that he composed. Eknath's devotional poems have a didactic significance. He defines *bhakti* as the recognition of the divine nature of all things. A perfect example of a *sthitha-prajna*, a man of steadfast wisdom, he showed how to lead a spiritual life while living in the world without being of the world. A poet of eminence, dealing with high spiritual themes coming in the line of Jnaneshwar, he has left a vast volume of spiritual works.]

The Lord Served Him For Twelve Years

EKNATH was born at Paithan in Shake 1455. His parents, Surya Narayan and Rakhamabai, died when he was a small boy and so Eknath was brought up by his grandfather Chakrapani.

Unlike other boys, Eknath did not evince any interest in play. Instead he collected small stones, offered flowers to them, and tried to sing the praise of his family-deity.

The young boy used to attend Kirtans and memorise them. During his lone hours he repeated "*Achut, Anand, Jagadguru*," etc. Chakrapani, the grandfather, used to remark to his wife about the remarkable light of divinity in Eknath and say it

was the result of the boy's ancestor Bhanudas's unstinted devotion to Vithoba.

Like a Warkari, young Eknath used to take hold of a stick with *gerua* cloth wound round it and tell people that he was going to Pandhari!

Eknath performed his Sandhya worship regularly. Learning that only through service to a Guru, a man is able to free himself from the unending cycle of birth and death, he made up his mind to go in search of a Guru.

But as he did not know where to go, like Tukaram he sat in a temple contemplating on Shiva for seven days. Then he heard a divine voice saying: "Go to Devgad; there you will come into contact with a Sadguru in the person of Janardan Swami, who has *anugraha* of Sri Dattatreya!"

After hearing the divine voice, Eknath left his house without informing his grandparents, to meet Janardan Swami at Devgad. Devgad is twenty miles from Paithan.

Now, Janardan Swami was a Rigvedi Deshastha Brahmin of Chalisgaon. His surname was Deshpande. He was in the service of the Muslim King, but in private life devoted his time in the Lord's meditation. And it is on record that Janardan Swami used to talk with Sri Dattatreya face to face.

At the sight of his Guru, Eknath fell prostrate at his feet and sought permission to serve him.

Janardan Swami accepted Eknath as his disciple, i.e. as one who would devote all his body and mind in the service of his Guru.

Whenever Janardhan Swami read *Amrutanu-*

bhav of Sri Dyandev, Eknath used to listen to it with great interest.

Often Janardan Swami entrusted his official work of keeping Government accounts in the hands of his disciple. One day Eknath was faced with a difference of half pice in the tally. All through the night he tried but could not find the mistake. Towards the approach of morning Eknath found the mistake which he corrected, and clapped his hands in joy.

Janardan Swami who was secretly watching Eknath, asked him "Why did you clap your hands?" as though he did not know.

Eknath told him the reason—that he had found the mistake after great trouble.

Said Janardan Swami: "If you apply your mind wholeheartedly to God just as you did in finding out the mistake of half pice, you will fulfil your life's mission!"

On hearing this advice Eknath forgot everything else and soon became possessed with the desire to have a *darshan* of Sri Dattatreya.

One day Janardan Swami took Eknath along with him to the top of a hill. There was a beautiful lake.

Janardan Swami told Eknath: "My son, this beautiful place is frequented by Lord Dattatreya. But He assumes different forms. You should not be afraid of them."

Just as he said Lord Dattatreya one day appeared before them as a Mussalman Fakir. Janardan Swami being a cultivated soul recognised the Lord in the Fakir and so fell at His feet. He fur-

ther prayed: "Lord, give *darshan* to Eknath in Thy usual form!"

Then the Mussalman discarded his form and gave *darshan* to Eknath as Sri Dattatreya!

That was the first occasion Eknath came face to face with God.

Later on, the Lord of Dwarka, Sri Krishna, assumed the form of a poor Brahmin and sought service under Eknath. Said the Lord to Eknath: "I need no payment. Food and clothes alone are sufficient."

"I shall surely keep you, sir, but I do not want you to do me any service," replied Eknath.

"How can one take food and clothes without working? Please leave those things to me," pleaded the Brahmin.

"May I know your name, sir?" asked Eknath.

"My name is Krishna, but people call me Shrikhandya," replied the newcomer.

Shrikhandya or Sri Krishna carried water, cleaned the house of Eknath every morning, and when Eknath was about to perform his *pooja*, brought flowers, sandal-paste and other articles ready for him.

Thus Lord Sri Krishna served Eknath for twelve years.

One day a very devoted Brahmin went to Dwarka to have a *sagun-darshan* of Lord Sri Krishna, but learnt in his dream that the Lord was not in Dwarka, but had gone to Paithan and was serving Eknath as Shrikhandya.

The Brahmin ran to Paithan and seeking Eknath requested him to allow him to see Shrikhandya.

Shrikhandya or Lord Sri Krishna was overwhelmed by the devotion of the Brahmin and so appeared before the Brahmin and Eknath as Chaturbhuja Murti!

On Sunday the Phalgun Vadya Shasthi of Shaka 1521, Eknath took out a long procession repeating Hari Nama all the way from his house to the banks of the Godavari. In waist-deep water of the Godavari he took *Jal-samadhi*.

SANT TUKARAM

(1598 to 1650 A.D.)

[The Missionary Saint of Maharashtra who received initiation into the mantra: *Rama Krishna Hari* from his guru Shri Chaitanya Baba. Curbing his restless spirit by stern penances, in the fashion of Ramana of a later day, he tried to think himself as dead to realise the evanescence of worldly life. Tukaram was a *Saakaara* and *Saguna Upaasaka*, preferring it to the *Niraakaara* goal of absorption. His "heart wants to see the face of the God of Pandharpur, who ravished me with His beauty and charm". Like Namdev, Tukaram preached the Message of the Divine Name as the only sure way to salvation. His *abhangas* are widely popular.]

Hari Is In Me Like Sweet In Jaggery

SANT Tukaram was born in the closing years of the 16th century in a Kshatriya Maharashtra family of Dehu. Very early in life the burdens of the family fell on him. Faced by adversity and tragedy in the shape of the death of near and dear relatives by starvation, and despised by others, he turned his back on the family and sought God for solace. Unlike others, he asked God Himself for guidance.

Asked he of God: "Tell me, Oh God, how best to serve you, how to realise you, since my mind sways me from right path? I do not know how to perform *Japa* of Thy name, I do not know austerities; I have failed to control my senses. I

have failed to control my mind. I do not know family-customs. I do not know what devotion is nor have I the help of saintly persons. My mind is tossing high and low. I am, again, inclined sometimes to renew family ties. Desires and anger have still their hold on me.

"Therefore, Oh God, do not desert me, give me protection so that I may rise above all these. You are known to save Your devotees."

He started observing Ekadasi fast and serving people without caring for the views of the community. He went to the Bhandara mountain two miles from Dehu where he sat motionless in *dhyana* with eyes closed, determined, like Dhruva, to see God. God relented after seven days. Said a voice: "Open your eyes; I am in front of you in serpent form".

Tukaram would not open his eyes. "If God gave *darshan* in *Chaturbhuj* in all ages, why should I alone be denied that pleasure?" So thinking Tukaram prayed again. Ultimately God yielded and appeared before him in human form and embraced him. Later again Lord Pandurang along with Namdev appeared in his dream and commanded him to sing the Lord's praises. Putting complete faith in the Divine commandment, Tukaram wrote the Gatha containing 4,590 Abhangas.

There are overwhelming proofs in Tukaram's own Gatha that not only had he the *darshan* of the Lord, but also that the Lord kept him constant company.

Says Tukaram:

God placed His hand on my head and asked me to be fearless.

God has come to my help and He gives me company by staying in my heart.

I have long been in search of Hari but my desire has now been fulfilled. *I have met Hari.* I will serve Him henceforth.

God of Pandhari has accepted me. He has made my heart as his place of residence.

God is all over me like sweetness in a lump of jaggery.

Words coming out of my mouth are not mine own. He is directing my speech.

If you think I am speaking, then I tell you, my speech is not mine, the Lord of the universe (Vishambhar) speaks through me.

All the particles of my body, my surroundings have become one with Him.

God, Thou art the shelter of the forsaken and the mother of destitutes. In consonance with this reputation You have come in the form of a beautiful and attractive youth and have given me an embrace, thus ending my mental agony.

People may carry on dry discussions about God but in my case, I have the good fortune of having His close embrace.

I have actually met Him.

Why should I go to seek Him in lonely places, because I can see Him even in crowds. He keeps me company wherever I go!

God enjoys my company like a sportsman.

That Tukaram lived the life of a Jivanmukta will be apparent from the following statements of Tukaram:

The whole universe has now become one

Narayan. I have completely surrendered my entire self. All the bodily actions have now come to an end and I have only one thing to do and that is contemplating His name. Now there is only cheerfulness because I perceive Govind in the whole universe.

Now whom shall I serve? Because the idea of a separate entity has vanished, I now act at His directions. The strings of my life are in His hands and I dance at His directions. Whatever I speak is His speech. I have absolutely no doubt about it. Oh people, listen to me. I have now passed the stage of feeling myself as a different entity.

The relation between You and me, Oh God, is just like a wave and the sea. Just as the waves and the sea are one, so between You and me there is complete oneness. It is absolutely through illusion that people call one a devotee and the other God. In fact, just as the cloth and its threads are one, so are God and myself one and the same. Since God has occupied the whole universe, He has also taken possession of my life.

Now my feelings have become steadfast. My Pran has now centralised itself. This is only because I have seen the signs of His incomings. My whole body is full of cheer. My mind is now completely directed towards Him. Now I have become so cheerful that my body has completely forgotten all material enjoyments. I have seen the blue bright light. I feel as if I have drunk a cup of nectar.

I say without absolute doubt that God has removed the feelings of separate entity. The Jeeva and Shiva have become one.

After performing austerities for 75 days I have

met Vithoba in His *nirakar* form. I have seen Him on the plains of Brahmagiri mountain. All my feelings have now been united in Parabrahma. My body was surrounded by serpents, scorpions, and tigers. They tried to torture me, but since I have lost all feelings of the self I hardly felt that there was any distinction between them and me!

SRI BODHENDRA SARASWATI

(17th Century A.D.)

[Sri Bodhendra Saraswati was the 59th pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha. He was born in Kanchi to Kesava Panduranga Yogi and Sugunambal and was initiated into *sanyas* by Sri Visivadhika Bodhendra. By the order of his guru, he propagated the *Namakirtana Siddhanta* on the basis of the *Nama-kaumudi* of Lakshmidhara Kavi. His works include *Namamrta Rasodaya*, *Nama Rasayanam*, *Nama Suryodayam*, *Nama Tarangam*, *Namarnavam*, *Harihara Bheda Dhikkaram*, *Harihara Advaita Bhushanam* and *Murtabrahma Vivekam*. He was the “Namadev of the South”, who established the Nama Kirtana and Bhagvan-nama-bhajan as *Sadhanas* to spirituality. A number of miracles are associated with him.]

*The Lord Demonstrated The Power Of
Rama-Nama*

It was past midnight. At the veranda of Poet Lakshmidhara's house at Jagannath Kshetra lay Sri Bodhendra Saraswati tossing on an improvised bed anxiously waiting for the day to break.

The Swamiji was on his way to Kanchi from Kashi, having been bidden thither by his Guru. He was passing through Jagannath and was to have called at the poet's place. But being late in the night when he reached the city, he preferred to stay outside for the rest of the night not wishing to disturb the inmates of the house.

Soon after he lay down thus, he was agreeably surprised to see an anxious Brahmin hurrying up in the thick of night and knocking at the door of the same house without any compunction. From the way he did, it appeared there was some extraordinary reason for his action, because he looked both agitated and determined.

After a few minutes of knocking, the door opened and the poet's son Lakshmikanta came out, rubbing his eyes.

"May I disturb you for a few minutes?" asked the newcomer.

"Surely, you can. Would you come in?" asked Lakshmikanta and both of them went inside and sat down on a mat and started talking.

Said the newcomer: "I wanted to have a doubt cleared by you. As the matter was very urgent, I came at this odd hour. Five years ago I started on Kashi-yatra with my wife. On the way I stayed at the yonder town at an inn one night. When I woke up in the morning I found my wife missing. I searched her for three days and not being able to find her, left for Kashi with all hope of recovering her shattered. On my return, however, I rested at the same place. When I went to have a dip at the river I saw a woman come to fetch water. Although I did not notice her, she called my attention by addressing me 'My lord' and immediately started weeping bitterly. A quick look at her revealed that she was a fallen woman. She looked like a ghost.

"I asked her 'Who are you, woman, and why do you weep?'

" 'Don't you recognise me, your wife, my lord? During our Kashi-yatra, you remember, we were

sleeping at an inn in this place. At that time I was forcibly carried away by dacoits. I have passed through hell since then. Circumstances conspired against me and I am loath to call myself your wife. By God's grace, I could meet you now. Even though I may not be of any use to you as wife, I beg of you to allow me to spend the rest of my life doing service to you. Pray, take me away from this dreadful place and give me a break from this miserable life! Let us hurry before the villains find us out, take me away anywhere!' she said.

"I was deeply moved by her confession and said: 'I did not know that you were carried away by force. I searched for you in vain for three days. Somehow we have been destined to meet again. Looking to the facts, I have no objection to your remaining with me in the manner you want.'

"Saying this, I took her through the forest and reached this place just now and hastened to you to learn of the necessary atonement, if at all there is one, for such sins as she has gone through. There at a distance, stands the unfortunate woman."

Lakshmikanta heard this narration and thought for a second. He replied: "Oh Brahmin, ask the woman to recite the divine name "Rama" thrice and she will be purified of all her sins. You can then take her back."

No sooner had he uttered this prescription than Lakshmikanta's mother shouted from inside: "Son! I have heard your father telling that in such cases, the name of Rama need be pronounced but once which is quite adequate for redeeming her. Why then are you asking her to repeat the sacred name thrice?"

Sri Bodhendra Saraswati who had been listening to this interesting conversation, quietly walked into the room. Lakshmikanta on seeing the Swamiji enter, immediately fell at his feet and stood to attention respectfully.

Asked Bodhendra: "Sir, I have been listening to your conversation. You gave that gentleman a prescription. But, may I know the authority for it?"

"Oh sir, I shall presently produce it before you."

Saying this, Lakshmikanta went inside and brought the copy of *Namakaumudi* composed by his father Lakshmidhara Kavi.

Sri Bodhendra Saraswati read through the volume and felt delighted. In the end, wanting to test the efficacy of the prescription, he declared: "If *Bhagawan-Nama* has such real power as said in this *Namakaumudi*, let this woman take her bath in the Jagannath Tirtha uttering Rama Nama and let her regain her original form; let her black clothes change into white; let her disfigurement completely vanish and let her come out with *kumkum* on her forehead."

Lakshmikanta accepted this challenge and early next morning in the presence of a huge crowd the woman took her bath in the Jagannath Tirtha uttering the prescribed Rama Nama. Lo! As soon as she rose from her dip, all the changes required were to be seen on her figure! The vermilion *kumkum* shone from her forehead.

Everyone who watched her was wonderstruck and Sri Bodhendra who was thoroughly convinced of the efficacy and power of Rama Nama received

bhiksha from the woman's own hands.

Blessing the couple, Sri Bodhendra continued his journey to Kanchi where he later became the 59th Pontiff of the Kamakoti Peeth.

Having *Namakaumudi* as the basis, Sri Bodhendra composed eight volumes of *granthas* as desired by his revered Guruji. They are: (1) *Namamrita Rasodaya*, (2) *Nama Rasayana*, (3) *Nama Suryodaya*, (4) *Nama Taranga*, (5) *Nama Arnava*, (6) *Hari Hara Bhedadhikara*, (7) *Hari Hara Advaita Bhushana*, and (8) *Murta Brahma Viveka*.

Even today Jagadguru Sri Bodhendra Saraswati is worshipped in every home as the doyen of *Namasankeertan* as follows:

सर्वलोकशरण्याय बोधेन्द्रगुरुमृतये ।

श्रीधरार्यस्वरूपाय नामोद्वाराय मंगलम् ।

