

Raṅga Avadhūta

The Saint of Nāreśvara



Author:
Dr. H. S. Joshi (Dhirubhai)

Translator:
Dr. B. N. Shah

TWENTY FOUR PRECEPTORS OF LORD DATTATREYA.



1. EARTH
2. AIR
3. SKY
4. WATER
5. FIRE
6. MOON
7. SUN
8. REGION
9. PYTHON
10. SEA
11. BUTTERFLY
12. BUMBLE- BEE
13. ELEPHANT
14. HONEY- EXTRACTOR
15. DEER
16. FISH
17. HARLOT
18. LAP'WING
19. CHILD
20. BANGLES OF A MAIDEN
21. SNAKE
22. ARROW-SHAPER
23. WASP
24. SPIDER

One more preceptor added by Rev. Śrī Rāṅga Avadhūtājī is one's own body itself

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The Saint Of Nāreśvara

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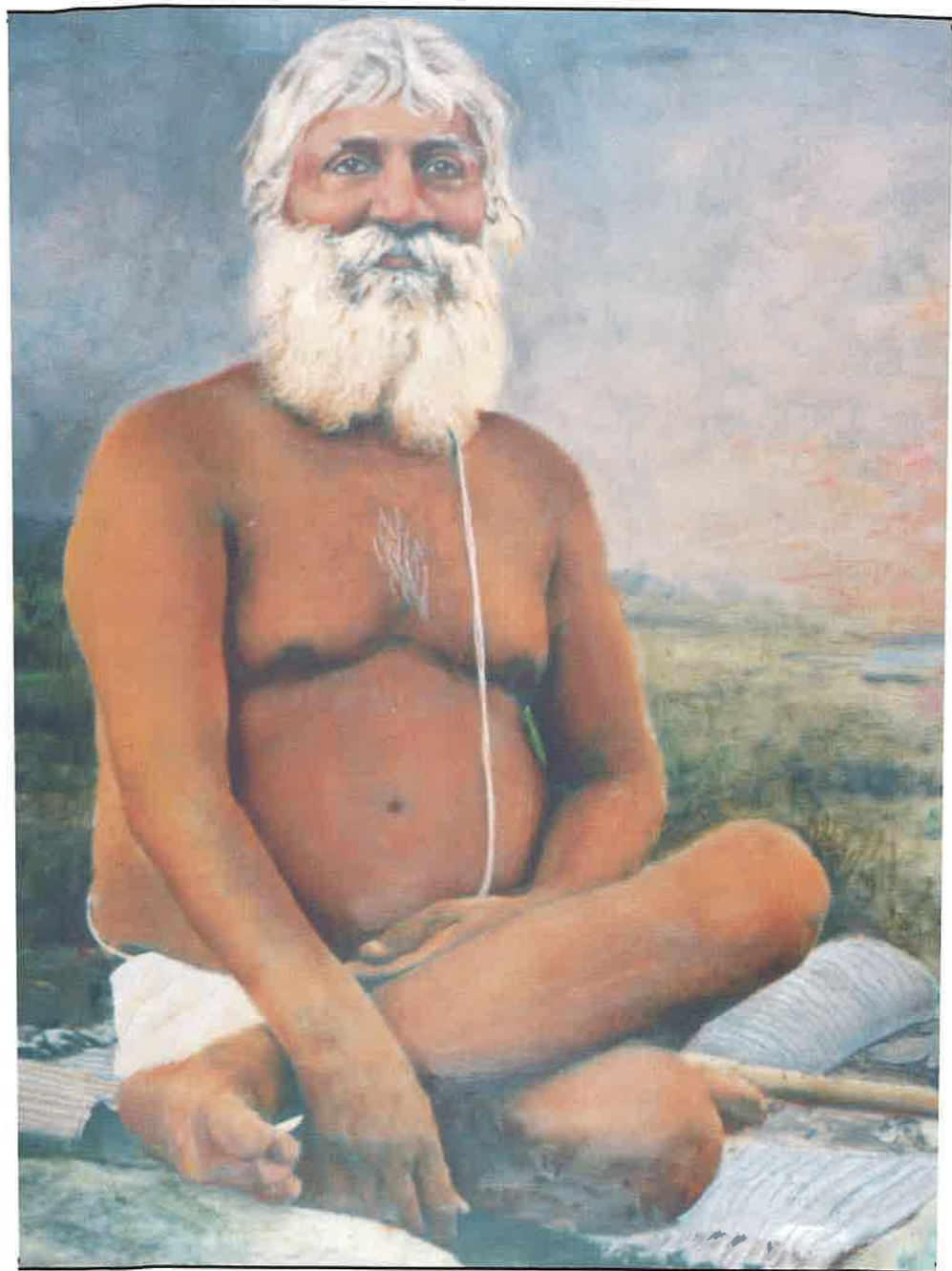
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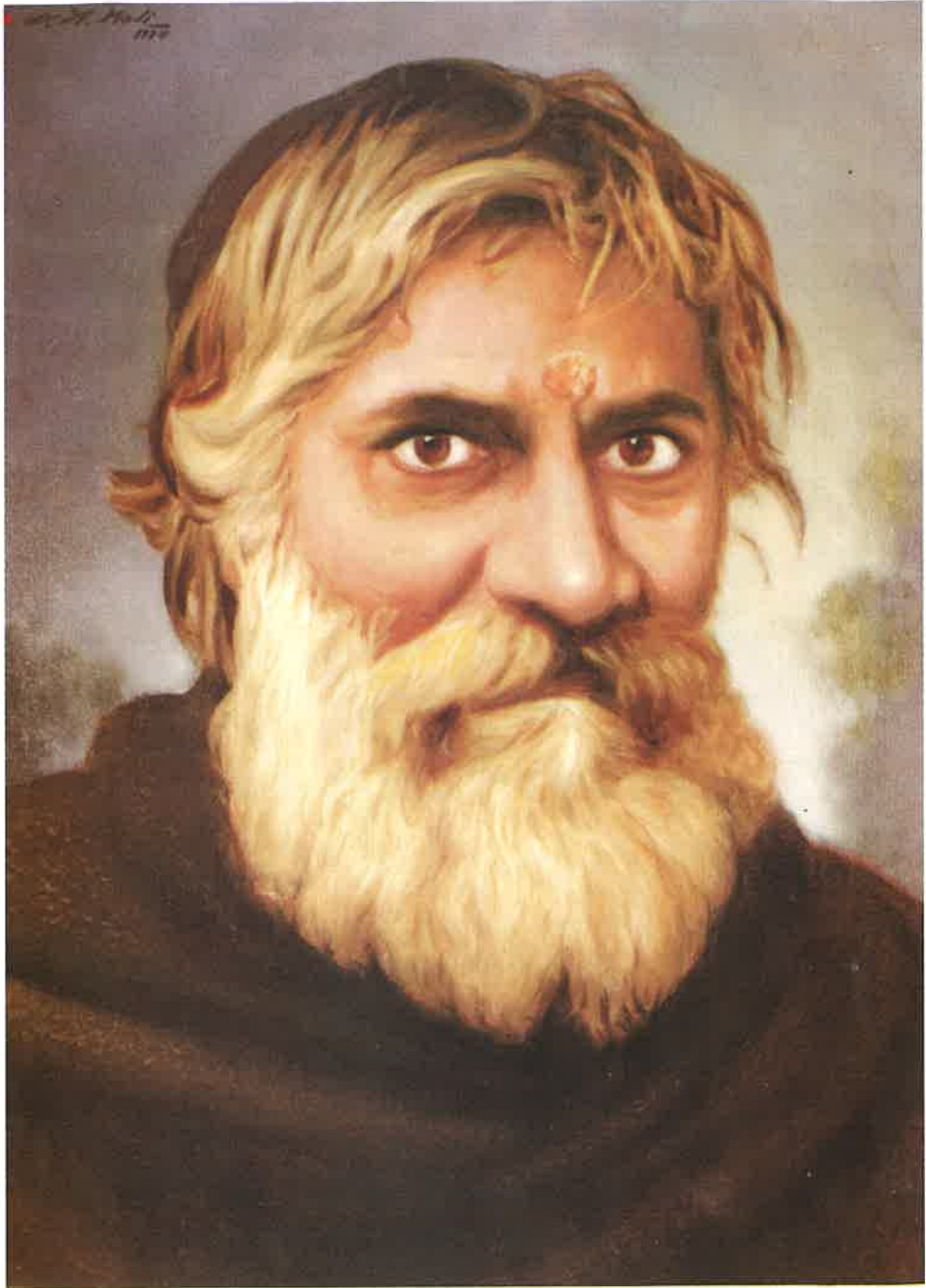
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**Bhagavāna Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta
Guru Mahārāja, Nāreśvara**

Raṅga Avadhūta

The Saint Of Nāreśvara

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It was the birth centenary year of Rev. Raṅga Avadhūtājī. Shri Jayantilal Acharya, Dr. Devdatta Joshi, Dr. Subhash Dave and myself approached to Shri Ambubhai Patel, president Gujarat Pustakālaya Maṇḍaḷa, Gujarat state with a proposal to prescribe a biographical study of Rev. Raṅga Avadhūtājī for the Gujarātī Śiṣṭa Vācana Parīkṣā being conducted every year by the Maṇḍaḷa. He gladly accepted the proposal and invited me to write the biography and asked to submit the book at the earliest. This happening inspired me to write the biography. It is the divine grace of Pūjyaśrī, I firmly believe, that the task undertaken saw a success.

While drafting I have kept in mind the young generation which needs great life-models before them to lead their lives towards the pathway to God. It is a matter of great satisfaction that this booklet in Gujarātī language is received by the students community so well that more than 45,000 copies are sold.

Again, it gives me great pleasure that Dr. B. N. Shah, a retired professor of English, M. S. University of Baroda has translated the booklet in English language. His services are offered as a devotion towards our Master,

Raṅga Avadhūta

Rev. Raṅga Avadhūta. I am really proud of his noble gesture of friendship towards me and express my regards for him.

Śrī Prem Avadhūtājī, popularly referred as an ‘Elder Brother’ in “Raṅga Avadhūta Parivāra” came to know about this English version and expressed a desire to get it published by Shri Anilbhai N. Shroff (Bombay) and Dr. Dilip Bhatt (U.S.A.), both being always ready to offer services for the noble cause in the interest of the devotees of Rev. Raṅga Avadhūtājī and Rev. Prem Avadhūtājī, here and abroad. I express my gratitude towards all the three.

I pray my sadguru Rev. Raṅga Avadhūtājī to bless all who have become an instrument in bringing out this English version.

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Raṅga Avadhūta

The Saint Of Nāreśvara

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I have been asked to write a brief note or statement about the work I did. I avoided it as politely as I could, the reason being frankly speaking, I still can't much understand Raṅga Avadhūtajī of Nāreśvara, nor can I ever go and touch even a fringe of his spirituality. Raṅga Avadhūtajī was a living image of spirituality to me; he is still there in me. I like to say, "Others abide our questions, thou art free." His image was imprinted in me much before I visited Nāreśvara or came to know Dr. H. S. Joshi.

The seeds were sown in Ankleshwar, and remained dormant for many, many years. My mind is not "quick"; it receives but with experience, it changes sides. Whatever happened, the center remained. The image of this "living spirituality", "life divine" survives in me. This is why I undertook the translation of Dr. Joshi's book.

The translation was an education to me. I could go back to my image and clarify it; Raṅga Avadhūtajī is a growing tree to me. Dr. Joshi's book is a little gem of art; it has a sense of moments, is meticulously structured, is lucidly written. It moves like a serial of scenes; it is not a documentary record, it is selective.

Raᅅga Avadhūta

Dr. Joshi and I have been good neighbours in Baroda, both were University teachers now living a retired life. I must add, however, that Dr. Joshi is much more learned and religious than I can ever be.

It has been my good luck that the work of translating fell to my lot. I deeply thank Dr. Joshi, Prem Avadhūtaji, Dr. Dave and all others who helped the publication of this English version.

This translation is offered in spirit of a leaf, a flower, a fruit, a spoon of water at the sacred feet of Raᅅga Avadhūtaji.

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Raṅga Avadhūta

The Saint Of Nāreśvara

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Pūjyaśrī Prem Avadhūtajī who is the closest votary of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtajī, the Saint of Nāreśvara during his early visits to USA and CANADA had inspired and initiated many Indians and citizens of the Western countries, settled over there. He now visits the West every year to bless them.

His mission is simply to expound and explain (not to covert ofcourse) the vision and the way of Rev. Raṅga Avadhūtajī's thinking. He is especially concerned to make it easily accessible to the youth less familiar with Gujarātī language and he does it with love and devotion.

To educate such a new generation in the West, at the instance of Śrī Prem Avadhūtajī and with his blessings ofcourse, we published a few books in English, covering Morning Prayers; Evening Prayers; Dattabāvanī, a Divine Hymn with anotations; Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtajī's birthday messages to the world and Removal of Tension. These books have raised tremendous curiocity in the West as to Who was this

Raṅga Avadhūta

Raṅga Avadhūta, What was his early life; His educational Background, What were his-thoughts on various subjects and most importantly why did lakhs and lakhs of people flock around him day in and day out. And if he always kept himself away from Wealth, Name and Fame, Publicity, Prestige, Public addresses, Discourses, Press announcements etc. why do lakhs and lakhs of people worship him today like God?

All these questions and many more have been aptly answered in this book. Both Dr. Dhirubhai Joshi and Dr. B. N. Shah have done a wonderful job and prepared this biographical report in simple English.

We are indeed grateful to the author as well as the translator and we also cannot forget Dr. Subhash Dave who not only corrected the proofs but brought the entire presentation in such a good shape.

We also thank the Avadhūta Sāhitya Prakāśana Trusta for granting unconditional permission to publish this book. May God bless all the devotees who have directly or indirectly extended a helping hand to us in bringing out this publication.

We are indeed glad to put this book at the hands of the non-Gujarātī speaking readers in India and abroad, who, we believe will get Spiritual Insight, Divine Tranquility and Eternal Bliss.

With a respectful prostrate bow at the lotus feet of my Lord and Master Bhagawāna Śrī Raᅅga Avadhūtaji and Pūjyaśrī Prem Avadhūtaji without whose blessings this publication would not have been possible, I remain,

June 27, 2006

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ANIL N SHROFF



DIACRITICAL MARKINGS OF VOWELS AND
CONSONANTS AND THEIR PRONOUNCIATIONS CHART-I

अ	A, a	क	Ka, ka	ड	Ḍa, ḍa	र	Ra, ra
आ	Ā, ā	ख	Kha, kha	ढ	Ḍha, ḍha	ॠ	Ṛ, ṛ (Mild as in Karyo)
इ	I, i	ग	Ga, ga	ण	Ṇa, ṇa	ल	La, la
ई	Ī, ī	घ	Gha, gha	त	Ta, ta	व	Va, va (Wa) (wa)
उ	U, u	ङ	ṅ (ng)	थ	Tha, tha	श	Śa, śa
ऊ	Ū, ū	च	Ca, ca (Cha), (cha)	द	Da, da	ष	Ṣa, ṣa
ऋ	Ṛ, ṛ	छ	Ča, ča (Chha), (chha)	ध	Dha, dha	स	Sa, sa
ए	E, e	ज	Ja, ja	न	Na, na	ह	Ha, ha
ऐ	Ai, ai	झ	Jha, jha (Za), (za)	प	Pa, pa	ॠ	ḥ (mild as in kaḥyu)
ओ	O, o	ञ	ṅ (yn)	फ	Pha, pha (Fa), (fa)	ण	Ṭa, ṭa
औ	Au, au	भ	Bha, bha	ब	Ba, ba	क्ष	Kṣa, kṣa
अं	Am, am	ट	Ṭa, ṭa	म	Ma, ma	ज्ञ	Gñā, gñā
अः	Aḥ, aḥ	ठ	Ṭha, ṭha	य	Ya, ya	लृ	Lṛ, lṛ
						श्री	Śrī, śrī
						त्र	Tra, tra
						:	(विसर्ग) h
						ऽ	(अपत्यह)
							(‘ sign indicating the clision of A/a)

Nasal conjunct consonant

‘ṅ’ to be pronounced as a silent nasal sound.

ङ् वाङ्मय Vaṅmaya = Vangmaya

ञ् मञ्च Mañca = Mancha

लृ मण्डल Maṅḍala

न् मन्त्रण Mantraṅā

म् पम्पा Pampā

CHART-II

PHONETIC PRONUNCIATIONS OF VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

VOWELS : TO BE PRONOUNCED AS

a	(अ)	as	'a'	in	away / normal
ā	(आ)	as	'aa'	in	cār /fāther / fārm
i	(इ)	as	'i'	in	pin / pick / ink
ī	(ई)	as	'ee'	in	feel / peel
u	(उ)	as	'u'	in	put
ū	(ऊ)	as	'oo'	in	pool / foot
r	(ऋ)	as	'rhu'	in	rhubarb (an eatable plant)/ rhuṣhi (ऋषि)
e	(ए)	as	'e'	in	they / then
ai	(ऐ)	as	'ai'	in	snail
o	(ओ)	as	'o'	in	go
au	(औ)	as	'aw'	in	how / owl
am	(अं)	as	'am'	in	amber
ah	(अः)	as	'aha'	in	aha !

GUTTURAL CONSONANTS :

ka	(क)	as	'ka'	in	Karate
kha	(ख)	Aspirated	'ka'	as in	Khāki (Army uniform)/ Khādi (Gandhian dress)
ga	(ग)	as	'ga'	in	gum / gun / guts
gha	(घ)	Aspirated	'ga'	as in	aghaṣṭ / ghoṣṭ
ṅ	(ङ)	as	'ṅ'	in	siṅg/riṅg/Raṅga Avadhūta

PALATAL CONSONANTS :

ca	(च)	as	'cha' in church / charm
c'a	(छ)	Aspirated 'ca'	i.e. 'chha' in chhatri (an umbrella) / Chhāyā (a shadow)
ja	(ज)	as	'ja' in jungle / judge
jha	(झ)	Aspirated 'ja'	as in jhoḷī / hedgehog
ñ	(ञ)	as	'nya' in canyon

RETROFLEX CONSONANTS

(Pronounced with the tongue against the palate) :

ṭa	(ट)	as	'ṭa' in ṭub /ṭaṭoo / spirit
ṭha	(ठ)	Aspirated 'ṭa'	as in ṭhug (a rouge) / Ṭhākora (a surname)
ḍa	(ड)	as	'ḍa' in ḍump / ḍug
ḍha	(ढ)	Aspirated 'ḍa'	as in ḍholaka (a small drum)
ṇa	(ण)	(Prepare to say 'ra' and say 'na')	as in Nārāyaṇa a (a name of God) / śaraṇa a (surrender)

DENTAL CONSONANTS

(Pronounced with a tongue against the teeth) :

ta	(त)	as	'ta' in Tandūra (दिंडर) / Datta
tha	(थ)	Aspirated 'ta'	as in Thailand/thunder
da	(द)	as	'da' in Dilip / Datta
dha	(ध)	Aspirated 'da'	as in dharma (religion)/ Dhobī (a washerman)
na	(न)	as	'na' in nut / number / nurse

BILABIAL CONSONANTS :

pa	(प)	as	'pa'	in	pun / pump / puff
pha	(फ़)	Aspirated	'pa' or 'fa'	as in	Pharmacy / fun
ba	(ब)	as	'ba'	in	banana / bump / bee
bha	(फ़)	Aspirated	'ba'	in	Bhūmī (earth) / bhaya (fear)
ma	(म)	as	'ma'	in	mother / mud / mind

OTHER CONSONANTS :

ya	(य)	A Palatal consonant	as in	young / Yogī	
ra	(र)	A Retroflex consonant (a rolled 'r')	as in	run	
la	(ल)	A Dental consonant,	as in	love / lunch	
va	(व)	A Labio dental consonant-	as in	verb/vessel	
śa	(श)	A Palatal consonant	as in	shut / shade	
ṣa	(ष)	A Retroflex consonant similar to 'sh'	but with folded tongue as in	auśadha (Medicine)	
sa	(स)	A Retroflex consonant	as in	sun	
ha	(ह)	A Glottal consonant	as in	hut	
ḷa	(ळ)	A Retroflex consonant with the tongue	at the back of the palate as in	dayāḷa (दयाळ) / haḷa (हळ)	
kṣa	(क्ष)	A compound consonant	as in	rickshaw (रिक्षा) / kṣatriya (क्षत्रिय) (a caste)	
jña	(ज्ञ)	A compound consonant	as in	āgnyā (आज्ञा) (order) / gnyāna (ज्ञान) (knowledge)	
Śrī	(श्री)	as 'Shree' (a mark of respect)	As 'Shree' in	Śrīmāna / Pūjyaśrī	
tra	(त्र)	as	'tra'	in	trishūḷa (त्रिशूळ=Trident)



Raṅga Avadhūta

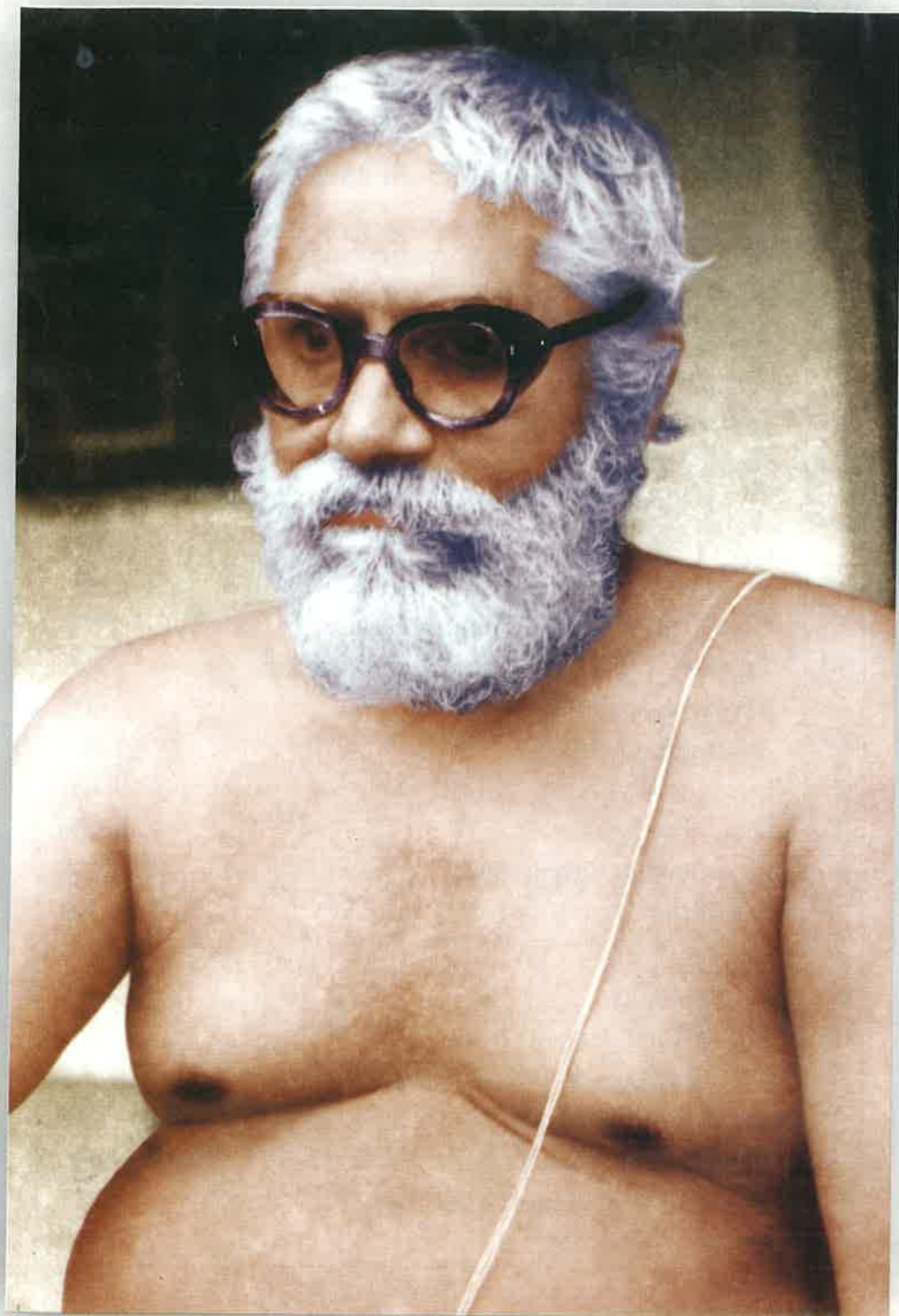
The Saint Of Nāreśvara

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Raṅga Avadhūta **The Saint Of Nāreśvara**

1. I WANT TO BE BORN IN YOUR FAMILY

Bhārat (India) is a land of saints and sages. God himself loves to be born again and again in various forms in this country. Among all other places in this nation, the state of Maharashtra has earned a distinction of being the loved homeland of Indian Saints.

In the state of Maharashtra, in the district of Ratnāgiri is situated a taluka town called Sangameshvar. Devalēm is an ordinary obscure village in this district. A Brahmin family belonging to the Atri gotra (lineage) lived there. Śrī Jayaram Bhatt who was the head of the family, had four sons. The third son named Viṭṭhala, in the early days of his life showed signs of detachment and a lack of interest in worldly affairs. However, his family was very respectable, and as was the common practice, Viṭṭhalapanta's marriage, was arranged at a very young age.

But, as luck would have it, Viṭṭhalapanta's wife died at a very young age. Now, the seeds of asceticism and renunciation planted early in life began to sprout and grow. He made up his mind to go to Paṇḍharpura and spend the rest of his life in the service of Lord Viṭhobā.

Panḍharpura, a centre dedicated to the worship of Viṭhobā (a form of Lord Viṣṇu) is situated on the banks of the river Candrabhāgā. It is a highly religious and holy town frequented for pilgrimage by devotees of Lord Viṣṇu called Vaiṣṇavas. Even today, thousands of devotees carrying flags pay a visit to this temple, especially on the Āṣādhī and Kārtikī Ekādaśī days.

As the story goes, a young man named Puṇḍalīka, highly devoted to his parents, was busy serving his parents, washing their feet in worship etc, when Lord Viṣṇu, pleased with his devotion, appeared to bless him with a boon. But Puṇḍalīka was so much engrossed in the service that he threw a brick at the Lord and asked him to wait on it till he finished serving his parents. Lord Viṣṇu did wait on the brick till Puṇḍalīka was free to see him. The Lord then asked him to seek a boon of his choice, whereupon, Puṇḍalīka asked the Lord to remain there- standing on the brick- all the time and fulfill the aspirations of all His devotees and alleviate them from the miseries of life. God was pleased to grant that boon to Puṇḍalīka and it is believed that the Lord is still standing on the brick at Panḍharpura looking after His devotees.

Even today you can see Lord Panḍharinātha Viṭṭhala standing on the brick. 'Viṭ', in Marāṭhī, means a brick. God standing on a brick is called Viṭṭhala.

Viṭṭhalapanta came to such a religious and pious place to settle down. He stayed there for sometime and

his ascetic nature was nourished. He got a dream one night in which Viṭhobā himself appeared and ordered Viṭṭhalapanta to return home. "I want to be born in your family" Viṭhobā told him. At first Viṭṭhalapanta could not understand and believe what he heard in the dream but once again the same message was heard. When Viṭṭhalapanta ignored both the dream messages, God appeared in front of him in the dream and scolded him, "Why don't you understand? Go back home and marry again. There is a maiden girl in Moṅghe family in Pālī waiting for you. Marry her. I want to take birth in your family." After that, Viṭṭhalapanta returned home and conveyed Lord's message to his family. Jayarāma Bhatt was naturally very happy to learn as to why he had come back home. On making enquiries he found the girl named Kāśī in the Moṅghe family at Pālī. The dream was true and Viṭṭhalapanta married Kāśī. After marriage, as it is the custom in southern families, Kāśī was renamed Rukmīṇī.

2. VIṬṬHALAPANTA IN GODHARĀ

Śrī Jayarāma Bhatt had a friend named Sakhārāma Sarpotdar who lived in Godharā in the state of Gujarat. There was a temple in his house dedicated to the worship of Lord Viṭṭhala. He was looking for a priest for this temple to perform the daily rituals. When Sakhārāma visited Devalēm, he came to know the story of Viṭṭhalapanta, and he requested his old friend Jayarāma

Bhatt to send Viṭṭhalapanta and his wife Rukmīṇī with him to Godharā and serve and look after the Viṭṭhala temple. “Let this couple come to Godharā. I very much need Viṭṭhalapanta’s service in the temple as he is well versed in the performance of daily rituals and sacrifices to the holy fire. He is also conversant with the scriptures too.”

Jayarāma Bhatt was not quite willing to heed to this proposal and his heart resisted it, but Viṭṭhalapanta himself said, “Dear father, let me go to Godharā; I shall get a chance to worship Viṭhobā and it will give me immense pleasure. Jayarāma Bhatt agreed and thus Viṭṭhalapanta and Rukmīṇī came to live in Godharā and here they started their family life. As Viṭṭhalapanta was a priest of Vedic learning he became well-known and popular in the Pañcamahāla district and the surrounding area. He was an expert in performing yagnas, rites of sacrifices to holy Fire. He was not a greedy Brahmin or a Priest; he led a simple life of strict piety. He earned his livelihood in a very righteous way and this helped him win the respect and love of people of Godharā, especially the devotees of Lord Viṭhala.

Rukmīṇī was an ideal Hindu wife; She was devoted and loyal. Above all she was a contented wife who found her joy of life in the happiness of her husband. She observed all religious festivals, kept pledges and fasts. She was very austere in life. She never failed to take

rounds of the Tulsi plant as a daily ritual. She also helped Sakhārāma Sarpotdar's wife in the household work. Her routine was quite demanding. She herself drew water from the well every day and used the same water for cooking and drinking and other household work. Even in cooking food the same holiness was strictly maintained. She even prevented any body else touching the food that she was cooking. She would not transgress any rule of pious conduct. All others respected her punctiliousness- religious formalities.

As days passed by Rukmīṇī conceived and everyone at the temple and those who knew the family were overjoyed at the good news.

3. PĀṄḌURĀṄGA IS BORN

Ekādaśī, the eleventh day of the month of Kārtik is a very special sacred day for the devotees of Lord Viṭṭhala. Every year a big fair is held in Paṅḍharpura and there are many festivities. You will hear the chants of "Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala" in the whole country and abroad, wherever there is a Viṭṭhala temple. This festival is celebrated with gaitery and fervour. All around devotees sing devotional songs and chant hymns in chorus.

Rukmīṇī was in the last month of her pregnancy. There was an atmosphere of piety all around; everyone was chanting the name of God and suddenly a fierce fire broke out in the neighbourhood. Everyone rushed with their pots and buckets filled with water to quench the

fire as there were no firebrigades in those days. People were busy drawing water from near-by wells to extinguish the huge flames of fire. Rukmīṇī was so kind-hearted and selfless that ignoring her own condition, she joined others in their efforts to fetch water. Her exemplary spirit and determination impressed all. The fire was extinguished with the help of the people and soon thereafter Rukmīṇī began to feel labour pains. The day was Gopa Aṣṭamī- Cowherd's day. The eighth and ninth day of Kārtika month fell on the sameday i.e. they overlapped, and on such an auspicious day a baby boy was born to Rukmīṇī. There was abundant joy everywhere. According to the English calender, it was 21st November, 1898 and as the Hindu calender goes it was 9th day of the month Kārtika, Vikram Sarṁvat 1955. It is known as Kuṣmāṇḍa Navamī. That marks a beginning of a new age (i.e. Satyuga). Sweets were distributed in and around the temple. Appropriate rites were performed after the birth. Everyone was happy. The boy was named Pāṇḍuraṅga. But fondly everyone called him Bābu.

It seems Lord Viṭṭhala of Paṇḍharpura took birth as promised to Sri Viṭṭhalapanta through the medium of oft repeated dreams and before his appearance in this world, the fire in Godharā got extinguished.

4. PĀṆDURĀṄGA BEGINS TO SPEAK

Bābu started speaking when he was almost one and a half years old. Not only that but even at that tender age, he showed signs of thinking for himself which is evident in the following incident.

There was an epidemic of plague in Godharā. Many people died everyday and funeral processions passed by the home of little Bābu. Such a procession was carrying a corpse one day.

Bābu, a little child of one and half years age, sitting by the side of his father asked the father: “What are they carrying tied up in knots? Why are they crying?”

The father replied, “The person being carried is dead and the corpse is being taken to a cemetery on a pier to be burnt.”

Immediately another question followed: “Will he have no burns on his body when put on fire?” The father remarked, “After death no one feels burns”. The questions stopped here but, on the following day, seeing another corpse, the little boy continued his questions: “Will you too die? What about my mother? Will you two be also burnt?” The father wanted to stop further questions, so he said in one word, “Yes”.

However the child came out with a new question: “What happens after death?”

The father said, “There is re-birth”.

The child further questioned, “Will he not have to die once again?” The question was not answered by his

father. Soon after, the child himself raised a new question, “Is there a way to stop this chain of birth and death and re-birth?”

The father’s reply was, “If you continuously chant the name of God Rāma, this doesn’t occur; it ends.”

The answer appealed to the child and he was satisfied. He received a graduation message -a gospel of “Rāma-Raṭaṇa” recital of Rāma’s name from the father and, whenever the child was alone by himself, he was heard repeating Rāma’s name.

5. DEATH OF THE FATHER

When Pāṇḍuraṅga was three years old Viṭṭhalapanta-Rukmīṇī were blessed with another son who was named Nārāyaṇa. When Nārāyaṇa was a year and a half old father Viṭṭhalapanta fell prey to the epidemic of plague in Godharā.

The disease proved fatal and when Pāṇḍuraṅga was five years old and Nārāyaṇa was hardly one and a half years, their father passed away. Their mother was now helpless and could see no way to support the family. She had two little sons and was living in an alien district.

She could look upon the Sarpotdāra family as her relatives but Sakhārāma, unfortunately, died of shock after the death of his friend’s son, Viṭṭhalapanta. Even then, the mother Rukmīṇī proved to be very courageous. She ignored her own miseries and problems and devoted

her energies to the upbringing of her two sons and some how she didn't want the two sons to feel the absence of their father.

The sons were equally sensible and co-operative; they made no demands on the mother and they were neither obstinate nor adamant at all. The family lived together affectionately and contentedly.

One day, the little boy Pāṇḍuraṅga was playing in the street, barely covered with clothes. He was wearing only a loin cloth on his body. The mother said, "Bābu, go and put on your clothes. The district collector is passing through our street today" The boy returned, "If the collector feels ashamed he himself will cover me with clothes".

Once, the family had no vegetables to cook for the evening meal. A woman in the neighbourhood had bought some brinjals, so she gave some to Rukmīṇī. When Pāṇḍuraṅga came to know about this he told his mother, "Mother, we can do without vegetables but please do not borrow anything from anyone hereafter; Remember, you are the mother of a Lion".



6. PĀṆḌURAṅGA'S SACRED THREAD CEREMONY AND HIS INITIATION IN NARASOBĀ WĀḌĪ

The two boys, Pāṇḍuraṅga and Nārāyaṇa were growing up fast and the time came to arrange their sacred thread ceremony. So the mother left for Devaḷem with her sons and the rites of initiation to learning were performed.

While they were returning from Devaḷem they paid a visit to Narasobāwāḍī to offer their homage to the footprints of Nṛsimha Sarasvatī Swāmī Mahārāja and obtain the blessings of the Deity. This wāḍī is the very place where Śrī Nṛsimha Sarasvatī, believed to be the incarnation of Lord Dattātreya, performed his countless miracles and acts of Divine play i.e. "Līlā". It is situated near Sāṅgalī in Mahārāṣṭra. Even today one can visit the temple, feel the Bliss and Tranquility and experience relief from tension and miseries of life. Thousands of devotees visit every year to glimpse the Lord's foot-prints i.e. Pāḍukā. There is no idol to worship at Wāḍī.

Rev. Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī Swāmī Mahārāja, the saint of Māṅgāmva, who attained samādhi (i.e. relinquished his physical body) at Garuḍeśvara in Gujarat on the banks of the holy river Narmadā, was spending his days at Wāḍī at the time when Pāṇḍuraṅga and Nārāyaṇa visited the place after their sacred thread

ceremony. As good luck would have it, the family could go there and see the saint and pay their respects to him. It was a day of joy to the family as they felt blessed.

The little boy Pāṇḍuraṅga, on seeing the great saint, ran towards him, but his aunt stopped him and said: “you can’t touch the saint wearing these clothes. You can touch his feet from a distance.” However, the Swāmījī immediately said: “Oh! this child is ours. Dear child! To whom do you belong?”

The boy answered. “to you only”.

After this incident Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtājī (as Pāṇḍuraṅga would later be referred to) used to say quite often, “Since that very moment at Wāḍī I had laid my head at my master’s feet; I haven’t taken it away from him even today. Avadhūta is thus headless”.

Thus Pāṇḍuraṅga met his spiritual guide and Master at the age of eight; soon after his sacred thread ceremony. The moment marks a spiritual awakening and initiation in young Pāṇḍuraṅga.

7. AT SCHOOL

Pāṇḍuraṅga received his elementary education at schools in Godharā. He was his teachers’ favourite. He maintained first or second rank in his studies; He was generally a quiet boy. He played pranks, though not quite often, but his image as a sober and a disciplined student, remained with all. He made it a practice to make small pieces of paper, write on them

the message of his father and put them at God Hanumāna's feet. He reflected deeply upon what he had read.

Once it so happened that his friend Hariprasāda was threatened by a bully who asked for an encounter with him on the banks of the river where he would break his bones to pieces. The ruffian was a rich man's son and was popular with such bullies.

Hariprasāda related his story to Pāṇḍuraṅga who could not tolerate such oppression. He asked his friend, "Do you have a sword or a club that looks like a sword?" "Yes, said Hariprasāda. I have a wooden sword." Pāṇḍuraṅga said, "Bring it along with you."

The rich boy, with many of his friends who were equally unruly and wild, reached the spot on the appointed day and time. There were only Hariprasāda and Pāṇḍuraṅga to confront them. But as soon as they reached the bank of the river, Pāṇḍuraṅga roared, "Come on; who is there to beat Hariprasāda? I shall destroy them all with this sword." So saying, he began to whirl his sword around. The leader of the bullies was impressed by this prowess of Pāṇḍuraṅga and felt that he should rather make such courageous friends than cowards who happen to be wealthy. The tables were turned and the bully had to run away, not Hariprasāda.

8. EXAMINATION - ORAL

There used to be held in those days, a school final examination and successful candidates got jobs easily. Many students used to appear for this examination. The oral test was difficult because the examiner was a British official.

Pāṇḍuraṅga appeared for this test. The examiner was Principal Robertson who was well known for his strict nature. Pāṇḍuraṅga's friends had cautioned him that, if he didn't use proper words, he would fail. So, they said, "Control your tendency and habit of teasing." The reply came: "Time will take care of itself." As soon as Pāṇḍuraṅga stood in front of Mr. Robertson, his dress, his shaven head and his appearance in general was noticed by the Britisher who smiled to himself at the appearance of the boy. This was noted by the student also at first sight.

The first question Robertson asked Pāṇḍuraṅga was: "What is all this funny odd dress and appearance?" Pāṇḍuraṅga replied, "There are two ways to answer your question- one is a simple straightforward answer to your question and the other is by asking a counter question to you. Which one would you prefer? I will answer accordingly".

Robertson soon sensed that the student had a quick mind and said with a smile: "As you please".

Pāṇḍuraṅga then answered, “Sir, beauty depends upon a beholder’s eyes. You may dislike what I like. My dress appears strange and funny to you where as (pointing at the neck-tie, he said, “the tie...to me) the tie you wear is equally odd to me.

Robertson said that it is a religious symbol. “So are these threads of my religion: my shaven head, my mark on the forehead”, Pāṇḍuraṅga rejoined. Robertson then asked, “Do you cease to be a Hindu without them?”

Pāṇḍuraṅga: “If you don’t wear a tie, do you cease to be a Christian?”

Robertson replied: “No, no. By wearing it I remind myself that I should be a good christian.”

Pāṇḍuraṅga: “So it is with us”.

Robertson remarked that it was very odd to shave your head.

Pāṇḍuraṅga politely replied that India is a poor country. “We have to spend four annas (one fourth of a Rupee) to get our hair cut. If you go for a clean-shaven head like mine, you pay only a paise (One sixty fourth of a Rupee). Besides it keeps my head cool and open for new ideas.” Robertson: “Oh! is it so?”

Pāṇḍuraṅga said, “Please try it for yourself. You may fail me if you don’t find it so.”

And Robertson laughed. He was greatly pleased with the student’s clarity of words and thoughts and the courageous manner in which he answered the questions.

He said to Pāṇḍuraṅga: “Go, you are awarded the first rank”.

9. POWER OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

Once Pāṇḍuraṅga was to take his intermediate examination. He fell ill before the examination and grew very weak. To make matters worse, one Sanyāsī who visited him predicted that his stars were unfavourable and that he might fail. He suggested to him to miss the test and save reputation; as the excuse of ill health was readily available.

In spite of this prediction, Pāṇḍuraṅga was full of great self-confidence. He had worked hard through out the year; he, of course, couldn't read much at the last moment due to illness. He would take medicines but would certainly take the examination! He might not get first class, he said to himself, but was sufficiently prepared for a second class.

He appeared for the examination despite the discouragement of many well-wishers. As he was weak, he had to ask for a writer but when the result was declared, he had passed the exam in second class.

Then he teased that Sanyāsī and jokingly (in good humour) said, "Swāmijī, you may now tear off your astrology book. I have passed the examination." Swāmijī replied, "This is the age of Kali." Did the Kali age disappear while you were reading the horoscope?" the young boy asked.

10. UNFLINCHING FAITH IN GOD

Pāṇḍuraṅga was a young student at Baroda college. He had to pay examination fees for the second semester and he had no money. He was against borrowing money or begging from anyone. Some of his friends were discussing amongst themselves as to how this problem could be solved but Pāṇḍuraṅga wasn't at all upset and said, "If God has willed for me to study further, he shall make some arrangements for the payment of fees. No sooner had he said this than a voice was heard, "Who is P. V. Valāme amongst you?" Pāṇḍuraṅga Viṭṭhalapanta Valāme was his full name.

Someone said, "There, he is." He was then given nearly two hundred and fifty rupees by the caller who said "Please, accept this amount and relieve me of my obligation and debt."

Valāme said, "Sir, I do not know you. Nor have I lent any money to anyone, I don't remember to have done any way. So how can I accept this amount?"

The caller then narrated the whole story to Pāṇḍuraṅga. "My father had borrowed money from your father long ago at the time of some crisis. Since he couldn't repay the amount, he asked me, to repay the sum to his descendant whenever I could. To keep his word I have come looking for you." Pāṇḍuraṅga and his friends were happy that they had money to pay the exam fees. His faith in God grew stronger and it is further confirmed in his future life.

11. BEHIND THE SCENES

Once some students were playing cricket on the college ground. A large crowd of students, professors and the local residents had gathered there and the game was getting very exciting.

At that time a high ranking Military Officer of the Gaekwara Government passed by the place, whirling around his cane baton which hurt some students around him. The students were annoyed and enraged and they surrounded him. With this the military official got angry and more aggressive and beat a few students violently. So they held a meeting of the students and professors. It was unanimously agreed that something must be done about it but couldn't decide the course of action. So they approached Pāṇḍuraṅga Vaḷāme who advised them to go on a peaceful sit down strike. There should be absolutely no violence but classes should not be attended. they shouldn't collect in a crowd and under no circumstances there should be any destructive activities.

Notices were circulated amongst the students the same night and a call for strike was made public. In the whole city there was an atmosphere of resentment against that official. At that time the Principal of the college, who was out of town when the incident occurred, returned from the trip. He was informed of the incident. He understood the situation and counselled the students to remain calm and peaceful. He also advised them, call off the strike and be patient till he came back from Bombay.

The students heeded the advice of the Principal. The Principal, on his return, wrote a note to the government and to the surprise of all there was an apology letter from the same officer on the college notice-board. This proved that Vaḷāme was a clever and a brave leader and they all began to talk about his leadership qualities, his wisdom and judgement. But Pāṇḍuraṅga never sought publicity or applause. He always preferred to work behind the scene.

12. IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Lokamānya Tilak passed away in 1921. The students held a condolence meeting in the Baroda Jubilee garden. Pāṇḍuraṅga, who had high regards for Tilak, also participated in the tributes paid to the great leader. He spoke very movingly. One or two of his subsequent letters exhibited as to how deeply he felt sorry and sad at the demise of the freedom fighter. How deeply he took it to his heart and how much he respected the departed leader. “Lokamānya is dead and the whole India cried. So did we all.”

Pāṇḍuraṅga loved his country and his patriotism was evident since his college days. Gandhiji was then taking up leadership of the freedom struggle. Gandhiji’s call to the students was: “Serve your country and that is your tryst with destiny.

Pāṇḍuraṅga wrote on the notice-board “I am giving up studies for the freedom of our country; one who

desires to follow me may do so.” In fact only the last term was left when he left his studies. At home the family was waiting for him to complete his studies and start earning their livelihood. Pāṇḍuraṅga was not unaware of the situation and the poverty in the family. But freedom of the motherland was on the top of his mind and could not care for anything else. He sacrificed his bright future for India’s freedom.

13. FOLLOWING GANDHIJI

Pāṇḍuraṅga attended one of the Congress conventions before he left his studies. He introduced himself as a representative of Baroda College, and Gandhiji asked him: “Where do you come from?”

Valāme replied: From Baroda College as a representative of the students.

Gandhiji asked: “What is the guarantee that you are a representative?”

Pat came the reply from Valāme: “That question might arise if someone challenges. Who appoints lion as the king of the forest?”

Gandhiji stared admirably at this student, radiant with self-confidence, courage, ready wittedness and couldn’t help saying, “India’s independence is at hand if I get a hundred such students.”

Pāṇḍuraṅga came back to Ahmedabad and started writing in dailies and weeklies. He stayed at Swarāja Āsrama (Hostel) for sometime. At that time he was writing

articles without mincing any words or beating about the bush. The column carried pseudonyms- “Bhāṅgo Loṭo” and “written by Gaṅjerī” (suggestive of narcotic habits). The effects of Pāṇḍuraṅga’s articles were tremendous as he could intoxicate the minds and hearts of people with his command over language and thoughts.

An eminent lawyer, Śrī Jayakar was going to visit the hostel where Pāṇḍuraṅga was staying. He was spending a day there. It was at the same hostel that he met Amrutalal Modi through his old college friend Ambalal Vyas; this friendship with Modi lasted to the end of his life. Later on Modi began to look upon Pāṇḍuraṅga as his spiritual master.

At the time of Śrī Jayakar’s visit to the hostel, the residents started discussing the items to be served to the guest for lunch. Some of them favoured a special menu and these three friends proposed simple food which was normally served to them. The majority supported a special menu. So these three didn’t go for lunch and the incident came to the knowledge of the Principal Giḍawāṇī and even Gandhiji. At the time of prayer Gandhiji himself agreed with the views of these three and congratulated them.

Another time Pāṇḍuraṅga Vaḷāme met Gandhiji while returning from Ḍākora. Gandhiji asked him, “Where had you been?” Vaḷāme replied: I am just coming from Ḍākora! Gandhiji remarked, “It is a holy place but too dirty.”

Pat came Vaḷāme's reply: "I was so much absorbed and engrossed in having the glimpses of Lord Raṅac'odaraṅya's attractive, charmingly pleasant and magnificent idol that I did not notice the dirty or filthy surroundings of the temple. My mission was to get engrossed into the Deity.

Gandhiji was much impressed with his reply and appreciated Pāṇḍuraṅga's independent views, clarity of thoughts, so forcefully and logically expressed and his spiritual aptitude.

Gandhiji admitted to Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha those thirteen students who had left their studies earlier. It was here that Pāṇḍuraṅga came to know Kākā Kālelkar who thought very highly of Pāṇḍuraṅga as a student. Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha awarded the Bachelor's degree to all the thirteen students and Pāṇḍuraṅga received "Master of Language" (Bhāṣā-Viśārada).

14. AS A TEACHER-AUTHOR

Pāṇḍuraṅga now began to teach at a National school. He performed his duties very conscientiously according to his new Aphorism: *इन्द्रदेवो भव ।* 'Invoke the Divine unto the taught'. He wrote and published two books of Sanskrit grammar while teaching at the school. They were entitled- 'Girvāṇa Bhāṣā' Parts I and II. Not only did he select the best illustrative examples from the ancient Sanskrit classics but also composed original epigrams that represented his new outlook. He wrote: "Only the fools

see excellence and power in riches; the wise see them in nobility of character". These two books were sent to Kākā Sāheb Kālelkar in jail on a platter of fruits, and they were returned with many interesting comments by Kākā Sāheb Kālelkar. Pāṇḍuraṅga also wrote and published fourteen stories from "Upaniṣads", summarised in a simple and interesting Gujarātī language.

Thus his reputation spread as a scholar of sanskrit as well as a good teacher.

15. HIS PRESENCE OF MIND AND SELF CONTROL

Once when Vaḷāme was passing by on Richi Road, an over-crowded street of Ahmedabad wearing long tresses of hair which touched up to his knees, some hooligans and notorious boys surrounded him and began to tease him calling, "A lady' O lady of the stage, an actress". Pāṇḍuraṅga was not at all angry or upset; he on the contrary, joined them in their teasing game and began singing with them, "Oh! Look, look at a lady of the stage".

The boys felt ashamed of their ownelves and immediately left the place.

The on-lookers were kept wondering at his remarkable self-control and presence of mind. There was no anger, no complaint and he went away as if nothing had happened!

16. PĀṆḌURĀṄGA AS ETHICAL TEACHER

Pāṇḍurāṅga used to observe a fast every Thursday when he was working as a national teacher. He used to send one of his students during recess to buy some sweet balls made out of concentrated milk and sugar (Pendaś). He gave him a rupee to buy the sweets. He wouldn't count or check the amount of money spent and returned by the student. He would simply put the change into his pocket, without uttering a word.

One day the student came back with tears rolling down his eyes, touched his feet saying, "Sir, please, forgive me". Śrī Vaḷāme asked him, "Dear boy, I don't even know your fault. Why are you crying?"

The boy felt sad and admitted: "Everytime I went out to buy the sweets for you I ate a piece out of it and I kept a paise or two out of the change I received. You didn't utter a word all these days. Today my conscience bites me. Please forgive me and tell me that you have done so."

Then Vaḷāme said quite seriously, "Dear boy, you don't expect your teacher to be so stupid as not to notice that you were eating some portion of sweets stealthily. I took it the other way; I felt that it was my duty to give you something for the service you rendered to me. I didn't say anything as you were doing it yourself. It is enough that you are repenting. Think that you have atoned for your sin". What a magnanimous way of looking at some body else's faults.

17. SCHOOL INSPECTION

Valāme was working at one of the National Schools. When he took up the job it was a condition of his contract that the administrators would permit him to break for lunch from 8 am till 8.30 am daily. This condition was willingly accepted by the administrators.

Once it so happened that some Government inspectors paid a visit to the school. They were going from class to class with the principal of the school. They reached Śrī Valāme's class when Valāme had already left for lunch.

The students of the class got up and greeted the principal and the visitors. Even in absence of the class teacher; they were engrossed in doing their lessons and class work.

The inspector inquired: "Where is the class teacher?"
Principal explained: "He has his lunch-break now."
Inspector: "So early? Even when the class is on?"

Principal: "That's a condition of his appointment."
Śrī Valāme returned at that moment. He requested the inspector to go with him and inspect his class. Of course this could be better done in absence of the class teacher.

The inspector had already gone out of Valāme's class but he simply asked Valāme, "Do you eat so early?"

Pāṇḍuraṅga answered, "Sir, I take my lunch an hour or two later than you do. I get up at 2 am in the

morning and I eat after six hours whereas you get up at 6 am. and eat your lunch at about 10 o'clock”.

The inspector went away smiling. Obviously the inspector had no complaints because even in the absence of the teacher the class had behaved so well. Everyone was quietly doing his lessons.

18. WORK AND ITS REWARD: VAḶĀME'S SCHOLARLY SERVICES

Once Ms. Anasūyāben Sārābhāī of the rich and famous textile mill owners family in Ahmedabad was looking for a teacher who would teach her sanskrit and read sanskrit classics with her. Kākā Sāheb (Kālelkar) recommended Śrī VaḶāme to her and VaḶāme started going to Ms. Anasūyāben's bungalow for tuitions.

As she had many other things to do, she could hardly study for fifteen days in a month but Śrī VaḶāme received full monthly charges from her.

Śrī VaḶāme did not like this- half work and full pay business. One day he told Anasūyāben that he didn't like being paid full month's charges for less than half the work he had to do. She said, “Don't you come here daily? You can't teach me on account of my own fault, my other occupations and exigencies. Don't feel bad about it Sir”. But these words did not appeal to him and he asked her to give him some other work to do. So he was entrusted, rather with some reluctance, the task of translating some portion from books that were being published in Śrī Bhagawānadās series.

Śrī Vaḷāme contributed a few translations to this series such as “Tolstoy and education” and “What shall we do then?” and such other Tolstoy’s books. He had also prepared his own version of stories from ‘Viṣṇupurāṇa’ which was published later from Nāreśvara. His another work, “Praśnottara Gītā” was also published later from Nāreśvara.

Kākā Sāheb Kālelkar had made an anthology from Bhartṛhari’s Śataks- concerning ethical conduct- called “Sadbodhaśataka” (one hundred epigrams of ethics). He chose Śrī Vaḷāme to write a commentary in Sanskrit that will be useful to the pupils. Accordingly, Śrī Vaḷāme wrote a simple commentary in Sanskrit, Bālbodhīnī (a primer for children). The manuscript of this book was sent to Kākā Sāheb who liked it but couldn’t print it then. This was also published later from Nāreśvara.

19. PRACTICE BEFORE PRECEPT

As a part of the Indian Freedom Movement a campaign was on for prohibition of sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks. Gandhiji’s principle was practice persuasion without use of force. So Satyagrahis (missionaries of prohibition) went to pubs and liquor shops selling alcoholic drinks and tried to prevail upon the customers to refrain from drinking. Many went back, addicts could not.

A woman in Ahmedabad used to visit a particular bar everyday for a drink or two and then carry a bottle

home. She could not be dissuaded from drinking and her argument was- you are addicted to drinking tea/coffee or tobacco addiction like snuff or smoking and I am addicted to drinking. What is the difference? Why should I give up drinking?

Pāṇḍuraṅga used to accompany the volunteers during the visits to that pub but hardly said a word. The co-workers insisted that Pāṇḍuraṅga should now try to convince her. He agreed but added that he would try after three days.

After the third day he told the woman, “Sister! I am not asking you to give up drinking but atleast stop taking a bottle home. I got rid of my addiction to tea and I now expect you to reciprocate the same and stop drinking.”

The use of the word “Sister” worked like magic. Until now no one had spoken to her with respect. She was used to words of slight and contempt, but when she heard the loving address of Pāṇḍuraṅga- ‘Sister’, she said at once, “Get away! I won’t ever visit this place from today; I swear to give up drinking.”

After she left the place friends surrounded Pāṇḍuraṅga and asked him as to what was the sacred charm exercised by him and Pāṇḍuraṅga replied, “I have received one, not given any”.

Pāṇḍuraṅga observed that his friends were very much surprised at what had happened; so he explained, ‘How could I expect her to give up drinking when I continued drinking tea? I, therefore, gave up tea three days ago.

I suffered a headache for a while and I felt some uneasiness because I had missed my cup of tea, but I was firm in my resolution. Even on the second day I remembered my cup of tea, though not for long. But on the third day I did not even remember the cup of tea. So, after this only, I could ask her to stop drinking or at least stop taking a bottle home!”

First practice before you preach- this had a tremendous impact on all. All his friends recalled the story of saint Eknātha and a young boy who used to eat jaggery i.e. refined molasses.

20. STREAM OF INNER LIFE

During this period Pāṇḍuraṅga's stream of inner life was flowing in a different direction. He had continued the daily chanting of Lord Rāma's Name- the lesson that his father had taught him. He had also continued reading the biographical chapters of the Master's guide ("Pōthī") with strict adherence to the disciplines of a holy life. In his own way he also practised yogic exercises i.e. Āsanās, breath control, concentration and meditation. He woke up very early in the morning for his spiritual self-training. He never read at night. One of his friends who was also his class-mate, remarked, "If I had not woken up early in the morning, he would awaken me saying that the sun had already risen to greet me".

When Pāṇḍuraṅga was in Baroda he came in contact with a saint who had a family but he had attained great

moral heights. Many enlightenment seekers met him at his home at four o'clock in the morning.

There is an incident related to this period. The Saint called Bhagawāna by his disciples asked one of his disciples to reach his residence exactly at 4 a.m. All the aspirants but the one whom the master had instructed were on time. The saint reprimanded, "How can such a person tread the razor-sharp course of spirituality? He is not even able to reach here at four o'clock!"

Some other time the master had asked some other seeker to come without any clothes and a part of his head shaven. He had also instructed him to cut a part of his moustache opposite to the side of his shaven head. The disciple looked at his master incredulously and the teacher told him "Don't feel embarrassed! I am not the body, ('नाहं देहः') is not merely to be recited without practicing it!"

Pāṇḍuraṅga immediately asked, "Can I come this way?"

Śrī Bhagawāna said, 'No, you need not'.

There seemed to be a secret, divine indication behind Pāṇḍuraṅga's daily reading of "GuruCaritra" volume ("Pothi"). He had a dream when he was a child, and he heard some inner voice saying "Read 'Pothi'". But he didn't grasp its meaning then.

He had a maternal uncle who was an officer. He was wealthy and enjoyed all luxuries of life but had no children. Sāibābā, the saint of Śiraḍī had given the uncle

Gurucaritra “Pothī” with his own hands and had blessed him with a cradle. He used to read this book daily with great devotion. He read atleast one chapter everyday. He wouldn't eat without reading it. He had to travel quite often on official errands and therefore he was looking for somebody who would read the book regularly with all sincerity, faith and devotion. He mentioned this to his sister Rukmiṇī when he had came to see her. Pāṇḍuraṅga heard the word “Pothī” (book) and was immediately reminded of his dream. Without losing any time, he offered himself to take the book. The uncle gave him the book willingly and Pāṇḍuraṅga read it daily and kept his promise.

In this way his inner life was turning to a spiritual path. Even while travelling he was always looking for a seduded spot where he would eventually settle down and persue path of spiritual uplift and enlightenment.

Meanwhile his younger brother, Nārāyaṇa was already employed after completion of his studies. He had settled in Bombay and one day Pāṇḍuraṅga sought permission of his mother saying, “Mother, I want to renounce this wordly life and want to retire to a forest”.

Which mother would like her own son to become an Ascetic? Moreover Pāṇḍuraṅga was an educated and brilliant son with a bright and promising future, brought up after the death of her husband against tremendous hardships and sufferings, all in the hope of a comfortable future when both her sons grew up.

How could she tell him, “Yes, you may go!” On the contrary, she was thinking of his marriage.

Pāṇḍuraṅga in no uncertain terms told his mother: “Mother, I’m never going to marry. If you force me to marry, you are going to keep a burning fire in the family because I will never maintain my family and you will have to look after my wife. Nārāyaṇa is stable and on his own. I have done my duty. The moment has come when I must do what I have to do in the quest of God and take up a spiritual path in search of eternal bliss.” He added, “if you get me married there will be only one daughter-in-law to fall at your feet. If you allow me to go my way, there will be many who would come seeking your blessings”.

This prophecy has really come true because Pāṇḍuraṅga, after he became “Raṅga Avadhūta”, many newly weds came to seek his blessing and the blessed ones fell at the feet of the mother Rukmāmbā too.

21. IMPORTANCE OF PRĀKRṬA LITERATURE

Once the saint Bhagawāna asked Pāṇḍuraṅga, “Have you seen any Prākṛta (vernacular) books? What about Jñāneśwari?” Have you tried to read such books?

Pāṇḍuraṅga in an accent common to the youth, light-heartedly said that those who do not know Sanskrit would read Prākṛta. What is there in Prākṛta literature? he asked. Śrī Bhagawāna, without losing his cool or getting annoyed lovingly said “You should

study Prākṛta books in order to get rid of your pride that you know better Sanskrit. And Avadhūtājī began reading Prākṛta books. He was already reading daily “GuruCaritra” but later on he read Jñāneśwari, Dāsabodha, Eknāth’s Bhāgwata and was convinced that the saints had expressed nothing but the vedic knowledge in the language of common men.

22. BLESSINGS OF SAINTS

Pāṇḍuraṅga had heard the name of Śrī Keśavānandājī of Sāikhedā. Several people from the surrounding areas approached him with worldly desires. This enlightened simple soul who soar high spiritually generally observed silence and kept on consigning to the holy fire kept burning nearby whatever he received. Pāṇḍuraṅga went to see him; he stayed there for two or three days and inquired as to when the saint was available for private guidance. He came to know that there was some privacy after midnight and if the saint was in good mood, he would speak a little with visitors. Pāṇḍuraṅga availed himself of this opportunity. He met the saint and said, “Can I keep my head at your feet? When the saint had accepted the request he told him that he wanted to read scriptures in the company of a saint like him. The saint said, “you see the drama going on here; you can’t do your work here; go to the banks of the Narmadā. The saint was eating the mango offered by Pāṇḍuraṅga and went on speaking to him as well. “From out of the

woods to festive sunshine radiance” were the words of the saint’s refrain during conversation.

Pāṇḍuraṅga then tasted a mango from the same lot out of which he had offered one to the saint and he realised that it was very sour. But the saint was relishing the taste of the mango as if it was the sweetest of its kind. So Pāṇḍuraṅga felt that he had received blessings of the saint and was asked by the saint to return to Gujarat. The hidden meaning of “Out of the woods to festive radiance” dawned a little later. It was an echo of a coming gradual transformation of Nāreśvara, the wasteland where nothing grew to the holy place of pilgrimage for thousands of devotees today.

Another Saint, who epitomized the glory of saintly life, was living in a hermitage called “Morāṭakkā” (It is near Omkāreśwara, on the bank of the Narmadā). The Saint was not there when he went to see him. So he wrote a letter to the saint asking for permission for a private reading of scriptures in the personal watch of the saint. A message was received that the saint was planning to give up his physical body quite soon; Pāṇḍuraṅga should go back to the place from where he came.

When he met Śrī Bhagawāna in Baroda he was instructed to try to remain for twentyfour hours in the same state of mind that he maintained for a few hours daily. In Baroda he met another saint called “Magar Swāmī” (the Saint who saved his life from the mouth of a crocodile) who suggested to him to seek out a lonely place somewhere between Sīnor and Broach.

He took the suggestions of these saints as a message from the Lord Almighty with blessings and started looking for a secluded spot on the banks of the Narmadā.

23. CENTERING IN AT DAHERE (NĀREŚVARA)

Pāṇḍuraṅga had come to establish close contacts with Sarkhej, a small town on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. A member of the Board of Trustees of the National Schools lived there. Pāṇḍuraṅga had come to know Śrī Ratanlal Tripathi (popularly known as Mahātmā in Avadhūta circle).

He was working at the Sanskrit school in Raṅāpur on the banks of the Narmadā. Pāṇḍuraṅga went there.

In Raṅāpur, there lived Hargovindadās, a goldsmith by profession and a devotee of God. He was in the moneylending business too in a small way.

As Pāṇḍuraṅga and Ratanlal were passing by near his house, Hargovindadās called them and they went in to see him.

Hargovindadās offered them a seat but Pāṇḍuraṅga kept standing as he did not use a seat used by others. Pāṇḍuraṅga was then offered a small clean wooden stool which he accepted. They waited there for sometime, had their meal at Hargovindadas' home and after some talks when they were leaving, he tried to put a Rupee coin into Pāṇḍuraṅga's hands. Pāṇḍuraṅga then told him about his vow: not to touch money. This came to Hargovindadas as a great surprise because he had never

met, seen or heard of any saint who would not even touch money. He developed a lot of respect for Pāṇḍuraṅga in his heart.

When he came to know that Pāṇḍuraṅga was a celibate and looking for a lonely place, he recommended Nāreśvara (that time known as Daherā) a village near Liloḍa-Sāyara. It was a cremation ground for seven hamlets surrounded by woods. It was teeming with snakes and scorpions. Pāṇḍuraṅga liked this dreadful place at first sight itself.

And on the 4th December, 1925 in the bitter cold of the fourth day of dark fortnight in the month of Māgasara V.S.1982, Pāṇḍuraṅga set his seat at Nāreśvara and started staying in a small hut made out of hay and dry bamboo sticks. After almost after three months, he moved into a better hut of bricks and clay.

24. DANCE OF SNAKE AND PEACOCK

A snake and a peacock are sworn enemies since times immemorial. In Sanskrit the peacock is said be a slayer of snakes. But in two or three days of his stay at Dahere, Pāṇḍuraṅga could see that a serpent, nearly twelve feet long, was playing freely and fearlessly with two peacocks. It was a rare sight indeed and Pāṇḍuraṅga felt that it was a pious and holy place. It began to strike him as an abode of peace and joy, not of dread and terror.

After a few days he began to hear sounds of divine music coming from the Lord Śiva's temple, sounds of the morning and the evening worship-recitations of Vedic verses with melodious music. He heard these sounds lying on the floor of his hut but could see nothing when he went near the temple to see for himself. So he decided to listen to the sacred music from a distance and not to get close to that spot! He did this for a long time.

25. SAINT'S ADVICE

Pāṇḍuraṅga met a number of Saints before he selected and settled his seat at Nāreśvara. He scrupulously put into practice whatever advice he received from the saints- the counsels tested by experience and time. The Saint of Sākori, Upāsani Mahārāja cautioned the celibate Pāṇḍuraṅga that men and women of society are extremely selfish and do anything to serve their selfish interests. He also warned him to keep himself away from public eye and popularity. He gave his own example; he used to play with his own dry excreta so that people stayed away from him. Despite this, they didn't leave him alone. He quoted a verse from the Bhagavadgītā: He who gives no trouble to people and is not troubled by any man or woman, who is neither delighted nor feels pains, is dear to God. (12-15)

As Pāṇḍuraṅga wished to avoid giving trouble to any one he made it a rule to walk down the distance

of five kilometers from Dahere (Nāreśvara) to the station (Mālod of that time, now called Nāreśvara Road). When he found it difficult to continue this practice he went to Koral by boat and took a train from there. Whatever happened he didn't break rules he made for himself.

But the public didn't spare anything to trouble him. However, he took all these as a part of his spiritual training and looked upon joy, pain, anger, disappointment and distress as equal and tried to move beyond these dualities of life.

There was another saint from Moraṭakkā, and he was a great visionary, a seer. He told Pāṇḍuraṅga that once he was sitting in his cell and practising his yogic exercises, he had made arrangements for a boy to watch and stop visitors from entering it. But once a dignitary paid a visit to his cell and the boy at once opened the door without calling out. "Luckily my eyes were saved; I would have lost my eyes." Since then he kept the door of his cell bolted shut from inside. He advised the spiritual seeker not to depend on others.

The seer related his own experience to explain the working of the mind. He was a great book-lover and had purchased many books on philosophy and religion. A question once occurred to him, "who will read all these books when I am no more. Should I give away all the books to a public library for better use?" He decided to do so, but a little later another idea ran across his mind. What would he do if he wanted to

read them in future. He was advised to ask the library manager to guarantee him that the books would be lent to him whenever he demanded. The decision was accordingly taken and all books were packed to be sent away to the library. Lists were prepared but the saint was troubled by a doubt that if the condition was not honoured by the library? The books stayed where they were for a few more days. The saint told Pāṇḍuraṅga that when he stopped thinking about the books which of course took him five to six days time, he could send away the bundles of books to the library.

“The mind is fickle and mischievous- don’t forget” said the saint to Pāṇḍuraṅga. The Saint Bhagawāna counselled him to constantly reflect on God.

26. BEFORE COMING TO NĀREŚVARA

Before Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga settled at Nāreśvara he often made short trips and outings with his friends to different places. His inner intention was always to find out a lonely spot for meditation.

Once he went to Kedāranātha with his friends where they stayed at the public resthouse of the temple. People had already warned them about a tiger that visited the place at night. They shut themselves up in the room, bolted the doors and windows from inside and went to sleep.

It was midnight and a tiger’s roar was heard. They felt as if the tiger was sauntering just around their room. All were terrified.

Pāṇḍuraṅga unlatched the door, came out with a stick, forcefully struck it on the floor and loudly called out “Gurudeva Datta”. The tiger fled away almost immediately.

Once he was walking through the woods of Mount Abu with his friends and on the way his friend, Amrutlal Modi, got injured on his foot and was trailing behind in walking. Pāṇḍuraṅga soon went back looking for his friend, nursed him a bit and took him back to their station.

One night in a dream he was asked to read “DattaPurāṇa” one hundred and eight times. One mantra (verse) was also given to him by his spiritual Master, Vāsudevānandajī, to chant repeatedly and the dream was over.

Pāṇḍuraṅga then started enquiring about “DattaPurāṇa”. Where to find it! Scholars knew about 18 Major Epics (Mahā Purāṇa) and 18 Minor Epics (Laghu Purāṇa) but no one could guide him on DattaPurāṇa. So he was confused. Then Some one told him to look for it in Bharucha in Gujarat, where Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja, a great devotee of Lord Dattātreya was practising Yoga. You may perhaps get more information about the book over there. And all of a sudden an opportunity came Pāṇḍuraṅga’s way to go to Bharucha in search of his friend’s lost son.

As luck would have it, he came to know that at some place all books written by his spiritual Master

Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī Swāmī Mahārāja including “DattaPurāṇa” were there. But this gentleman who had all these books told him that since he had kept all these holy books in his daily worship; could not part with any of them.

Disappointed as he was, at least he came to know that there existed a book called ‘DattaPurāṇa.’ But then his host remarked, “Kalyāṇajībhāī keeps all such books. Let us go there.” They all went to Kalyāṇajībhāī’s place and there Pāṇḍuraṅga was told to stay on at Bharucha for three-four days to read that book, so saying Kalyāṇajībhāī opened the box in which all those books were kept. One by one they went on removing all the books and putting them aside. They found one copy each of all the books while they found two copies of “DattaPurāṇa.” Kalyanabhai interjected, “O celibate! it seems this extra copy of DattaPurāṇa has been preserved for you only. Please take it and carry on with your ritual of reading it repeatedly. Pāṇḍuraṅga accepted the book gratefully, pressed it to his heart, offered a bow to it and with great joy he returned from Bharucha. He came to Nāreśvara only to read this book 108 times.

27. HIS DAILY ROUTINE

At Nāreśvara, Pāṇḍuraṅga used to get up very early in the auspicious wee hours of the morning and take bath with the potful of water brought from the river Narmadā the previous day. He followed his routine round the year irrespective of whether it was Summer, Winter or Monsoon.

He would finish his morning routine attending to nature's call, bathing, yogic exercises etc. up to day break and then go to the river for a bath with an empty pot to get the water for the day.

Before going to the river he would keep for cooking a mixture of rice and lentils (Khicaḍī) in a bowl over a clay stove. Some times he would add a few balls of wheat flour and leave it for cooking on a low heat. Before leaving he would order the mixture to get nicely cooked before he returned from the river or else he threatend to eat it raw. It is needless to say the delicious meal was absolutely ready to eat by the time the saint returned to the Āśrama.

He used to worship Lord Almighty after prayers and chant His Name repeatedly standing in waist deep water of the river and he was so much engrossed in his prayers that he was hardly conscious of the surroundings or what was happening around him.

Once while performing this daily routine of offering prayer mid-stream, three huge crocodiles rushed

towards him. The on-lookers on the bank of the river feared the worst and thought that the saint was in trouble. The shouting and screaming of people and the uproar forced Pāṇḍuraṅga to open his eyes and immediately he grasped the situation.

He immediately took some water in his palm, sprinkled it on the three crocodiles and with folded hands he said, "O Trinity! If you have come to see me you have already done so and if you have come to bless me with your appearance I have had your glimpse. Now please return to your place." The crocodiles immediately turned back and disappeared in the river water as if they understood the instructions.

This daily routine of bathing in the river was seldom transgressed. It was only when Pāṇḍuraṅga was not well or running high fever that he did not go to the river.

Once Keshavlal from Sarkhej came to Nāreśvara to see Pāṇḍuraṅga and to enquire about his health. In those days there used to be a train starting from Karajan in the evening. Visitors to Nāreśvara had to get off at Mālod railway station, and walk up on a narrow walking path for a long distance. When Keshavbhai reached there he asked for some water to drink. The dedicated celibate said, "I had fever and so I couldn't go to the river to fetch water." Śrī Keshavbhai remarked, "Oh! what kind of place have you

chosen? I had trouble reaching here and now does one have to go to the river for getting water? What would you have done had I not come and you felt thirsty in fever?"

But Pāṇḍuraṅga was truly an enlightened soul. He said in good humour, "Sir, that is why God sent you here today!" Keshavlal then went to the river and brought a potful of water. But then he realised what is a true life of an Ascetic saint.

After bath he would go back up the hill. The fire in the clay-stove would have subsided by then. He would go to the stove and ask: "Hi, my savoury dish! Are you ready?" And then he himself would answer: "Yes. of course I am ready." He would then have the delicious meal i.e. 'Khichadi' (a gruel of rice and lentils), drink some water and after resting a while he would spend his time on spiritual meditation. If by chance there was any visitor, he would spend his time with him. Otherwise, it was all quiet and he was at peace with himself. His mental condition has been expressed in one of the devotional songs written by him. It goes as follows:
 In cool shades of woods lives a hermit in a jungle there,
 Smiling, chanting or someday weeping, gossiping with none.
 He would spend his day basking in the sun and talking
 to the stars at night. Playing like the forest birds and never
 complain of hardships.....1

- He would talk with trees and play with tiger and snake.
He never hoards, loincloth, quilt, shoulder bag or banners...2
- He besmears his body with ashes of pride, burning malice,
pride and attachments. Thinks of no women and touches
not others' wealth. He fears nothing at any time.....3
- He would drink water from a wood-stream. And ask
someday a fruit or a piece of bread. Considering worldly
pleasures as vicious he remains always alert saint.....4
- He seeks company of holy Master and spends all his
time in devotional discussions. Keeping patience in
heart while worshipping with concentration full, talks
with pious saints.....5
- Considering a bed of hay as a bed of roses or smooth
Muslin cloth he relaxes and finds delight alone as
soveriegn-self! Keeps equipoise in loss or gain, and swells
self-restraint in heart.....6
- Peace and repose do shine in him, and alleviates miseries
of the distressed ones. Rules the world self-denial,
renunciation and detachment Chanting the Name of
Lord in every breath.....7
- Dispelled are all illusions of mind and the sea of
troubles subsides. Loses his self in God's consiousness,
and masters salvation.....8
- His look and appearance itself is greatly satisfying
and pleasing and devotional singing in his presence is
enlightening. The string instrument Tambura of the

Tatvamasi- Thou art That- starts played and the grace of the goal is achiever.....9

This way, being determined to achieve his set goals Pāṇḍuraṅga became popularly known in the people as Raṅga Avadhūta.

28. HARASSMENT FROM PEOPLE

In Nāreśvara, on one side Pāṇḍuraṅga kept himself engrossed in his austerities and meditations; going about his way peacefully and on the other side, people began to entertain strange fancies about him. Some felt that quite reputed people from cities were coming to see him; he talks in English, so he might very well be a spy or one of the freedom fighters. Some people didn't like his peaceful way of life. They were looking for a cigarette smoking Sadhu or one who would help them fix numbers in gambling.

So there used to be some trouble every other day. Once somebody killed a peacock and threw the dead peacock near his hut. The saint would be held responsible for the crime of killing a national bird, and he could be thus got rid of. Kamaldas, a saint staying there, brought it to the notice of Pāṇḍuraṅga. The village administrator was called, legal entries were made and the dead peacock was thrown into the river.

Once someone instigated the head police inspector and sent him to Pāṇḍuraṅga thinking that if he was a freedom rebel, he would get a prize. The inspector

tried to show off his authority and put on airs. Avadhūtājī did not take notice of the inspector's presence and just ignored him. The inspector proudly asked him, "Mahārāja, do you know who I am? I'm a police-inspector". Avadhūtājī said, "If you were with your retinue, I could have recognized you as a police-inspector but you have come in a group of women. How would I know then?"

The inspector lost face and changed the conversation. He asked: "Mahārāja, do you know some charms?"

Avadhūtājī, "Yes, I do. But of a different kind, not the type you have in mind."

The inspector: "What kind?"

Avadhūtājī, "To teach a lesson to a barbarian like you! Shall I demonstrate?"

The inspector left the place without uttering a word.

29. PERSONIFICATION OF FEARLESSNESS

While he faced such harassment from people, he was also getting regard and honour from other people as a saint. Some thieves thought that he must be secretly holding precious riches in his room. One night two thieves approached him with shining spears.

Avadhūtājī was resting in the front verendah of his cottage; he was almost awake.

One of the two stood near his head and the other one by his feet. Avadhūta didn't change his position at all. Then the following conversation ensued:

Thief: Mahārāja, open the door.

Mahārāja: It's open already; you will find wealth of 14 worlds of the entire universe, Open the door yourself and take as much as you can.

Thief: Many of your devotees visit you, isn't it?

Mahārāja: Yes. Some like you visit at night.

Thief: Aren't you afraid when alone?

Mahārāja: What is there to be afraid of when one is alone? If there is someone else then, that may breed fear.

Thief: What would you do if some one holds and beats you?

Mahārāja: You are two of you. Let one of you hold me and the other beat me and then see what I can do.

One of the two suddenly spoke: "Let's go back; we are in a wrong place."

He who seeks God and has surrendered to Him, must be courageous. Fearlessness is the prime cardinal virtue of spiritual wealth.

30. AVADHŪTĪ-ECSTASY

(Ecstasy of an emancipated Soul)

Basically Nāreśvara was a cremation ground for seven surrounding hamlets or villages. It was a dense forest where serpents, scorpions, big black ants moved about freely. Once Śrī Amrutlal Modi had come to Nāreśvara to meet Avadhūtājī and, in about an hour's

time, three scorpions appeared there; these scorpions were dark green and very poisonous.

Once Avadhūtājī was all alone and it was midnight. A scorpion sprang, as if from no where, bit the saint on the little finger. He felt tremendous pain and burning sensation as if a big fire had engulfed his whole body, What to do? Who would attend to him? There was no one around. So he got up and with the acute pain went to the river. It was pitch dark with only star light showing the path. There were no steps leading to the river in those days and the river water had also greatly swollen that night. Avadhūtājī dipped his hand into the cold water of the river, held it there for long, and his pain subsided. He narrated the experience in one of his letters: where he added; “Today my joy is overflowing all bounds but there is nobody to share it.” Even with such unbearable pain he was in his Divine ecstasy and tranquility. Avadhūtājī’s joy never diminished under any difficult circumstances. In fact it always grew more.

31. DISCOURSES ON THE GĪTĀ

Many folk tales about Avadhūtājī, right or wrong, were spreading all around which gained for him a respectful position among the village folk.

Meanwhile, a sadhu named Niranjana came to village Diver (Tal. Sinor) and started spreading misinterpretations of the Bhāgvata Gītā. He reviled the Hindu religion indiscriminately and abused it irresponsibly.

The elders of town realised this and were seriously thinking about how to handle the problem. Somehow Avadhūtajī came to know about it.

They came to Nāreśvara and talked to Avadhūtajī about removing the nuisance of Niranjana.

Avadhūtajī went to Diver. But the moment Niranjan came to know about Avadhūtajī's arrival, he disappeared from the place. Here Avadhūtajī gave a series of discourses on the Gītā for over a month, in simple language that the common man could understand and enjoy.

In the same way he saved people of Bharuch district from the mischief of Sādhus who indulged in sensualities with the simple-hearted women of the villages in the area. He exposed them and saved them from taking the wrong path.

32. MAN OF NOTHING - LORD OF EVERYTHING

Once Avadhūtajī paid a visit to Rājapipalā. Huge crowds of people flocked to get a glimpse of the saint. Even members of the Princely family came to pay their respect to him.

Once Avadhūtajī was sitting with some gentlemen of the Princely family when a begger got there by chance; he said to the saint, "O Fatherly saint! I am a helpless person. I don't have any means of support except for this bag of mine. Please help me get something from these people".

Avadhūtājī said, “Dear brother! at least you have this bag for support. I don’t have even that. Go- throw away this helpless bag like me. One who has nothing, no help or support is a man of his own will, a true Master of himself.

How would a poor beggar understand the deep import of profound philosophy of Avadhūtājī?

The beggar did not throw away his bag and Avadhūtājī said nothing to anybody for him.

Once Avadhūtājī was staying at Prāgajībhāī Mistry’s farm in Rājapīpaḷā. He never lectured but if someone asked him a question he would reply to satisfy his curiosity. If a question was from an idler he kept quiet or evaded the question pretending to have no knowledge of the subject. People experienced rare serenity and peace of mind in the presence of Avadhūtājī. All their questions were automatically answered merely by a glimpse of the saint. Some people who went determined to get an answer to their questions had a strange experience. When they met Avadhūtājī they found the same subject or topic being discussed by Avadhūtājī and their own question being answered in reply to someone else’s questions.

Once a lawyer thought to himself that Avadhūtājī unlike others, never preaches or sermonises. Then why do so many people flock to him? What do they get from him? Everyday he thought of posing a question to him but Avadhūtājī’s personality was so powerful that he couldn’t do it at all. Two or three days passed by and

one day he summoned all his courage and asked the question to Avadhūtājī.

Avadhūtājī said: “Dear one, let us not talk of others. I have noticed you coming here for two or three days. Tell me why?”

The lawyer: “Bāpji, returning home from here I feel restless. I am drawn to this place”.

Avadhūtājī said: “Something which you cannot see, know or explain but the existence of which you cannot deny is divinity or God, and that draws all people here. As you are drawn here, so are others.”

33. UNCOMMON MODESTY

Once, on his walking tour, Avadhūtājī came to Mālasar, a village on the bank of the river Narmadā, where he went to the temple of Śrī Satyanārāyaṇa to have the glimpse of the Deity.

While Avadhūtājī was offering his prayer, the temple priest came to him and told him, “What kind of Sādhu are you! Don’t you know how to offer prayers to God?”

Avadhūtājī in all humility replied, “Brother! I am not a Sādhu. I shall worship the Deity as you direct. I don’t know.

The priest said, “You should pray, standing on the right side of the Idol.”

Avadhūtājī did as he was told and left without a word of anger. He respected the other’s view point. He had no pride for his education, knowledge or spirituality.

34. BETTING AND AVADHŪTAJĪ

In the earlier days of Avadhūtajī's settlement, several persons indulging in gambling and playing games of fortune and betting on numbers used to visit Nāreśvara. They would pray for lucky numbers.

Avadhūtajī was a firm and strong believer in the gospel of hard work and earning one's bread with the sweat of one's brow. So he paid no heed to such requests.

Once a gambler approached him and prayed for a lucky number to bet. Avadhūtajī pointed to a little girl playing over there and told him to play on the number suggested by that girl. The visitor was very happy with the suggestion and went to the girl, tried to be friendly with her and asked to say one number. But the girl playfully uttered three figures instead of one. When repeatedly persuaded, she gave out three or four numbers only. The visitor looked at Avadhūtajī and Avadhūtajī said, "What can I do my dear fellow? If she tells you one figure, your purpose will be served". That night Avadhūtajī composed a devotional song:

I saw one skylad desirefree Avadhūta. (Refrain).

Not two, not five, Oh Gentlemen! Not even ten but unique ONE [In a pack of playing cards, compared to Two, Five or Ten only One (Ekkā) has a unique position and the highest value.].....1.

Some call Him Rāma, some call Him Kṛṣṇa and some call Him Datta! And yet He is the one Unseen.....2.

You are the King and you are the Queen. You are the prince! And yet You are the one Undefinable!.....3.

Paint, Painter and Painting; such dualities I have left. (Individual soul, universal soul and the knowledge of the both, such triple entities have dissolved and only the oneness remains.).....4.

On hearing this psalm the gambler felt that the Saint had indicated to stake on number “one”. Accordingly he played on No.1. But he did not have serious faith and staked only a paisa. As luck would have it, he won: He got his number “one”, but he did not earn much because the stake was very low. When the visitor began to bother Avadhūtājī again and again; he said, “I didn’t counsel any figure to you at all. If it was in your luck, you would have betted on higher stakes and got more money. Go, work hard and earn your bread”. There was no encouragement to such visitors.

In fact Avadhūtājī was teaching an important religious truth that there is only one God pervading the whole universe. Some call Him Rāma; some call Him Kṛṣṇa, and some call Him Datta but He is only One and the same. He is a male, and a female, a king, a queen or a prince. But this philosophy was not understood by that gambler.

Avadhūtājī went on doing his work in his own way; though people believed differently of him. He practised his exercises and carried out his vow of reading 108 times the Holy book 'DattaPurāṇa' and chanting repeatedly the name of God.

Now, his religious rites on hand were nearing completion and the end had to be celebrated with religious ceremony which required a lot of money. Where to get that money? He neither begged of anyone for money, nor did he permit any body to offer money to him.

He had a new idea, ending his worship in Avadhūtīmanner. It was to take a circumambulation of the river Narmadā in 108 days. He had made up his mind to undertake this penance but Lord Almighty had a different mission for him ready and on account of this he could visit unexpectedly many centers of pilgrimages in the Southern India. What was that mission?

35. AT THE FEET OF GĀṄḌĀ MAHĀRĀJA

Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī Swāmī Mahārāja, in a dream commanded Avadhūtājī, "Go to the south. Gāṅḍā is waiting for you".

Avadhūtājī, thought to himself as to who was this Gāṅḍā and where to go and meet him. Finally he got a clue. Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatījī had a dedicated disciple, who always stayed with him; his name was Śrī Yogānanda Sarasvatījī, alias Gāṅḍā Mahārāja.

He was an accomplished yoga and meditation practitioner in Bharuch. Later, he left for the south and settled in a village in Maharashtra. He composed a biography of Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī as an epic volume in Marāṭhī in a poetic form and this book was to be corrected, given finishing touches and edited by a competent person. So, Gāṇḍā Mahārāja was worried.

Then Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī appeared in his dream and told Gāṇḍā Mahārāja, “I am sending a celibate. Don’t worry”.

Avadhūtājī set out on his journey to meet Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja. In the first place he had no money. Then he would never travel by bus or train without a ticket and never to ask for anything from anyone was his principle. So he moved from one place to another on foot only. Taking all such problems, sufferings and hardships in his stride, he reached Gāṇḍā Mahārāja, who had settled in Guñja. He understood the task that he was supposed to do. He revised and edited the book. Then the book was to be printed. So Avadhūtājī said, “After I return from Narmadā parikramā. I’ll do everything that you want me to do”.

While Avadhūtājī was in Guñja, a new type of almanac was published. So people were discussing whether to perform the ceremony in the memory of the dead ancestors according to the new almanac or the old one. All those people approached Gāṇḍā Mahārāja for a solution and he entrusted the work to

Śrī Avadhūtajī- the celibate. Avadhūtajī said, “If your elders died in times of the old almanac follow the old one and if they died in the new, follow the new one”. This answer appealed to all.

This work of editing the biography of Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī provided an opportunity to Avadhūtajī to know the minutest detail of his Master’s life. The Divine Actions were all Lord’s performances, inspired deeds and divine signals.

On his return from the circumambulation, staying in Bharuch he saw to it that the book ‘Śrī Gurumūrti Caritra’ was carefully printed, without errors. He also abbreviated it in 108 Sanskrit verses; naming it ‘Śrī Vāsudevanāmasūdhā’. It was composed by him and was included in his daily prayers.

What a humility in this stotra!

To cite an example in stanza 73 he writes:

‘Appearing only in his dreams this small child was transformed from savage into a noble human; O Vasudeva! I bow down to thee.’ (73)

It was his good fortune that he had to stay in Bharucha where he received a copy of ‘DattaPurāṇa’ and also could get an opportunity to read “proofs” of the divine life-story of his Master. God also surprisingly works out his wonderful plans.





36. CIRCUMAMBULATION

Kākā Saheb Kālelkar has spoken of a river as the mother of humanity and truly, a river satisfies the needs of a mother. How much satisfied and wealthy is the peasant living on its banks! A civilised life flourishes only on the bank of a river. And that is why several centres of pilgrimage have developed on the banks of rivers.

The origin of the river Narmadā is in the mountains of Amarkaṅṭaka. As the ancient scriptures tell us, it springs from the perspiration of the Lord Śiva. Its etymology is: “Narma” means joy, bliss and “Dā” means giver; which means Narmadā is the giver of joy. Really, at the very sight of this flowing river your heart is filled with delight and this is a rare experience for a pilgrim. It is said that one earns righteousness and sanctity with a dip in other rivers; whereas the very look of the river Narmadā sanctifies you! It is the only river whose all four sides can be traversed. Even today, hundreds of devotees of Narmadā take circumambulation out of devotion. People derive satisfaction of circumambulation even by visiting holy centres of pilgrimage by car or a bus. You can commence the Parikramā from any place on the bank and return to the same place at the end and have glimpses of Lord Omkāreśvara. One has to ensure that one does not cross the flow anywhere en route. At Vimaleśwara where Narmadā merges with the sea you have to cross the river by boat to return to the place where you started.

Avadhūtājī started his cirumambulation from Mortakkā. Very often he walked 50 miles in a day but normally he walked 25 miles (50 kms) a day. He would stop only when he had fever or some staunch devotee insisted on his stay at a place on the way.

He had a peculiar dress during parikramā. He wore a cone-shaped cap over his head that was like a wild turban; an extra loin-cloth tied on one foot. His baggage consisted of a shoulder bag containing tooth-powder, a tongue-cleaner, a thorn-puller and a small box to keep jaggery (gur). In one hand, he carried a small bucket like brass carrier for water. The bag hanging on the shoulder he held the stick in the other hand. He wrapped a blanket only occasionally; otherwise, it was kept hanging. His gait was brisk like the whip of wind.

It was his unwritten rule to speak Gujarātī in Hindī speaking areas and Hindī in Gujarātī areas; none could guess if he was an educated person or he knew English. In spite of that many co-parikramāvāsīs asked him, “Why are you on circumambulation like this, you seem to be from a well-off family! We are unhappy, so we go round the river like this.”

Avadhūtājī’s reply was “Brother! you are in search of happiness and I am looking for unhappiness which I can’t find anywhere.” Avadhūtājī totally disliked begging. He neither knew how to beg nor was he comfortable while begging. so he took gur from wherever he could get. Gur was dissolved in water and he

drank it. And if he got some cooked food he would eat it as if provided by the Almighty God.

37. EXPERIENCES DURING CIRCUMAMBULATION

Many a times Avadhūtajī used to say that if ever you had any doubt about the existence of God you better try the circumambulation of the river Narmadā with deep faith in your heart. There would be many instances that would awaken the sense of God's grace or of the motherly Narmadā.

Some of his experiences are worth-noting.

Once it so happened that he didn't get gur from any where nor did he receive any cooked food. Despite this he continued his daily walk. While he was on the move a person approached him with a pot of gur (jaggery) and asked "Are you the person doing parikramā taking only Gur-water?". When Avadhūtajī said yes, he went near and placed his pot of gur and requested him to accept it. Avadhūtajī asked him: "Who has directed you to give me this pot of Gur?" That person answered: "Mā Narmadā appeared in my dream and instructed me that a saint was on his pilgrimage, taking only gur water. He has run out of his stock of Gur. So you go and replenish it for him."

Avadhūtajī silently thanked the river Goddess, took a small portion from the full pot and put it into his own small box.

The person told Avadhūtajī that the full pot was meant for him. He said, “I don’t need so much. As I go further I’ll get it by the motherly grace of the Narmadā. It is a sign of distrust to hoard beyond your needs”. But the person said, “I can’t take back the gur offered to you. You have to have it now”. Avadhūtajī suggested a middle course and asked him to take back the leftover part as prasāda (divine grace) and distribute it among people.

There was another experience of Narmadā’s motherly benevolence. Avadhūtajī had eaten nothing for nearly three days. He got nothing and he was tired of continuous walking. He took a bath, thinking that it would refresh him. He felt refreshed indeed, but the pangs of hunger also grew more acute. As he advanced a little further, he saw a fresh loaf of Indian bread with a blob of butter lying on a rock. He was tempted to take it but he started thinking as to who might have kept it there and how can he eat?

A little further away he saw two fresh loaves of bread on a mat. Now he felt the mother river had offered him bread with butter but his education had come in the way and he missed the chance. Now he must eat these 2 loaves and not to reject the Divine Grace of Mā Narmadā. He ate it and continued his march ahead.

Not only did he have such experiences of divine grace but also he came in contact with people of

different sorts. His experiences were both pleasant and unpleasant.

One evening he decided to stay overnight on the bank of the river where a few Sādhus were also camping. They told Avadhūtajī to stay near the stream of the river. Avadhūtajī thought that those Sādhus would light a fire and consume narcotics; so it was advisable to stay away from them.

He moved away closer to the stream.

It was midnight and the roar of a tiger was heard. Those Sādhus were cunning to advise Avadhūta to stay near the stream; thinking that if a tiger appeared, it would first go near the stream and they would have enough time to escape. Avadhūtajī was almost awake and cautioned all. He put more logs of wood into the fire, made it brighter, took his bath in the river and was engrossed in meditation. They all thought that the tiger had gone away. But it appeared behind the spot where he had camped, leapt and sprang over to the opposite bank and disappeared.

Once he ran across a devotee who played on a string instrument called tamburā. He could sing religious devotional songs quite well. But then robbers struck them on the way. Everybody had to part with their possessions; the tamburā devotee had also to give away everything but he would not part with his tamburā. He said he wanted it to sing devotional songs and glorify God. However, these robbers snatched the

instrument from him and banged it on the ground. It was broken and lo! a few silver coin rupees came rattling out of it. Now Avadhūtājī understood why the tamburā devotee was unwilling to part with his instrument. When Avadhūtājī realised that the devotee was very unhappy and restless without his instrument, he got him a new one.

Once a person named Khemsingh joined him on the way. Avadhūtājī used to get food offerings from everywhere by virtue of his austerities. So Khemsingh too got it as he was accompanying Avadhūtājī. In fact it was a treat for him. He flourished under the pretext of Avadhūta's service. Once Avadhūtājī was having fever and so he felt thirsty quite often. Khemsingh used to fetch water for him and a thought occurred to him as to what would happen to this saint if I was not around? Avadhūtājī read his mind and he said, Khemsingh! either you go before me or come after me. We don't travel together".

Khemsingh tried to persuade him to change his decision but Avadhūtājī always stuck to his resolutions. Khemsingh thought, "Avadhūtājī has fever; how far would he go? Let him start earlier, I can catch up with him".

Avadhūtājī was walking ahead and Khemsingh was following him, but for one full month Khemsingh couldn't overtake him. On the other hand, the offerings of cooked food he used to receive in Avadhūtājī's company had also diminished. He lost his health and on

meeting Avadhūtājī he begged his pardon and once again he accompanied Avadhūtājī.

Khemsingh, again made a mistake. Avadhūtājī used to practice Brahma-Dātaṇa* in the wee hours of the early morning. It was a form of yogic action, in which one has to take a small thin piece of a branch of a berry tree and penetrate it deeply in the throat and remove cough and other impurities from the body.

Khemsingh thought it was a simple process and once tried to experiment with it. The cleanser had hardly entered the throat crevices, where it got stuck. Now, he was in a fix; he could neither pull it out nor could he push it in. He could not even speak. As good luck would have it, Avadhūtājī had just finished his meditation and he saw the plight of Khemsingh, visualised the seriousness of the situation and hanging him upside down, with his head downward, extracted the cleanser. Khemsingh bled through his mouth but his life was saved. He then took a vow not to imitate Avadhūtājī.

Avadhūtājī was crossing the sea in a boat near Vimleśvara and there were several sādhus and pilgrims sailing with him in the boat. Suddenly the sea became stormy and the rising waves began to fill water into the boat. They all felt that their end was inevitable. Some began to cry; some yelled and screamed out of fright and all around, there was an atmosphere of gloom.

* It is a special ritual in yoga to clean the internal body, using a tooth brush cum cleanser made out of a thin fresh branch of a berry tree, called Dātaṇa.

Avadhūtājī's constitution was prone to dyspepsia; his acidic stomach was considerably shaken as the boat was rocking to and fro, up and down. So, Avadhūtājī closed his eyes and kept his head bent low to the bottom of the boat. In his mind, a composition, homage to the motherly river Narmadā, was shaping itself. All the passengers said, "Dear Brother, you are quiet. Praise the mighty river at least once." Avadhūtājī replied "If the boat sinks, we will all fall into the lap of the mother-river, that's a rare fate to meet, and if saved, what's there to gain on the other side of the river?"

And suddenly the tumult subsided, and hopes revived in all the boat passengers. We have received a very beautiful ode to the Narmadā written by Śrī Avadhūtājī in a tune similar to Vande Mātaram.

While he was in circumambulation of Narmadā, during a short halt in Bharuch, he met H.H. 1008 Śrī CandraśekharaŚraṇā Śaṅkarācārya, the Head of Dwāarakāpīṭha. He was acquainted with Śrī Avadhūtājī from early years of life before he was installed as the Head of Dwāarakāpīṭha. Not only that but he had very high regards too for Śrī Avadhūtājī. Like Avadhūtājī he also had tremendous love and respect for sanskrit language and a great pride for Indian culture.

He was extremely happy and overjoyed on meeting the celibate Avadhūtājī after a very long time especially after being installed as the Head of the centre.

After the preliminary exchange of pleasantries Śrī Shankeranandji proposed “O Brahmācārijī, how nice and great Śāradāpīṭha would be if an eminent scholar and ascetic like you were to join me here as the Head of this centre. Immediately I can entrust the Seat of Honour at Prabhāsapāṭaṇa and then you become my successor at Dwārakāpīṭha when I leave. You can stay over here with me now. Avadhūtajī said, “At present I am in a circumambulation of Narmadā. Even if someone offers Avadhūtajī the Kingship of Gods and Goddesses like Indralok and Candralok he would not deviate from the path of enlightenment or eternal bliss. Do you think your offer would lure me or tempt me? In Marāṭhī ‘pīṭha’ means flour. Do you want to tempt me with a handful of ‘pīṭha’ (flour)! I have set my mind on enlightenment and self-realisation; nothing else but this. Please forgive me for rejecting the offer.”

As he was spiritually advancing on his set goal, he could throw away the honour of Śaṅkarācārya’s offer of distinction. There was no surprise in this; renunciation was a part of his nature.

38. CELESTIAL VISION- WRITING OF EPICS AND SCRIPTURES

Once Avadhūtajī was strolling on the bank of the Narmadā. Now he was known as a saint sporting on the banks of the Narmadā and the resident of Nāreśvara. He had taken a halt at Indravaraṇa, a small village exactly opposite to Garuḍeśvara. Avadhūtajī had a divine vision. His spiritual Master, Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatījī (of Garuḍeśvara), commanded him:

“Take up the pot of Nectar of the life story of the Master, relish it yourself and let others also enjoy it; Death will scream aloud and run away from a fellow who thirsts for salvation.

Never will he suffer from poverty. Go and enjoy the bliss of life. So saying Swāmī Mahārāja put his pious hand on his head to bless him in the dream.”

Avadhūtajī was now roused from his dream. Garuḍeśvara was just on the other side. He could have glimpses of the samādhi-Temple of his spiritual Master and he was instructed to compose an epic like book on the Devotional Acts of His Lord and Master Bhaḡavāna Dattātreya. When he was camping at Sarkheja near Ahmedabad in a Guava Orchard he started composing and writing the book called ‘Śrī Gurulīlāmṛta’. Then he returned to Nāreśvara and finished writing his epic.

When the first part of Śrī Gurulīlāmṛta, dealing with knowledge and realisation, was published, in a review published in a monthly, “Buddhiprakāśa” it was regarded as a volume (grantha) held in high honour as Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.

It was the practice of Avadhūtaji to compose short devotional lyrics, odes of sacred celebrations and collections of these were already published. Before this, the “Dattanāmasmarāṇa” of 108 verses composed by him was very popular with his followers. Its refrain was: Chant Lord’s name in every breath. (Śvāse Śvāse Dattanāma Smarātman) The verse transformation of the Gītā, “Saṅgīta Gītā”, and PatraGītā, composed in ovi metre of Marāṭhī language, were already published. Ātmacintana (Reflections on Soul) was a philosophical poem inspired by the Vedantic ideas. Everynight the devotional songs were sung by visitors to the hermitage and these form a part of his booklet ‘DattaPañcaPadī’ ‘Nāreśvara-Mahātmaya’ was ready and published already when Avadhūtaji came back to Nāreśvara.

‘Dattabāvanī’, a Divine Hymn of 52 lines, glorifying Lord Datta, is recited in most of the families in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Its rhythm and format have so much appealed to people that its imitations, Kṛṣṇa-Bāvanī, Raṅga-odaBāvanī, have been published.

The ‘Dattabāvanī’ was conceived and composed at Saij, a small village near Kalol-Śerathā and there he was staying in the temple of Lord Śive known as Siddhanātha

Mahādeva. Śrī Kamalashankar, who arranged and hosted his visit and stay at Saij, was a native of Sarkheja and a teacher in Saij.

He believed that his wife was under the spell and influence of an evil spirit and so he requested Avadhūtājī to write a prayer to charm away the wicked spirit.

Avadhūtājī had in mind at first the form of Hanuman cālīsā, a poem of 40 lines, singing the glory of Hanuman. He picked up his pen, recalled and related the Devotional deeds of Lord Datta; it was done in a very thankful spirit. Now the hymn ran into 52 lines, instead of 40 lines. So it was called 'Dattabāvanī'. After it was written it occurred to him that the original biography in Marāṭhī 'Gurucaritra' has 52 chapters and there are 52 thursdays in a year. This title is appropriate.

'Raṅga Taraṅga' a collection of Marāṭhī Lyrics and 'Śrī Vāsudevasaptaśatī', a short composition in ovi metre, are also note worthy works. 'Sapta-Śatī', 'Gurucaritra', written in Marāṭhī by Śrī Vāsudevānandajī, was translated into Gujarātī in alliterative verses. This translation was published posthumously.

The collection of his letters-Part I and Part II-addressed to his two loyal friends- Śrī Amrutaḷal Modi and Śrī Ambalal Vyas, was called 'Patra-Manjuśā'. In it you can find his religious ideology and his psychology after his coming to Nāreśvara.

39. CONTRIBUTION TO THE TRADITION OF LITERATURE BY SAINTS

By composing the famous book ‘Śrī Gurulīlāmṛta.’ Avadhūtājī had already stepped into the realm of literature composed by saints. He enjoyed some literary distinction. He delivered the message of knowledge, action and devotion through ancient folk tales. His biography of his spiritual guide and Master is a great literary achievement.

‘Avadhūtī Ānanda’ is a collection of hymns, psalms and devotional songs. It is also a literary masterpiece. The Sanskrit poet-playwright Bhavabhūtī once said that significance dogs the word of saints. This truth is reflected in the psalms of ‘Avadhūtī Ānanda’. It treasures his rich experiences of attaining to heights of knowledge and devotion; it comes out like one burps after a full meal upto the brim. These psalms and hymns are written in Gujarātī and Hindī.

‘Raṅga-Hṛdayam’ comprises odes and hymns in the honour worship of Gods and Goddesses, and these are written in Sanskrit. There are profound philosophical poems in it too. They all mirror Avadhūtājī’s heart overflowing with love of God. It is also a great contribution to sacred literature.

In ‘Avadhūtī Ānanda’, morning prayers are very striking; “Akśara Gītā”, “Bodha Mālikā”, “Dattanāma Smaraṇa” attract the attention.

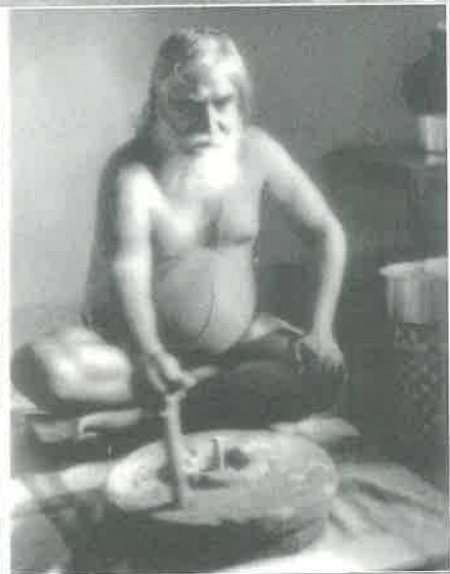
There are compositions in Gujarātī; Marāṭhī and Sanskrit languages addressed to Śrī Avadhūtājī in his honour and praise.

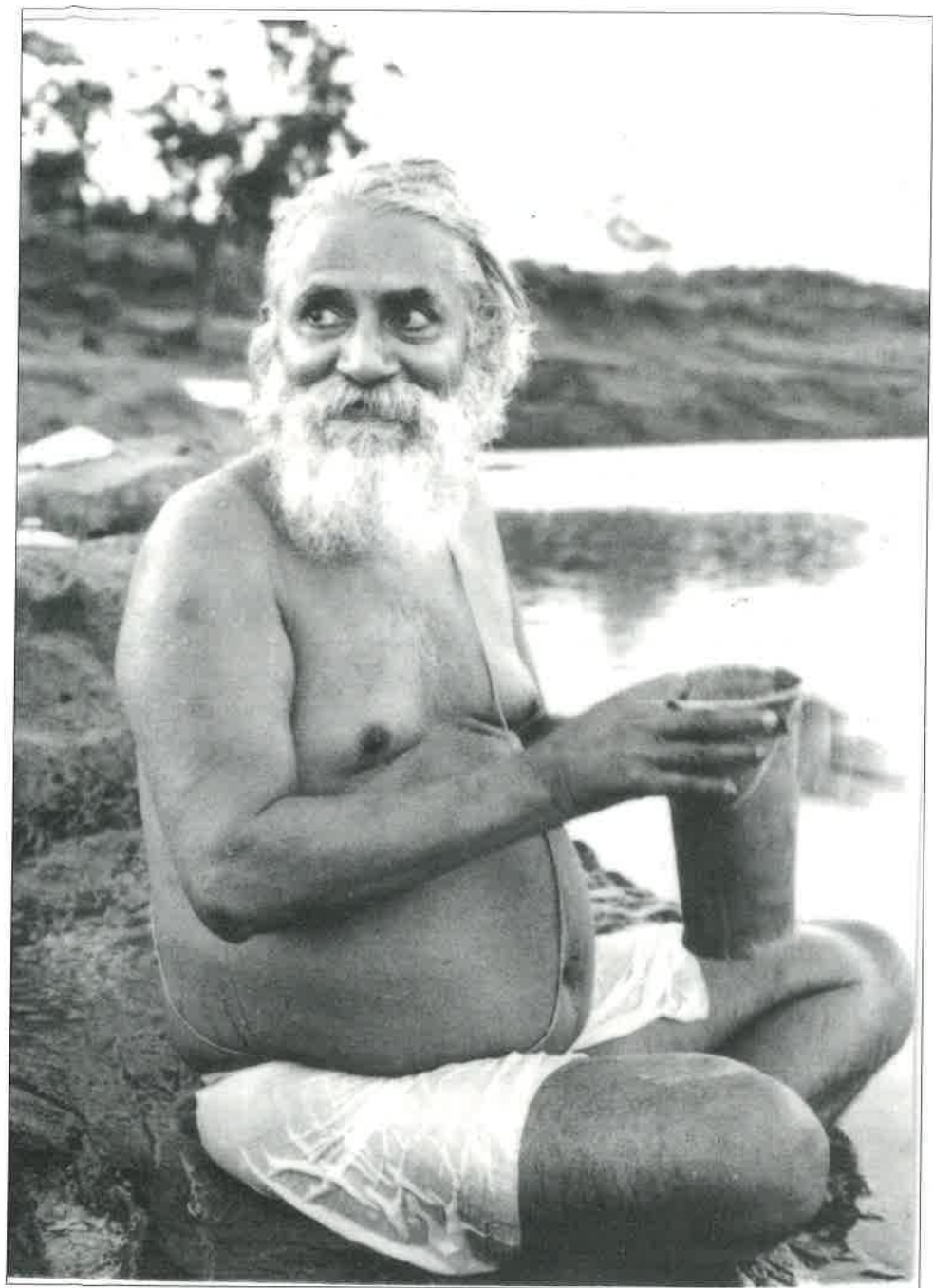
40. CELEBRATING DATTA-JAYANTĪ BIRTHDAY OF LORD DATTĀTREYA

Late Śrī Hargovindadas goldsmith from Raṅāpura was a true devotee. He used to visit Nāreśvara frequently. Once he thought of a plan to send loaves of Indian bread made with milk for Śrī Avadhūtājī every Thursday. Sometime a member of his family would visit Nāreśvara. Avadhūtājī, out of courtsey and politeness talked a few things with the person visiting Nāreśvara and on the rest of the days Avadhūtājī observed silence.

So people started going to him with their problems and miseries on Thursdays and Sundays. Śrī Avadhūta was absorbed in singing psalms. Very often he would utter the words “Datta” and “Avadhūta”. Lord Dattātreya’s birthday fell on the fifteenth day of Mṛgaśirṣa. In the earlier times all devotees gathered there and celebrated the birthday in presence of Avadhūtājī.

For two days they would read and recite ‘Gurulīlāmṛta’. The celebrations began early in the morning on the Full moon day i.e. the fifteenth day. Morning prayers were offered and morning rituals performed. In the evening at the hour of Lord Datta’s birth, couplets in honour of Lord’s birth from Gurulīlāmṛta were recited. Hymns were chanted and prayers were offered. Then there was continuous chanting of Lord’s name. Balmukundbhai sang a lullaby composed by Avadhūtājī.





Mahijī led a team of devotional singers from Totīdarā. At night they danced with ropes singing psalms and hymns for the whole night. The next day in the early morning they broke their fast. Then the people went away to their homes and villages. By and by this celebration assumed the form of a folk festival.

The first Datta-Jayantī celebration which involved an expenditure of only Rs.36 became more and more expensive as times went by. The crowds swelled.

Of course, all voluntarily observed religious discipline and enjoined others to do. So, it was more of a cultural meet than a common fair. The late National poet Zaverchand Meghani heard of this and he remarked: "Culture is the life giving breath of any community. It discards worn out conventions and produces new ones". Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta has given a new centre of pilgrimage on the outskirts of a river bank called Nāreśvara. It is throbbing with life now.

Avadhūtajī was by origin a Maharashtrian brahmin youth. His name was Pāṇḍuraṅga Vaḷāme. He was a graduate of the Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha. Because he was possessed by spirituality in search of eternal bliss not only for himself but even for all his devotees, he pursued his quest on the banks of the river Narmadā. Neither did he build a new temple nor did he construct a sanatorium raising funds or collecting donations. But there are two new things to his credit. One, he being dedicated to Guru Dattātreya, has written beautiful psalms

and devotional songs in Gujarātī and Second, he started a cultural fair of sorts.

Nearly ten thousand men and women attended this cultural meet every year and enjoyed poetic and religious atmosphere for almost a week. It became poetic because the devotees, while working in the kitchen, chanted hymns and psalms written by Raṅga Avadhūtājī and their laborious task in the kitchen became enjoyable and not at all boring by the melodious rhythms of his hymns. The pilgrims who were fetching water sang: Dattabāvanī- (Jaya Yogīśwara Datta Dayāḷa, Tuṅja Eka Jagamāṁ Pratipāḷa) "Glory be to the Datta, the Lord of yogis you alone are our guardian and redeemer".

Another devotee, working in the kitchen, cooking Tur or Muga Dāla or Lentil soup and mixing it with a ladle sang: "Zoḷī Annapūrṇā Kara Mām̄hya, Śānti-Kamaṇḍala Kara Sohāya!": Holding in hands a bag of offerings, his vessel of peace shines: Thus the cultural meet resounded with the music Dattabāvanī. (the divine hymn of 52 lines).

The noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore said often that memorials of stones and metals have lost significance; organise cultural fairs for the memories of our national readers. Community festivals should be common and respectable. However, it is not easy to continue the tradition of community fairs. People are credulous and superstitious. It is true to some extent that laymen are taken in by the saffron robes, long beards and bald heads.

However, the community fairs don't thrive with such appearances. Even exhibitions, sports, seminars and discourses or singers don't make true community fairs worthy of a name that vibrates with joy and life-spirit of community life around. "He truly deserves homage and honour who transfuses into the veins of men and women the poetry of life; this means people drop away the inhibitions of society, abandon themselves with full freedom, and enjoy the beauty of nature as a free divine gift.

"I haven't seen myself how Raṅga Avadhūta conducted such a community fair. But to conceive and conduct and continue such a tradition of community fairs is an achievement of a master spirit-this certainly I can say." (quoted from an article ('Narmadāne Tīre') in Urmi Ane Nav Rachana)

What was distinct about such DattaJayantī-celebrations was this- all food was hand-made. Manual labour was encouraged. Crowds of followers came but they raised the tents for their stay and when they left, they dismantled the tents. The water used in cooking food and other utilities was brought by people themselves. Avadhūtājī himself fetched five Kāvadaṣ (Bamboo laṭh on the shoulder with slings at both ends for carrying pitchers). This is now kept in a museum near the temple. Hundreds of men and women followed him singing in a refrain, "Digambarā Digambarā Śrīpāda

Vallabh Digambarā”. So the food people ate there was transformed by divine grace; it was God’s gift to people. They all sat together to share the divine “Prasāda” (Grace). They started eating after chanting aloud “Avadhūta Cintana Śrī gurudev Datta”. After eating, they collected their own dishes (made up of dried lotus leaves) and put them in trash bags. Thus the spirit of sacredness, dignity of self-reliance and discipline was observed. What he learnt and practised as a soldier of the freedom movement was translated into religious education.

Many such celebrations were held in his presence. Then after a few years Avadhūtaji said, “Now, all of you celebrate the Lord’s birthday in your own town. I shall visit some town every year turn by turn”. Thus the celebrations were decentralised.

41. IN THE MIDST OF THE WATERS OF THE NARMADĀ

Once Avadhūtaji and Śrī Ratanlal, a noble, righteous soul, who was responsible for Avadhūtaji choosing Nāreśvara as a seat of his spiritual journey, were staying at Araṇyeśvara Mahādeva shrine near Toṭidarā.

Many a times the shrine was surrounded by the tides or floods in the river. When the waters rose too high the priest and his assistant left the shrine. When Avadhūtaji had stopped by there, the waters continued to rise higher and higher, and the priest and his assistants

had already left the shrine. The villagers noticed that Avadhūtājī and his companion were still at the shrine, though the priest and his assistants were gone from the place. They went to the shrine, warned him of the imminent danger of not leaving the place but Avadhūtājī was determined to stay on there; Ratanlal could go away if he so desired. But how could he go away, leaving Avadhūtājī in the lurch? Both of them stayed there. Waters continued to swell higher and higher.

Ratanlal was scared but Avadhūtājī said, “Ratanlal, no need to fear. I took a circumambulation of the river and today, the river circumambulates me! It will go back after completing its aim!” Waters rose higher and higher and covered all the hills around the area, as if the river were making its pilgrimage around Avadhūtājī! After sometime the flood ebbed and, lo! to the amazement of all people, the saint (Avadhūta) and his companion were safe and sound.

A similar incident also occurred at Nāreśvara. In 1961, the Narmadā flooded overwhelmingly and the local people were frightened. In good humour Avadhūtājī said, “If the mother river comes over here to give me a bath I shall invite the Brahmins of Bhāloda and Koral villages and give them a grand dinner party!” Someone remarked, “O God, a brahmin of Bhāloda or Koral can come for your party if he is alive after the waters have flooded your cell!”

But Avadhūtajī composed an ode to pay homage to the river; it was 'Revā Gītam'. The song in the rhythmic structure of Mālakaum̐sa has become very popular with the followers of Avadhūtajī.

It is worth nothing that this ode was sung as a prayer by Śrī Vimlātāi Thakar at the opening session at a seminar of Sarvodaya workers.

42. CELEBRATIONS OF RAṄGA AVADHŪTA'S BIRTHDAY (RAṄGA-JAYANTĪ)

Avadhūta's old followers were once sitting by the side of his mother Rukamāmbā. While they were conversing it was mentioned casually that Raṅga Avadhūta was born on "Gopāṣṭamī" of Kārtika Month which fell on Monday and was regarded 9th day of the month. When the old almanacs were consulted it was learnt that the day was Kārtik 9th day of V.S. 1955. You think of Raṅga Avadhūtajī's birthday as you do of Lord Dattā's.

To start with, the first birthday, on a small scale but with full dignity and honour due to him, was celebrated in Diver. Then, by chance in Zanora, it continued, as years passed by, at Umallā, Pora, C'āṇī, Jhagaḍīā, Garbādā, Pādarā, Navāpura (Khāndeśa), Ajupurā, Vaḍodarā (52nd), Naḍīāda, Bājawā, Nāreśvara (60th), Dākora, Dharmaja, Kaṇabhā, Dwārakā, Navāgāma, Ambājī, Kampālā (Africa), Jaipura and at several places. At Bājawā, Avadhūtajī began giving a short sermon

in Gujarātī. Later on, such didactic discourses were published in a collection entitled 'Amara-Ādeśa', At Navāpura he took a bird's eye-view of the history of Datta-worship and such other topics. It was printed separately but, later on, was included in 'Amara-Ādeśa'.*

His 60th birthday was celebrated at Nāreśvara. The inspiring idea to do this was that his own mother Mā Rukmābā could see such a celebration.

When the proposal was placed before Avadhūtājī he said, "If you are going to make it a truly religious occasion, I grant you my permission. And in so far as I am concerned, my only condition is that you take me on this birthday to my Guru's memorial site at Garuḍeśvara". All his conditions were satisfied and the birthday was celebrated with irresistible zeal. During the week of celebrations, over a hundred thousand men and women visited Nāreśvara and paid their homage to him. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta's birthday celebration at Pādarā was a note worthy unique experience which the devotees will remember for ever. The procession at Pādarā to honour and welcome Avadhūtājī was of a different kind. We had not seen anything like it before. The shopkeepers and businessmen in every street and lane used the goods and wares of their own occupation to decorate the arches put up for the reception of their Guru Mahārāja. For example the goldsmiths hung real gold ornaments made by them. Florists decorated the welcome arch in their

* The english translation of Avadhūtājī's birthday message is now available in a book entitled "Thus Spake Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta = Call of Nāreśvara.

market with colourful flowers. Utensil merchants used their Brass, Aluminium and stainless steel utensils to decorate the arch in their locality. Capsellers used multi coloured caps. Potters used earthen pots and jugs. Electrical goods dealers used all kinds of decorative lights. Plumbers used all pipes and fittings nicely arranged in an arch to welcome Avadhūtaji. Leather goods manufacturers put up an arch decorated with shoes, sandals and leather jackets and so on. What a sight that was. Śrī Guṇavantarāy who was a host for Avadhūtaji greeted him showering real pearls. What a welcome Bāpaji received!

108 group-readings of 'Śrī Gurulīlāmṛta' were scheduled for the first time in Vaḍodarā. On his birthday his Pādukā was worshipped by newly composed hymns. Śrī Manishanker Upadhyay, a scholar of eminence, who was a resident of Baroda, wrote these verses. They are accepted as holy verses for his worship since then.

Devotional songs in Sanskrit were composed and sung. Three collections in Sanskrit in honour of Avadhūtaji are also published.

43. NĀRĀYAṆABHĀĪ IN NĀREŚVARA

Rev. Mother Rukamāmbā was living with Avadhūtaji's younger brother, Nārāyaṇabhāī. He fell seriously ill in Bombay, and Avadhūtaji called him as well as their mother and settled them at Nāreśvara.

Nārāyaṇa's illness was aggravating day by day and there were no signs of improvement. But the sacred and

pious atmosphere of the environment in Nāreśvara made the illness bearable to him. However, his soul was not ready to depart as something was bothering him. Avadhūtājī realised that Nārāyaṇa was worried about their mother. It was true. What would be the fate of their mother after Nārāyaṇa's death? Avadhūtājī had renounced worldly life! These were the questions that would have occupied Nārāyaṇa's mind, causing him worries.

Avadhūtājī could understand his brother's predicaments very well. He, peacefully but firmly promised his dying brother, "You need not worry about mother. I will take care of her. If I think that my renunciation comes in the way of my duties to her, I shall give up my ascetic way of life. If need be, I will even take up a job or do some business". Nārāyaṇa who really understood Avadhūtājī's nature was convinced and passed away peacefully after this.

The mother's grief would melt even a rock. She became a widow early in life, brought up her two sons with tremendous hardships and sufferings. Then one son gave up worldly life retiring to the forest and the other was dead.

By and by she got used to the life at Nāreśvara, and Avadhūtājī treated her well and looked after her as he had promised his brother. So the mother regained her peace of mind and readjusted her life to suit the changed environment. After that she took control of several things and was responsible for the development of Nāreśvara to a very great extent.



44. UNFLINCHING DEVOTION TO MOTHER (MOTHER AS DIVINITY)

Nāreśvara now began to develop after his mother settled down over there. In the begining, Avadhūtaji was against any construction of new buildings leaving everything to God. But now being obliged to live at Nāreśvara for the sake of his mother, he started granting his consent for allround development of Nāreśvara.

Every morning he would go and touch the feet of his mother; this was his way of mother-worship. Whenever he went out of Nāreśvara, he took leave and blessings of his mother and carried food prepared by her. He would cut short his scheduled programmes out of Nāreśvara and get back as early as possible whenever he heard of his mother's sickness.

After the grand celebration of his birthday at Pādarā, he drove straight to Hāmfeśvara on the bank of the Narmadā. One could go by train, in those days, to Hāmfeśvara via ChhotaUdaipur. From ChhotaUdaipur one had to travel in a bullock-cart to reach Kavāṁta, and from there walk down on foot. No proper roads were available in those days.

After a few days of his stay at Hāmfeśvara, the moment he came to know that the mother was not well, he set out at once from Hāmfeśvara, taking whatever transport was available to catch a train at 4 o'clock in the early morning at ChhotaUdaipur; he had to go on

foot for sometime, travel some distance by bullock-cart that would bounce high and low and some distance even by car. The journey was quite long from ChhotaUdaipur to Viśvāmitrī, Miyāgāma, Karjana and Nāreśvara. He didn't stop anywhere even to cleanse his teeth; only after reaching Nāreśvara he attended to his morning routine.

After this experience he decided not to travel far from Nāreśvara and stay at near-by places only. Such was his unswerving love for his mother.

Once, Avadhūtājī stopped giving his Pādukā (a pair of wooden sandals) for worship. It so happened that visitors from not so distant places generally brought their own garlands and flowers to perform worship, but visitors from a foreign country or chance-tourists had to buy flowers from the local flowershops at Nāreśvara. A local florist once took undue advantage of a foreign tourist believing him to be very affluent. The flowers were faded and stale. And the garland was not worth the price he charged. Avadhūtājī came to know about this and thought that if a florist could charge heavily the priests and other shopkeepers could do the same thing as well. Why shouldn't the practice of worshipping his pādukā be stopped? This will curb unfair trading practices at Nāreśvara.

Once resolved, his determination was unbending. He was not prepared to make any amends or compromise in any way.

Every year groups of pilgrims came walking to Nāreśvara and, there came such a group of devotees, including a learned scholar Viṣṇuprasāda and Śrī Jayantīlā Shah. They had taken a vow to worship Avadhūtajī's Pādūkā at Nāreśvara and were disappointed to know that they would not get the Pādūkās to worship and they won't be able to fulfill their vow. They all earnestly appealed to the mother to prevail upon Avadhūtajī to allow them to worship.

The mother immediately told Avadhūtajī, "Why don't you give your Pādūkā to these devotees? Consider their commitment, faith and the trouble they have undergone!" Avadhūtajī said, "Why should I do this if my ideals are dishonoured and compromise on my principles? Anyway, since you are asking me to give my footwear, I'll give it to you". The mother took the Pādūkā and gave them to the devotees. Avadhūtajī consented to do what he never would have done on his own just to respect his mother's word.

He often commented on a popular saying "Even mother doesn't offer a second helping of food without your asking" and reworked the maxim by remarking. 'A mother is she who serves food without your telling her to do so'. 'Mother is a living personification of motherhood.' 'There is no divinity greater than a mother,' such maxims were coined by him.

On the death of his mother on V.S. 2024 Jeṭha sud 11, he went to Moraṭakkā and performed all the last

rites in a traditional vedic style like a true son. He distributed clothes to Sādhus and on the first death anniversary (punyatithi) established a new monument of mother's day by raising "Māṭṛsmṛtiśail" there. On the spot where she was cremated he kept "Śrī yantra" and a memorial was raised there. Even today, in the months of Caitra and Āso, during the first nine days, songs and worship are chanted to celebrate her memory. The memorial is worshipped also in V.S. Jeṭha.

Once Avadhūtājī had to go out of Nāreśvara and had to sail by boat to catch a train at Koral. It was his practice to go and offer a prostrate bow to his mother and touch her feet before he left. Now, it so happened that she had gone out to the toilet and the attendants asked him to wait for her. Avadhūtājī was in a hurry to leave. So, he told the attendant, "Convey my regards to the mother and inform her that I'm gone. It's getting late". And, he went away.

Hardly had he gone a few steps away when his mother came back. She heard the story. She just said, "Couldn't he wait even for a little while? Why is he in such a great hurry?"

Avadhūtājī reached the bank of the river and took a boat. It was a machine-boat and he thought he would reach sooner and catch the train. But the machine of the boat got stuck and the time to catch the train was spent on the bank of the river only. Avadhūtājī now realised that this was all due to his leaving without

receiving the mother's blessings. There and then he resolved that he would never make this mistake again. As a mark of atonement he observed a fast on that day.

The mother too responded to his devotion in equal measure, with overwhelming love for him. She understood him and knew his nature very well and did everything to conceal from him her troubles, her problems and even her sicknesses. Once she vomitted profusely and her body began to shiver. She controlled herself because it was time for Avadhūtajī to take his meal. If he came to know that his mother had vomitted and she was not well, he wouldn't have taken his meal that day.

Once while cooking hot oil spilled over her feet. There were big blisters on her feet but she didn't complain about it until Avadhūtajī had finished taking his meal and departed.

There was no sign of any pain or agony on her face on both the occasions. After his meal, when Avadhūtajī left the dining place, she asked Modījī (Śrī Amrutlal Nathalal Modi, the Managing Trustee of Śrī Avadhūta Nivas Trust and the Chief Administrator of the Āśrama) to get a healing paste and some medicines. She further told Modiji that if she had complained of any pain, Avadhūtajī would have given up eating vegetables, telling to himself that "Just for me to eat vegetables my mother has to take so much trouble and even run the risk of getting burns on her body;

it is better that I stopped taking vegetables rather than giving so much trouble to my mother.”

Such was the bond of love and affection between the mother and her son.

Many a times Avadhūtajī would get lost in deep thought while taking his meal and his mother would often reproach him. Even if he left a small piece of Pāpaḍa in his dish she would ask, “Is this small piece going to be too much for you? This is a labour of love for you and you don’t care to eat it”. Avadhūtajī then said, “Māji don’t you see that I eat with great effort?”

45. WIT AND HUMOUR OF AVADHŪTAJĪ

Although Avadhūtajī was a person of serious nature, he had a good sense of humour and wit. He would casually say: “ People may perhaps forget everything else about me but they can never forget my humour”. He always remained in a happy and cheerful mood and advised his followers to remain so. Be in a pleasant and cheerful mood always (Lit- Now laugh and laugh aloud). Why do you look unhappy? (Lit- Why are you crying thus o! dear) In this psalm he emphasised more on joy than unhappiness. It is because laughter makes a true home; it unites all, but no body bothers about a crying or unhappy person.”

There is a popular Sanskrit verse:

अखंड मंगलाकारं व्याप्तं येन चराचरम् ।

तत्पदं दर्शितं येन तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

Akhaṇḍa- Maṇḍalākāraṁ Vyāptaṁ Yena Carācaram |
Tatpadaṁ Darśitaṁ Yena Tasmai Śrī Gurave Namah ||

With completely round shape, pervading entire heaven, by whom are shown the feet of Him, bow to that great Master!

In a light-hearted vein he interpreted the verse, saying: “I bow down my head to the Master whose figure is roly-polly; round as a sweet-ball and who is expanded in all directions; to who has pointed to a sweet-ball and helped me taste it.”

How do you identify a sādhu or an ascetic? Avadhūtajī put it humorously, “Long tresses of hair, clippers, jugs, sticks and loin-cloth!” He explained the meaning of a loin-cloth to the pilgrims: “Loin-cloth of greed, rag of temptation, deception of world and then renunciation of world”.

Once a devotee who recited “Dattabāvanī” everyday said to him: “Revered one! you promised that one who recites this divine hymn daily will have exceptional success and prosperity in life; I tried but all in vain. In spite of repeated readings there was no fulfilment in my life.” Avadhūtajī said, “Sir, you misunderstood the lines. I meant by ‘Siddhi’ the wife becomes an obedient servant”. The people who heard this laughed heartily. But the husband said, “Yes, sir; nowadays my wife has become obedient Dāsī.”

46. DOG 'BUCHIO' AS A DEVOTEE

After Avadhūtajī came to stay at Nāreśvara a dog with one ear, happened to go there and made its home near by. People called the dog "Buchio".

The peculiarity of this dog was that everyday he went to the river for a bath and after bath he went to Avadhūtajī as a token of worship. He never licked the dishes that were left out after serving. He ate only that food which was served to him by people. On Thursdays he observed a fast and did not eat at all, even though food was offered to him.

He guarded the area. He would bark at night-time if someone trespassed and stopped barking only after the inmates had recognised the visitor.

Every evening, at the time of train-arrival, he went to Mālod station. If someone was coming to Nāreśvara shrine he directed the visitor by walking ahead of him.

He died on the 13th day of Mārgaśīrṣa vada. Since then, loaves of bread are given to dogs in Nāreśvara on that day. A memorial is installed where he was buried. He was loved by people of the area.

You hear of some people treating "Buchio" as God to protect themselves if bitten by another dog.

47. NEEM TREE- A TREE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

While in Nāreśvara Avadhūtajī many a times sat under a neem tree and discussed philosophy and related subjects with devotees. Left alone, he would sit under the tree, absorbed in deep meditation.

Even now you can see this neem tree bent low on to the ground. Other trees and neem trees around stand tall and high whereas the branches of this neem tree touch the ground. Its branches, propped up high with poles, are kept skyward; its leaves have turned sweet and have transformed their bitterness. A neem tree is bitter but a poet has sung:

Śṛtaṁ Hi Nāreśvara-Raṅga-Saṅgān |
Nimbo'pi Mādhuryamupāgato'sti ||

In the company of Nāreśvara's Master, it is so said, even a neem tree has turned sweet.

This neem tree at Nāreśvara is revered and protected as the Budha's tree of enlightenment. There you can see a beautiful photograph of Avadhūtajī seated on a small pedestal.

48. NON-ATTACHED AVADHŪTA

Though Avadhūtājī was a moving spirit behind the growth of Nāreśvara as a place teeming with life, he always opposed the idea of naming anything after him. The new place that was meant for his personal residence and meditation was not to carry a line in the resolution of the trust. "For the use of Avadhūtājī". He resisted the proposal successfully. He never visited even the new constructions. If by chance, he had to visit any new building, he would take a bath with all his clothes on: this was an act of cleansing for him. He didn't permit either his devotees or other visitors to keep at his feet flowers, fruits, coconuts in the early days. Afterwards he allowed but these were distributed as a mark of divine grace among the people present over there.

On the occasion of worshipping his Pādukā especially on his birthday celebrations, the offerings were all given away to the needy and deserving people. If they were in excess, they were saved for another such occasion. He did not keep anything for his personal use from these offerings. He needed only two pieces of loin-cloth made of hand-woven coarse cotton fiber and one shawl or a blanket that was also coarse. He didn't accept these coverings from all, but only from his trusted and devoted followers who gave him without much ado. He wouldn't refuse offerings from anyone

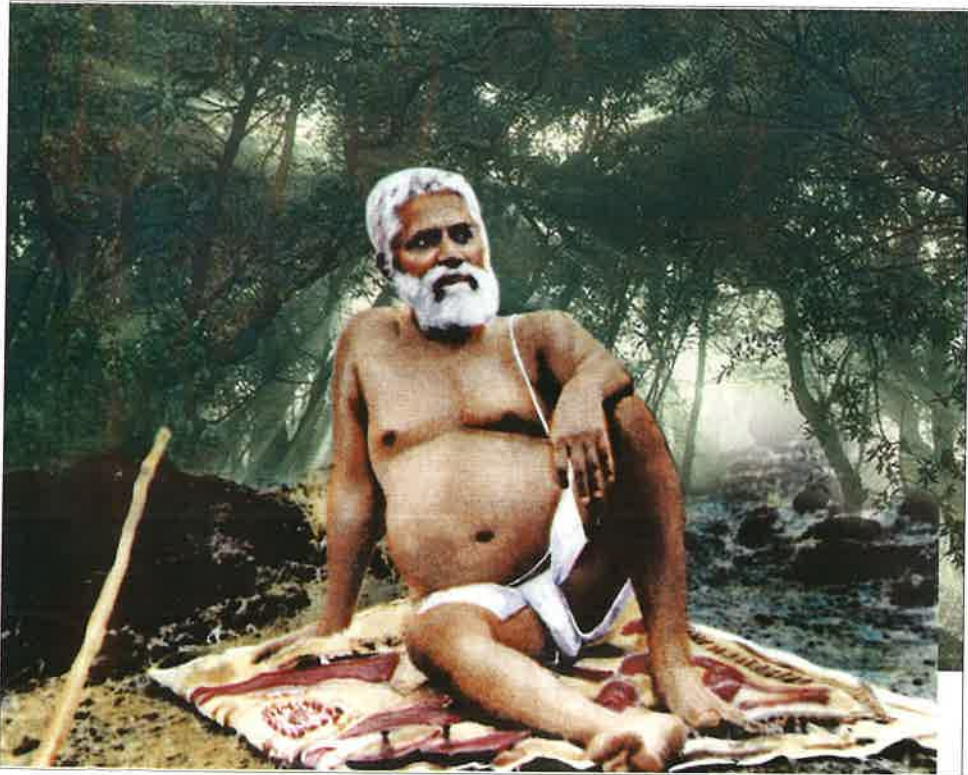
but never used any of it personally. He would fast if money was placed before him or kept near his feet: this happened in early days of his stay but people came to know about Avadhūtaji's vows and stopped offering money in cash or kind.

However an illiterate, rustic devotee, in the very early period of his settlement, put a four anna coin (Twenty five paise or one fourth of a Rupee) at his feet. That was the only wages he could make for a day. Two-three persons attending on Avadhūtaji reprimanded the poor villager. But Avadhūtaji said, "My dear fellows, it is a mark of Indian culture that you don't go to bow down to a saint with empty hands. True to our tradition he has offered his entire day's earnings to me with total devotion and reverence. Try to understand that depth of love. What does it matter if he didn't know my vow? I shall not eat anything today; there's no reason for you to raise hue and cry about it or yell at him".

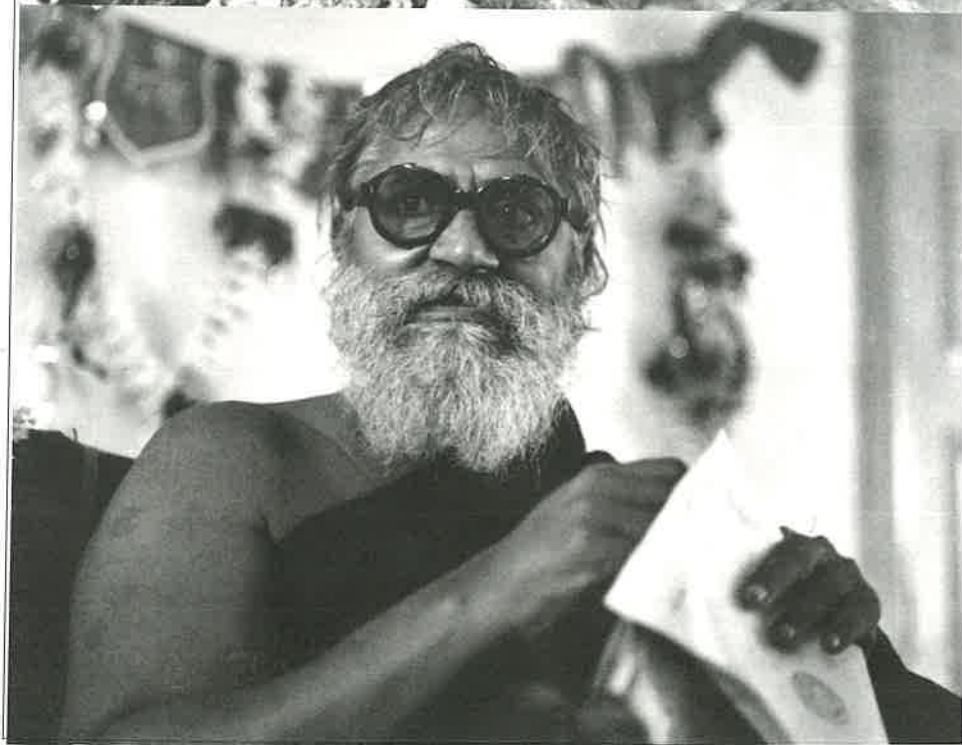
That peasant also decided to fast as the saint had proposed to do so on account of his ignorance. But Avadhūtaji told him, "My dear fellow! I am going to fast as it is my vow. You needn't. I ask you to go and eat". However, the peasant remained seated there. Then Avadhūtaji said, "I shall make an exception to my rule today; I shall eat something today. You go and eat."

A similar incident occurred in Africa. It has come to our notice that he had fasted for two days for the lapse of his attendants.

The revered-one also forbade offerings at his feet in the early period of his settlement. Once he had stopped at a near-by hamlet named Kahoṇā. There lived a devotee. His practice was to feed fishes with coconut pieces. So he stored many coconuts and offered one to Avadhūtajī when he visited him. Because of his love it was accepted; this encouraged other devotees to follow the example; There after, fruits, sweets and other offerings started pouring in.







49. HERMITAGE-SYMBOL OF VEDIC TRADITION

One Brahmin named Prabhashankar, a native of Minḍhoḷa, was an attendant in the service of Avadhūtajī. He daily recited the Gāyatrī Mantra, many hymns and psalms, and cooked food for Avadhūtajī. He was always ready to serve wherever he could.

One day he proposed to Avadhūtajī, "If a saint like you permits worship of your Pādukā here or else where, a Brahmin can earn a little and be in touch with ancient scriptures. He could sustain his interests in Vedic verses". This suggestion appealed to Avadhūtajī. He thought he should allow the worship of his Pādukā if this could preserve the ancient vedic tradition; he would serve a noble cause.

Thus started the practice of worshipping his Pādukā. Many learned Brahmins began to participate in this mode of worship. The ancient vedas were revived at this centre in his presence.

The culture of sacrifice* is an important component of the ancient vedic culture. Many sacrifices were performed in his presence at Nāreśvara; Many experts from Gujarat and Maharastra well-versed in vedic rites, performed sacrifices in honour of vedic deities. The discipline of the priests and ritualists of Nāreśvara began to be appreciated and admired. Because the sacrifices

* Sacrifice = Offerings to a holy fire for invoking and propitiation of a deity in vedic style while chanting verses and spells (Mantra).

were performed in true form and spirit, reward accrued soon. This spread the culture of sacrifices in other areas; and especially among his followers.

On the occasion of his 60th birthday the readings of the vedic texts of all the four vedas by the specialists were conducted; huts were constructed near by the cell of his abode.

Even after this, many vedic sacrifices such as “Swāhākāra” and Śrauta Sacrifice were arranged. On one such occasion Śaṅkarācārya of Dwārakāpīṭha Śrī Abhinava Śaccidānandjī was present there with his Chandra Maulīśvara. Both Avadhūtājī and Ācārya had close relation and they had high regard for each other.

50. A SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

Avadhūtājī was keen to purify and perfect the procedures of performing the ancient vedic tradition of sacrifice. He wanted to make it a true deed of righteousness and wanted to restore it to its lost import and truth.

There is an incident of his life, which can be regarded as responsible for his interest in reviving sacrifices.

Once when he was a young student there was Viṣṇuyāga, a sacrifice dedicated to God Viṣṇu at Godharā and Avadhūta’s maternal uncle was selected as one of the brahmins to perform it. As the uncle had to go out of town and he couldn’t avoid it, he asked his nephew

to represent him at the sacrifice. Avadhūta agreed. An old Brahmin told him that he couldn't stand the smoke of the holy fire, so he would recite the text, and asked Avadhūta if he could sit at the altar of fire.

Avadhūtajī agreed but another brahmin told him that he was deceived by that old man. "A reader of the text gets more money than a priest who offers sacrifices to fire". Avadhūtajī said to himself, "What meanness and cunning for money!" Then he heard a few young muslims passing by the tent and talking between themselves: "Look at these Hindu robbers. When the host is present, the priests pretend to recite the text and in his absence they are busy chit chatting, gossiping and enjoying their snuff."

Avadhūtajī was hurt by this insult to the Hindus as "robbers" and he made up his mind to revive sacrifices and encourage the right performances with honesty and sincerity by the priests.

51. AVADHŪTAJĪ- HIS RELATIONS WITH REPUTED PERSONS

Worship of Lord Dattātreya implies an ideal of harmony and concord among various religious faiths. There is no opposition to any religious sect or denomination; it teaches discrimination, to learn and choose the best out of all religious faiths. This is at the heart of Lord Dattātreya's choice of twenty four gurus. This ideal was well understood and successfully translated in to practice by Avadhūtajī.

He maintained friendly relations with several political and social workers. Right from the very beginning, he was on good terms with Swāmi Anand, then with Śrī Vāman Mukādama, and with honorable Nandāji and Śrī Chandrashankar Shukla. There were certainly disagreement of views; they parted but there was no disunion of hearts.

His relationship with Kākāsāheba Kālelkara forever remained close to both their hearts. Even after the nirvāṇa of Avadhūtajī, Kākāsāheba, at a seminar in Gandhinagar spoke very warmly and respectfully about his former brilliant student. The words in which Kākāsāheba praised Avadhūtajī came out deep down from heart and not as a merely a formality.

He maintained good relations with all the distinguished thinkers, the well read persons and orators conducting religious discourses (Kathākārs), story-tellers (Paurānikas), public speakers, who were famous or less known in Gujarat. He was intimate with Ācārya Vinobāji from his early years.

His relations with Pūjya Śrī Moṭā of Nadiad were very rich. Both of them had joined the Indian freedom movement in response to Gandhiji's call. Afterwards, their relationship was more spiritual. They met quite often and exchanged their views on religious matters.

Once Avadhūtajī stayed with Śrī Santarāma Mahārāja the religious head of the famous temple in Nadiad. Even

the present head of the Santarāma Temple holds very high regards for Avadhūtaji. Śrī Shantilal Thakar, a well known orator of Nadiad, delivered discourses on the great work, 'Gurulāmṛta.' Avadhūtaji also held Śrī Thakar in high esteem and respected his views.

His relationship with Śrī Kṛṣṇaśaṅkara Śāstri*, founder of Bhāgavat Vidyāpīṭha at Śolā in Gujarat and a renowned eminent scholar of Bhāgavata, developed to such an extent that Avadhūta attended the foundation stone laying ceremony with his devoted disciples and delivered an extraordinary address. Śāstriji, even after Niravāṇa of Avadhūtaji kept close contacts, with Avadhūta Parivāra, the followers of Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta.

Basically from Nadiad but on the bank of the river Sarasvatī, staying in water and performing religious rites of continuous chanting of 'Gayatrī Mantra' at the Arvadeśvara Temple Enlightened Saint Śrī Devshankar Bapa had so very close relationship with Śrī Avadhūtaji that even today followers of both the Saints are in close contact with one another.

Śrī Abhinava Saccidānandaji, Śaṅkarācārya of Dwārakāpīṭha and Avadhūtaji had built up true friendship due to their simplicity, sincerity and openness of hearts. Śaṅkarācārya always cherished the great honour accorded to him by Avadhūtaji when he visited Nāreśvara for the first time. In response to his respect Śaṅkarācāryaji enhanced the friendship with Avadhūta Parivāra by attending the Vedic Swāhākāra sacrifice at Nāreśvara.

* Left the body in the year 2002.

Raviśaṅkara Mahārāja of Gujarat also had many discussions with Śrī Avadhūtaji. Raviśaṅkaradādā listened to 'Gurulīlāmṛta' in the last days of his life.

Avadhūtaji went to Surat and Pādarā and personally attended the religious discourses of the saint and great narrator Dongareji on Bhāgawata Purāṇa. In reciprocation, Dongareji went to Nāreśvara and delivered a memorial lecture at the time of Avadhūtaji's nirvāṇa in Nov. 1968.

He had also met a great scholar of Sanskrit, Sātavaḷekarji. On his own he paid a visit to his residence at Atul village near Bulsar in South Gujarat. It was a memorable encounter of a great a saint with a scholar.

A great scholar of Ṛgveda, Śrī Yedurkar Śāstrī, also visited Nāreśvara. He had learnt the entire Ṛgveda by heart. He could recite its verses backwards to the start. Not only that, but he could even combine verses of the Ṛgveda with those of the Gītā and ViṣṇuSahasraNāma. He went to inaugurate "Raṅga Mandir" at Nāreśvara after Avadhūtaji's nirvāṇa. "Avadhūtaji also had a great spiritual relationship with an exponent and propagater of kuṇḍalini (to awaken the serpent-power) Wāmana Gulavaṇī Mahārāja, who was also a disciple of Avadhūtaji's own Master - Tembe Swāmī. He came to Nāreśvara on the occasion of the installation of Avadhūtaji's idol in Raṅga-Mandir.

He was also intimate with Swāmī Muktaṅnandaji the Saint of Vajreśvari. Nityānanda Avadhūtaji, the Guru of

Swāmī Mukṭānandajī, once told his followers that his other-self could be seen at Nāreśvara. Remembering this, Mukṭānandajī visited Nāreśvara to attend the last rites of Avadhūtajī and witness the installation of his idol.

The famous singers, Master Vasant and Dost Mohammed, gave several performances in the presence of Śrī Avadhūtajī with great devotion.

52. AVADHŪTAJĪ- FRIEND OF THE POOR

Avadhūtajī could not see anyone suffer. It would be appropriate to say that he distributed clothes and food with the liberality of a prodigal.

Once a devotee, who looked like a farmer offered a prostrate bow to Śrī Avadhūtajī. The moment the poor peasant bent down to touch his feet, Avadhūtajī noticed that his jacket was almost torn and tattered on its backside. He at once covered the poor man's back with the shawl he had on him.

On another occasion he helped a poor devotee get clothes from other devotees.

He gave clothes and ornaments to the daughter of his mother's attendant Narasī and got her married.

In 1965 a huge surgical camp was organised at his hermitage and nearly 601 operations, major and minor, were performed by the doctors, all free of charge. Avadhūtajī would personally visit all the patients and inquire about the condition of each patient. He helped them get whatever they needed. Modern amenities were

provided to the doctors. He himself kept an eye over the breakfast, lunch and dinner served to the doctors and the nursing staff. The ideal 'Service of Humanity is the service of God' was put in practice. Since then, many such surgical camps, eye-operations and other camps were organised at Nāreśvara free of charge under his inspiration. Now, there is a big hospital at Nāreśvara. A camp for rifle shooting was also arranged at Nāreśvara in the presence of Śrī Avadhūtajī.

53. AVADHŪTAJĪ- HIS PRACTICAL SENSE

Avadhūtajī's ideals and ideas were even too high for heavenly stars. He was ever lost in the intoxication of meditation. His union with God was constant.

However, his practical resourcefulness was a striking trait of his character. One of his birthdays was celebrated at Garabādā in Pañcamahāls (Gujarat). The host was a Brahmin. He made his stay there short, so that the host didn't have to spend more money. He even arranged for free distribution of maize among the aborigins through some other devotee.

Once he was staying at a temple of Hanumāna in Vaṅakhuṅṭā. On Saturday, the devotees, there recited the text of Hanumāna Cālīsā and poured oil on the deity's idol. Avadhūtajī advised the devotees not to waste hundreds of litres of oil collected for anointing the deity's idol but distribute it among the aborigins who

could use it for cooking the food in their homes. What a social touch to a misguided religious practice!

After his birthday celebration at Pādarā, he went to Hāmfeśvara. There, Śrī Maganlal Pandya attended upon him.

A devotee from a near by place daily delivered milk at Avadhūtajī's camp. Avadhūtajī accepted some of it and what remained of it was used by Śrī Maganlal and others.

The town of that devotee was affected by evil spirits. Avadhūtajī asked him to bring four wooden nails(chips) and asked Maganlal to blow air over those nails through his mouth. Maganlal said to Avadhūtajī, "Revered one, how will my blowing air help this?" "You can drink their milk; but can't you blow air over the nails for them?" he asked. Maganlal blew over them. Then Avadhūtajī asked the devotee to dig these nails into four corners of the village and the trouble caused by the evil spirit disappeared. By making Maganlal blow air over the nails Avadhūtajī relieved him of the obligation for drinking the milk provided by that town. One has to be practical and take care of one's social obligations and responsibilities.

A muslim gentleman, Hasanacācā, from a near by village Mālod couldn't find his lost money. He came to Nāreśvara in a depressed mood seeking Avadhūtajī's help. Avadhūtajī casually remarked that the villagers sometime kept money under their beds and forgot it. Hasancācā suddenly recollected and found his lost money.

Avadhūtajī's commonsense was of the highest order. He would casually say that when you go out of your home to buy or get something, ask your family if they need something; otherwise after returning home you may have to go again to get what the family wants.

He taught practical lessons of worldly life to his devotees.

54. TRUE TO WORD-AVADHŪTAJĪ'S GRACE

The main rest house at Nāreśvara was under construction and it was the first building being erected. People were excited about it. Gaṅgā, a young girl and the daughter of a fisherman in the near by village was extending her helping hand to the volunteers engaged in the construction work.

All workers were given a meal by Nāreśvara management. They also accepted wages. But Gaṅgā brought her own food with her and never accepted any wages.

She thought to herself, "What would be my contribution if I accepted wages? Others donate wealth while I can only donate some manual labour. How can I take money for my labour and how can I accept a free meal?"

When the construction was over Avadhūtajī himself distributed sarees and dhoties among the workers, but Gaṅgā didn't join them and refused to accept anything even at Avadhūtajī's hand.

Upon too much insistence from Avadhūtajī and the other devotees, she expressed her desire that Avadhūtajī pay a visit to her home.

Avadhūtajī told her, “This is not your true home. When you have your own home. i.e. get married, I shall visit you”.

After many years, Avadhūtajī did pay a visit to her family even without any invitation and kept his word. Gaṅgā was blessed by Divine grace and she lived happily thereafter.

55. REMEMBERING OBLIGATIONS

Avadhūtajī never accepted any financial obligation but if anybody had done anything for him he would never forget that obligation and would do everything for that person to more than reciprocate his obligation.

He always called Hargovindadas Soni who suggested Nāreśvara for his settlement, respectfully as “Dāsakākā” and gave him all assistance in his weal and woe.

Once Avadhūtajī was resting under a neem tree and there was a long queue of devotees waiting to have glimpse and offer a prostrate bow. A devotee was waiting in the queue for his turn with a garland and when he had his turn to see Avadhūtajī he said to him. “Revered one, do you recognise me?” Avadhūtajī raised his eyes and said, “I am not such an ungrateful person as would not recognise the person, who 15 years ago, came with bare feet to offer me a loaf of bread continuously for 15 days.”

The devotee was from Māṇḍavī, a small town near Surat. Avadhūtājī was camping at a temple of Lord Śiva. He was not so well-known over there but respected as a Saint. This devotee brought bread made with milk daily while coming from home to the temple without any footwear. He remembered that obligation, 15 years later.

56. AVADHŪTĪ HEALING

Avadhūtājī couldn't stand anyone's suffering, physical or mental. He advised cures and medications to his devotees, in his own Avadhūtī style.

A person suffering from cancer sought Avadhūtājī's grace to cure his incurable disease. Avadhūtājī asked him to cover the cancerous growth on his neck with the clay that was used in the daily worship of Lord Śiva during the month of Śrāvaṇa and later discarded into the river. He was cured.

After being fully cured he wanted to settle in Nāreśvara but Avadhūtājī told him to go back, earn some money to pay off the debt he had incurred during his illness and then think of settling somewhere.

Avadhūtājī didn't like anyone shirking his duties and responsibilities. If a person in service rushed to Nāreśvara without leave or on a working day, Avadhūtājī prevented him from doing so. He asked him to go back and attend to his duty first.

Whether he advised medicine or a spiritual discipline it was typically 'Avadhūtī.' It was patent medicine!

It might cure one person but not others. Perhaps it might even aggravate the other's illness.

Once Avadhūtājī asked a woman to move a stack of hay over the sick person's head and offer it to a donkey. His mother asked him, why did he think of a donkey and not a cow or a buffalo or some other animal? He said why, is donkey not an animal? Is there God not hidden in it?

Just as he was an inspired physician, not text-bound, so was he also an inspired spiritual educator.

Once, some girl students of Rosary School Vadodara in Gujarat visited his Āśrama. A number of visitors were sitting around him and the girls asked his permission to ask a question. He gave his consent but one of the girls said "But Bāpājī, we are Non-believers (in the existence of God) - Atheists."

Avadhūtājī replied: "It means that you have an implied belief in something. You believe that there is no God, which means you believe in his non-existence. Don't you? Now ask me whatever you like." The girls were all pleased and left the place enriched.

57. LOVE FOR YOUNG STUDENTS

Avadhūtājī had very deep love for students and children. Very often he used to say: "If you want to keep me in good health, leave me in the company of children. No elders should come near me. Then see how much my health improves." That is why in the midst of

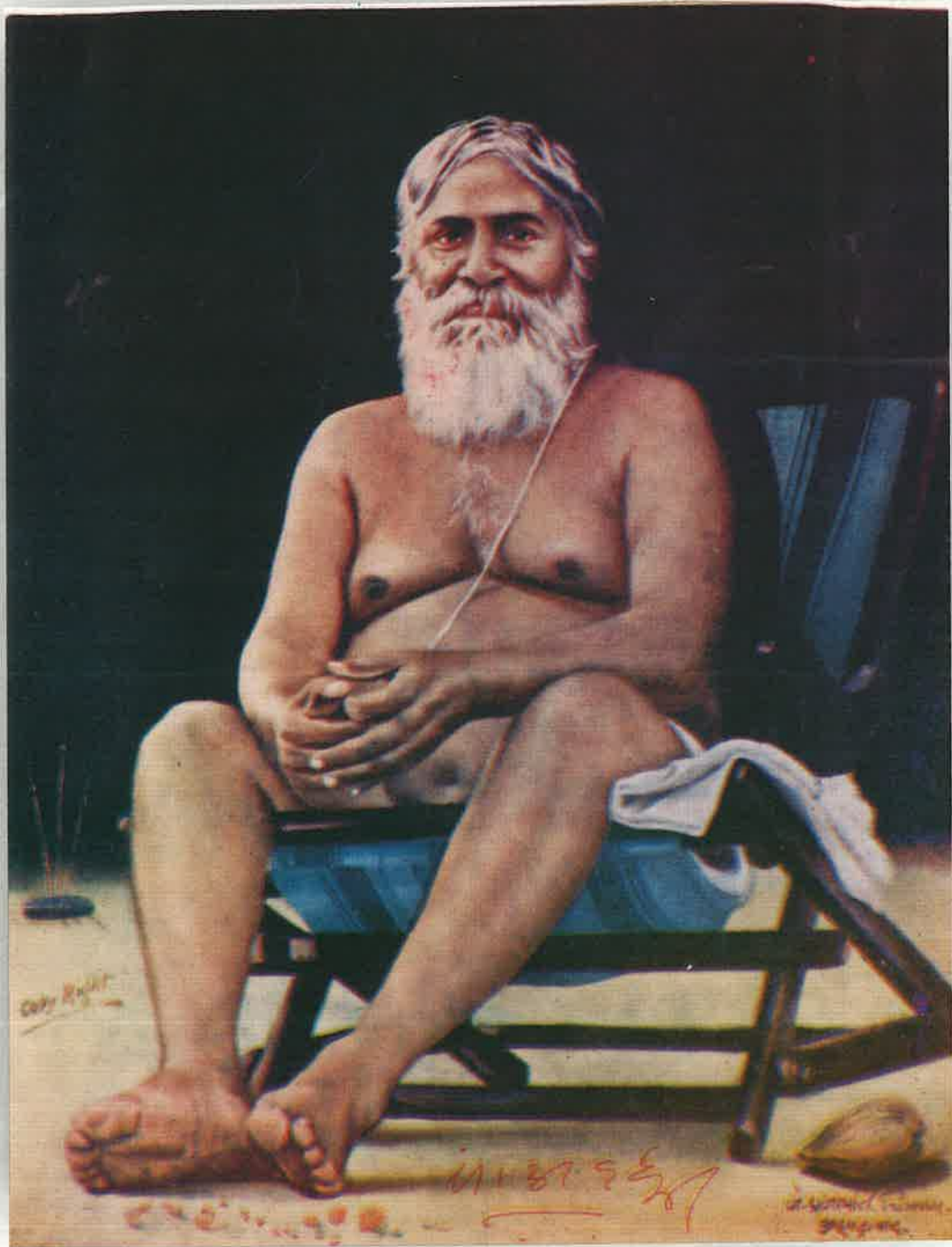
children he behaved like a child. He was always willing to address students without any hesitation.

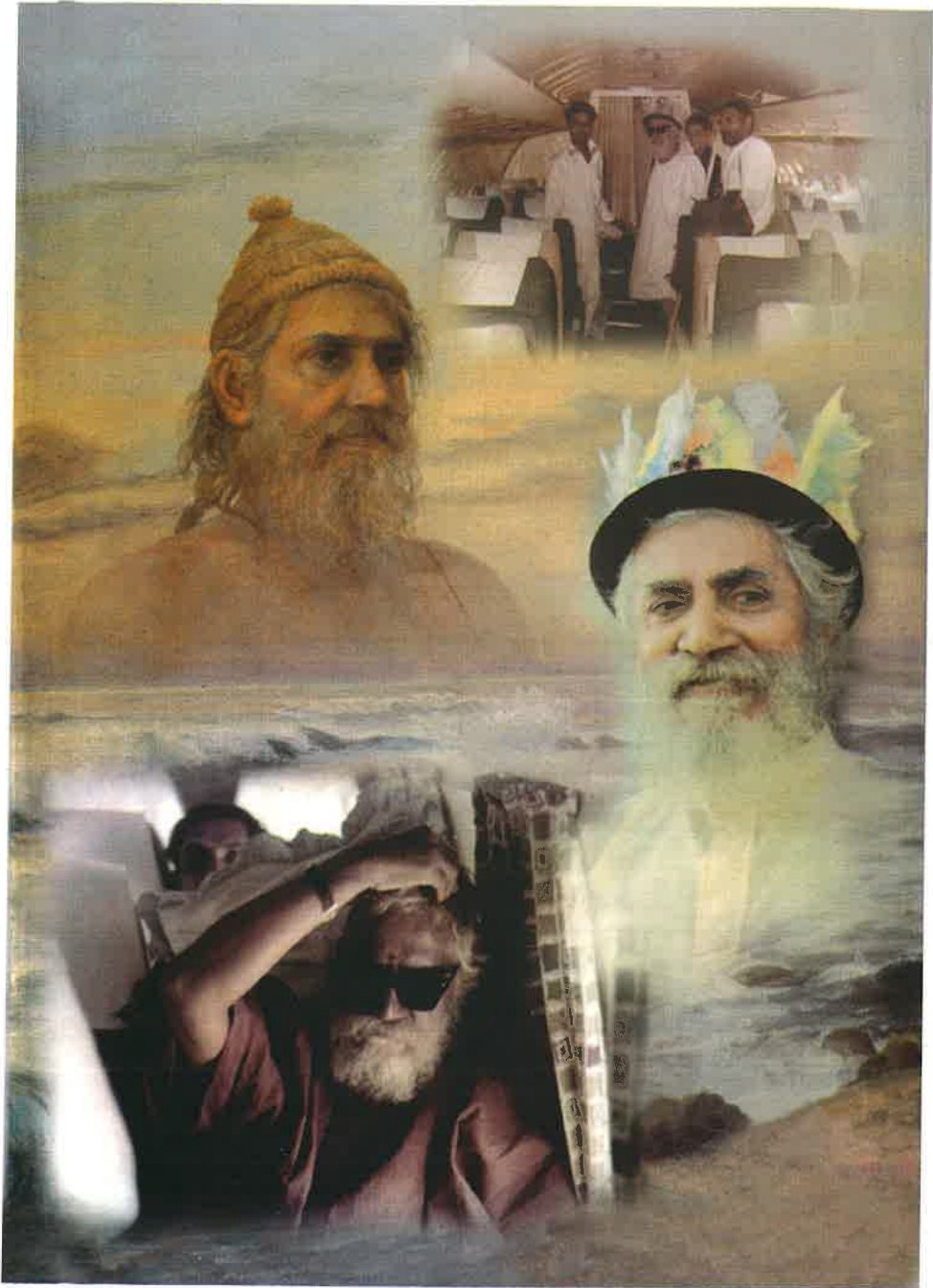
During his visit to Africa he encouraged children to sing his psalm “Evo Di Dekhāḍa” “Oh Dear! Show me such a day... Let there dawn such a day when I can witness your form all around! It was composed by him.

He expressed his educational philosophy at several institutions. In the Dākora educational institute, at the inauguration of the new building of the school at Valia and at the opening of a new S.S.C. class in the Navadurgā High School in Umallā.

He always reminded people that young students are the future makers of India. A young student is like God, he said often; so he gave a new aphorism, “Invoke the Divine unto the taught” (Cātra Devo Bhava). He desired that a college should be a centre of discipline, culture and restraint, co-operation, synthesis, concord and toleration. It should be a stream of new inspiration. He had faith and he inspired that kind of faith in others to work hard for good education that ensures well-being and prosperity in coming years.

He said that God has given “body, mind and intellect to a human being as means for his own development. These three should develop together to germinate true humanity and the society can breathe in peace. Schools and colleges can thus heavily contribute towards this goal.





58. VISIT TO AFRICA

After his mother relinquished her physical body there were circumstances that would, to a certain extent, permit Avadhūtājī to go to places a little more freely. Years ago he had promised to Śrī Maṇibhāī Patel, owner of Globe Cinema theatre in Nadiāda to visit Africa. Śrī Maṇibhāī died but his wife Kāśīben reminded him of his promise to her family and invited him to visit Africa. Her invitation was accepted and Avadhūtājī went to Africa.

Here, the birthday of Lord Dattātreya was celebrated. Avadhūtājī also sang psalms and choruses. A representative of Zambia Times who attended the celebration was very much impressed and said that he thought a Hindu Priest or preacher was visiting the place but now felt, he had seen a prophet. A European gentleman was so much moved that tears welled up in his eyes during his talks with Avadhūtājī.

An African lady was planning to visit India all by herself but she was nervous and afraid. Avadhūtājī gave her a photograph and said, “you are not alone; God is with you. You may not have seen God but I have. I am with you.” She was now fearless.

In Africa he left a lasting impression and proved wrong that Saints from India visit Africa to collect money and gifts. Saints and ascetics like Avadhūtājī go there to offer something to them, not to collect anything from them.

Some people in Africa had very good experiences. Avadhūtājī received praise in the African press; certificates of honour were awarded to him. One Englishman saw St. Paul in Avadhūtājī. Another one was so much impressed that he requested Avadhūtājī to touch his handkerchief so that his own kith and kin at home could experience his holiness and Divine Grace by the touch of that handkerchief.

He distributed shoes amongst the native Africans. When he visited the famous Victoria Falls he was reminded of the descent of the Ganges from Lord Śiva's matted hair on his head and he composed a hymn in Sanskrit.

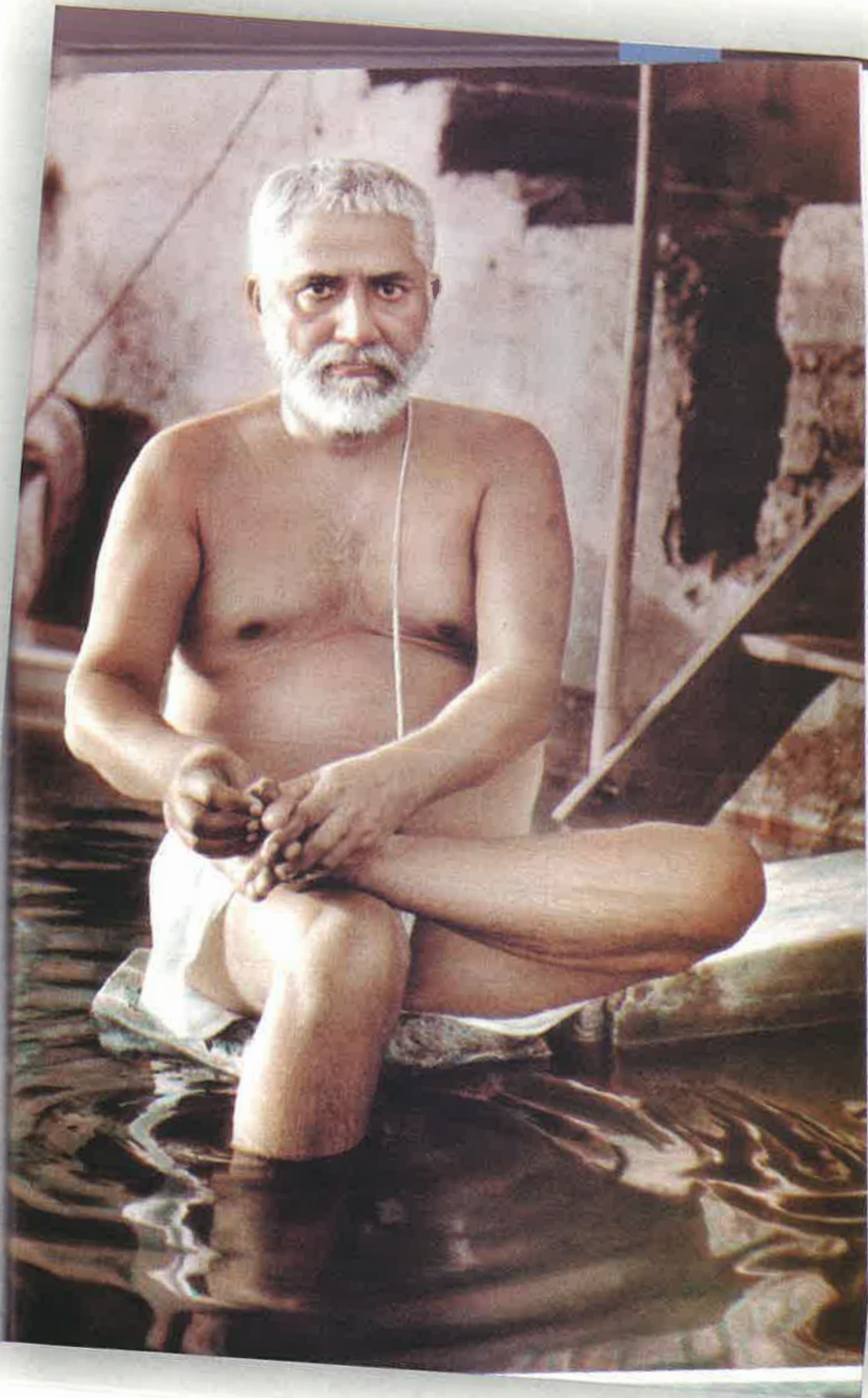
He made a short speech to students there :

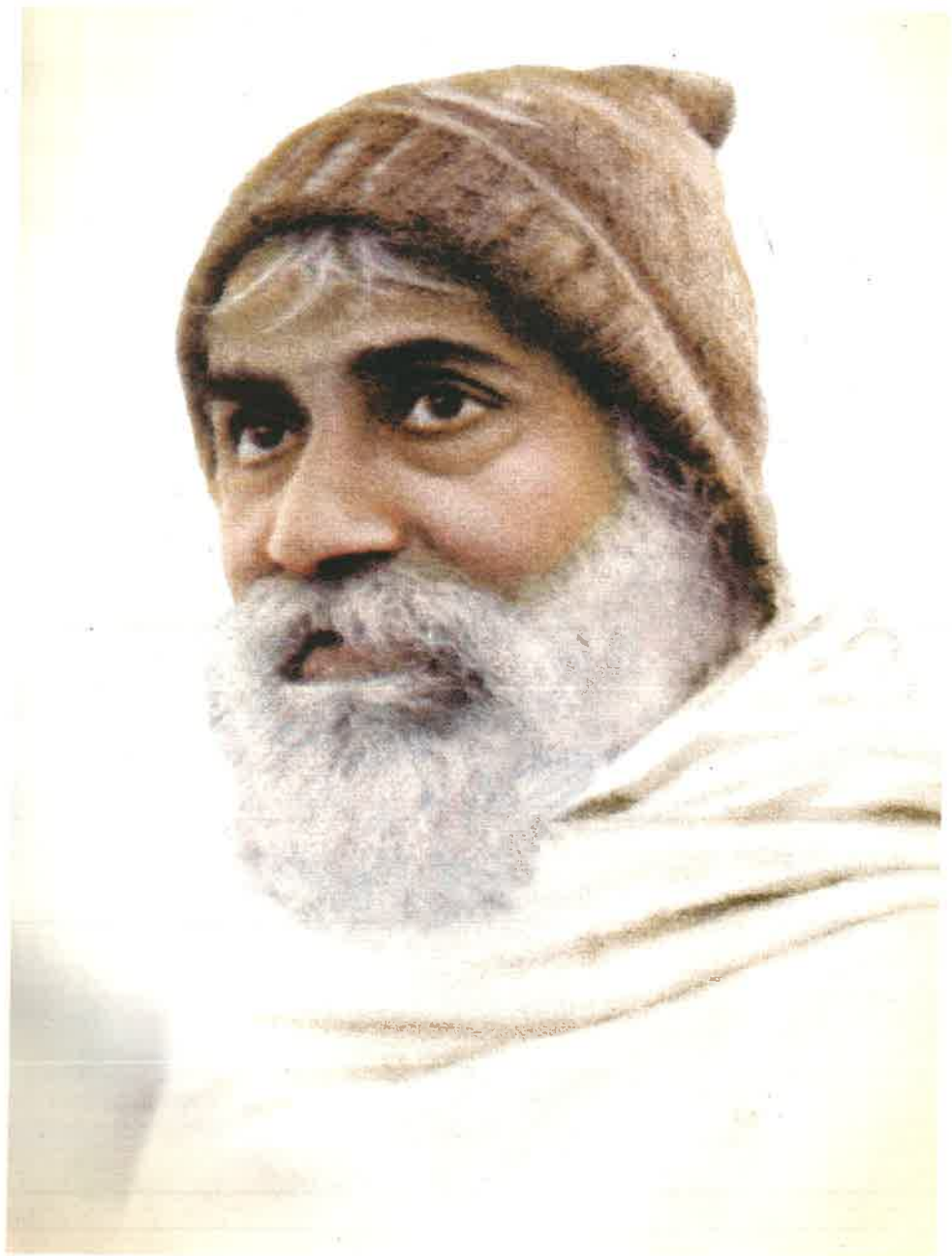
“If you have not acquired knowledge in the first phase of life, nor earned wealth in the second phase and not cultivated righteousness in the third one, what can be done with the fourth?” He explained the meaning of the sanskrit axiom and advised them to study well.

‘Oh, Dear! Please show me such a day... Let there dawn such a day when I could witness your form all around! Please show me such a day.’ Avadhūtājī made the students sing this devotional song, composed by him.

After that he shut his eyes and asked the students to observe silence and sit quietly for a few minutes.

On his return from his visit to five African states he said simply, “I have returned from Africa beating the drum for my spiritual Master over there.”





59. IN VALLABHA-VIDHYĀNAGARA

In 1968 Avadhūtājī went to Kuñjarāva in the months of July-August and, having spent a month there, proceeded to Vallabha Vidhyānagara. His discussions there with Raviśankara Dādā, Pujya Moṭā, Bhāilālkākā, H. M. Patel, Śāradāben Amin were of a special kind. For Bhāilālkākā, talks about king Bhartṛhari were a must. So Avadhūtājī's discussion with him on the subject lasted for about an hour.

Then talking to Pūjyaśrī Moṭā, he said "My dear Moṭā, I'm leaving (this world i.e. my physical body) first and shall make room for you; then, you come up over there".

In Vadodara he delivered a very thought provoking and unique address in Sanskrit to a gathering of scholars and after that he destroyed the manuscript of the speech. Then at the insistence of Śrī Maniśankar Śāstrī and other scholars and devotees, he dictated the speech once again, absolutely identical to the one he had delivered earlier, without change of even a word. The scholars were wonder struck at his brilliance of mind. What a fantastic photographic memory!

From there he went to Bākarola, Gopālapurā and to several places, where a noteworthy incident occurred. An old lady went to pay her homage with folded hands but as her sight was too weak, she couldn't get near Avadhūtājī. She said, "Oh, Revered one! where are you?"

Avadhūtajī guided her and she could go near him with the help of others. She could then have a glimpse of him.

Avadhūtajī suddenly spoke out, “My mother was like this” and so saying his voice was choked with suffocation. The loving memory of his mother, for a moment swayed over his emotions. But very soon he was once again calm and composed.

The poet Umiyāśaṅkara Ṭhākar who was dedicated to Gāyatrī went to pay respects to Avadhūtajī and Avadhūtajī gave him a message about Gāyatrī mantra as a token of remembrance. Only then, did it come to light that Avadhūtajī had also continuously chanted Gāyatrī Mantra as his religious vow.

Another devotee of Gāyatrī visited him and he was welcomed as professor Avadhūtajī. This was all spontaneously done; he was also reading his (Avadhūta’s) articles in ‘Gāyatrī Vijnāna.’

60. AVADHŪTA : AN ENIGMA

Avadhūtajī was a multi-faceted personality. In the words of Amrutlal Modi, his character was an embodiment of several kinds of moral virtues; he had on his countenance the radiance of Śukadevajī who was an unyielding celibate, force of Paraśurāma’s virility worthy of a Kṣatriya, aura of Vaśiṣṭha’s forgiveness, composure of Viśwāmitra’s blameless austerities, unwavering, unequalled service of Hanumāna who served

Lord Rāma, firm faith in the spiritual guide that reminds you of Sant Jñāneśvara, matchless intellectual depth and sharpness of Śaṅkarācārya's mind, uncompromising devotion of Dhruva, natural instinct for selfless service that could be marked in Lord Kṛṣṇa, profound spiritual understanding and insight of Yājñawalkya, encyclopaedic inclusiveness of varied experiences of Vyas and non-attachment of king Janak whose renunciation was the fruit of his knowledge.

Avadhūta is a riddle- that is as true for his followers as it was for himself. He often remarked that he was a problem to his own self and could not solve it himself. This is very true of his life.

61. IN HARIDVĀRA

Avadhūtājī, after raising the memorial for his mother at Nāreśvara, 'Māṭṛ-smṛti-śaila' paid a visit to several places and reached Kapadavañja where he casually mentioned, "This is our last station! True it turned out to be the last station of his Gujarat travels.

The birth centenary of Hon. "Gāṇḍā Mahārāja" was to be celebrated and the trustees were expected to reach here to extend an invitation to him. They didn't turn up. So a visit to Jaipur was fixed with the son of Shantilal Pandya.

A programme to visit Haridvāra was also worked out. He spent "Lābha Pañcamī" the fifth day of Diwali in Kapadvanj, then went to Jaipur and there the

7^{1st} birthday of Raṅga Avadhūtaji was celebrated with joy and fervour. In his last discourse he blessed the entire gathering of his devotees and followers. He told people to practise repeated recitals of God's names and practice moral discipline; this was a key to get freedom from the cycle of birth and death. This would flood their lives with bliss. They should spend sometime in selfless service. He also asked them to perform good deeds for God's grace and experience true joy in life."

Then he proceeded to Haridvāra. Someone just asked, "Revered one! when are you coming back?" He said, "Do you know of anyone coming back from the doors of The Lord Almighty? And truly he did not return from there! He uttered "Aum" three times and breathed his last on the last day, the darkest one, of Kārtik in V.S.2025. He left his physical body and his soul merged with the Eternal one.

His soulless, physical body was brought by air to Ahmedabad and from Ahmedabad carried to Nāreśvara by a decorated truck.

Thousands of people paid their last homage to this great saint with tearful eyes. Almost all the local news papers carried head line articles in admiration of the life of this departed soul.

His mortal remains were cremated and consigned to flames at the spot where a shrine today stands tall called the Raṅga Mandīra. He passed away on the 19th November 1968 and was cremated on 21st Nov.1968, at

midnight. As luck would have it, that happened to be his birthday.

There is a psalm written by Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtaji that can be taken to sum up his own life and vision. Such a song in English literature is known as a SWAN-SONG.

62. SWAN SONG

When this body returns to dust,
 to dust it returns,
 There'll be a time to ask: who was really he?
 Whence had he arrived and alas, where had now
 disappeared?
 None knew this, yea, why untill this day?
 Neither did he speak much nor was wordless,
 Neither did he travel too far never stayed at one place.
 Whispering, whispering, where has he vanished?
 Darkness, thick and wide, now covers the sky,
 It spreads here, there, everywhere, stopping nowhere.
 There was brightness just for a moment!!
 He healed wounds of human hearts, not too many though,
 And washed tears from human eyes, true!!
 And spoke a few words of love and solace, unheard
 indeed!!
 He sported with roses and made them blush!
 And the nightingales wailed and wailed to no end.
 And the wood streams leapt not too high
 And he squandered away the treasure of love.

He who received it danced with joy,
Others lost it and cried and cried!

He consecrated pieces of stones for divinity of Lord
Śaṅkara.

And also turned Śaṅkara into lifeless stones.

Tears of joy- did Raṅga See.

Born with nothing on hand died too with nothing
with him.

Hardly was he here; then what to talk of where is he
gone now?

Raṅga remained the same for ever, without any change,
there and there.

63. MYSTERIOUS EXPERIENCES

(1) Glimpse of God during circumambulation:

In the lives of saints like Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtājī there are many experiences which can not be easily understood with reason. They are generally taken as miracles.

But Avadhūtājī used to say: A true saint never performs or exhibits miracles. The positive pole of faith and dedication conjoins with the negative pole of self-sacrifice and self-control; this generated light you may call it a miracle, if you like.

There have been many such experiences in Avadhūtājī's life and also in the lives of his many followers. One or two of these may be noted.

Raṅga Avadhūtajī was on a circumambulation of Narmadā. One day he lost his way. He continued walking endlessly but could see no end of his path. Who would guide him on the way out? Whom could he ask either? Day was running out and evening was fast approaching.

He was now worried and prayed to God. At that time he ran across, by chance, a person looking like a wood-cutter. He began, “Revered one, it seems you have lost your way! Come along I will show you the way”.

Avadhūtajī followed the stranger for sometime, and when the outskirts of a township were in sight the visage seemed to be moving towards the river. Avadhūtajī reached the town. He looked back- and lo! the visage had vanished!

The wood-cutter had mentioned casually to him that he was going to buy opium. Avadhūtajī stayed three days in that township but no one turned up for buying opium even three days later! Avadhūtajī took it as God’s graciousness-joyous offering-and proceeded further.

(2) TRUE MUSLIM

Rev. Avadhūtajī was going to camp in some small town, the population of which was almost totally Muslim. The host with whom he was staying did not enjoy a good reputation; he was known as an uncivilised person in his town.

A follower of Avadhūtājī cautioned him: “Honourable one your host is a wolf in sheep’s garb.” Avadhūtājī just said, If you do not allow people like us to go to such persons how can they reform?

The people of the town thought that the saint who was visiting a blacksheep must also be a notorious character. So the host was nervous and fearing mischief at the time of the saint’s visit, he had called for body-guards with sticks etc.

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Avadhūtājī said, “Get me some water from the home of a righteous and pious muslim.

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Water was brought to him. He covered the glass of water with his palm on its top and uttered these words: “O God, the sovereign power, O the most benevolent one! Let this woman be cured if I am a true muslim!” Then the water was given to that woman. She drank it, was cured of her ailment and started walking on her own!

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The devotee felt as if he had troubled his Master by inviting him to his place. So he approached a rich landlord to borrow the cooling screens, but who would listen to a poor man like him? His request was turned down and he returned home with sadness.

Avadhūtājī visualised the situation and seeing his devotee unhappy, simply looked at the sky and thick dark clouds started forming over the devotee's house. Shortly there after it started pouring heavily and it rained cats and dogs just over the poor man's house and not any where else in the whole town. It was all cool in the devotee's house and he was extremely happy. His heart was filled with joy. He could not help saying: This is really your miraculous doing. O Raṅga Avadhūta!

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1. A person who has no compassion in heart for the poor is worthless and not welcome here.
2. God has countless names; He alone, the nameless one, holds the universe together.
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8. Refrain from speaking ill of any individual, community, institution or religious sect.
9. Listen to a few things but only the best, but ponder a great deal, discriminate and act accordingly.
10. Knowledge that is not translated into practice is a mere burden, like a treasure buried in the ground.
11. Always act with God in your heart.
12. Past has already slipped out of your hands, forget it.
13. Future is not in your hands; you do not know it, do not have terrible fears and anxieties about future.

14. Enjoy every moment of your life by making full use of the present moment.
15. You expect a reward but do not want to work; how is it possible, my friend.
16. He is a deluded one who wants to reform others without looking at the soles of his feet.
17. He is a great deceiver of God who simply recites God's name but shirks the call of duty ordained by destiny.
18. Give up your dogmatism and fanaticism.
19. Money is essential for building and maintaining social life but its foundation must be ethical.
20. Religion is a corner stone of social reconstruction and salvation serves as its roof.
21. He is indeed a true Hindu who is hurt by low-mindedness. He who avoids mean and disgraceful deeds is a true Hindu.
22. Repeated reciting the name of God is the foundation to happiness.
23. Nāma (not like this na Āma) is a common man's "neti (no, it is not.)" It is a pancea for the burden of human existence.
24. True worship of God is to give solace to suffering hearts, by whatever means.
25. Generally, why do people quarrel among themselves? Intolerance of other people's views.
26. Girdle up your loins for motherland.
27. Sports provide alertness to body, refreshes mind and fills your heart with sportsman spirit. It flows with selfless love and innocence.



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|| PARASPARADEVO BHAVA ||

INVOKE THE DIVINE UNTO ONE ANOTHER

Look at one another with Divine-Eye, Not with devil's look.

Feel the Divine Attribute in Each-one

and

Wishing welfare mutually, bestow welfare all around !

Practise integrity in Thought, Speech and Action.

Bless each-other, Curse not. Wish well, Wicked not.

Do good, Crooked not ! Supporter be, Exploiter not.

Saviour be, Detrimental not.

Helpful be, Harmful not. Speak less, Do more.

Keep head cool, Let there be warmth in hands and feet.

Cultivate tolerance towards everyone, Not hatred !

Speak always Truth, Falsehood never.

Virtuous deeds always do, Wicked never.

Wish welfare everyone's, Not only to ownself !

Look always at own faults, Praise always others' merits.

Earn your bread by self labour always !

On the tongue Eternal Almighty's Name,

With hands noble deeds and

In the heart a resolute courage Hanumanji- like,

Rush forward and forward sure.

Success is yours ! Success yours is !

Vairāṇim Praśamaṁ Yāntu Sauhārdam Vardhatām Mithah |

Kalahā Vilayaṁ Yāntu Bhāvayantu Janā Mithah ||

May enmities be tranquillised, Friendliness be thriven,

Quarrels be dissolved, And Love supreme be prevailed.

Om ! Let Divine Peace Prevail.

Peace Physical ! Peace Mental !! Peace Spiritual !!!

World-Friend,

RANGA AVADHUTA

59. IN VALLABHA-VIDHYĀNAGARA

In 1968 Avadhūtājī went to Kuñjarāva in the months of July-August and, having spent a month there, proceeded to Vallabha Vidhyānagara. His discussions there with Raviśankara Dādā, Puṅya Moṭā, Bhāilālkākā, H. M. Patel, Śāradāben Amin were of a special kind. For Bhāilālkākā, talks about king Bhartṛhari were a must. So Avadhūtājī's discussion with him on the subject lasted for about an hour.

Then talking to Pūjyaśrī Moṭā, he said "My dear Moṭā, I'm leaving (this world i.e. my physical body) first and shall make room for you; then, you come up over there".

In Vadodara he delivered a very thought provoking and unique address in Sanskrit to a gathering of scholars and after that he destroyed the manuscript of the speech. Then at the insistence of Śrī Maniśankar Śāstrī and other scholars and devotees, he dictated the speech once again, absolutely identical to the one he had delivered earlier, without change of even a word. The scholars were wonder struck at his brilliance of mind. What a fantastic photographic memory!

From there he went to Bākarola, Gopālapurā and to several places, where a noteworthy incident occurred. An old lady went to pay her homage with folded hands but as her sight was too weak, she couldn't get near Avadhūtājī. She said, "Oh, Revered one! where are you?"

Avadhūtajī guided her and she could go near him with the help of others. She could then have a glimpse of him.

Avadhūtajī suddenly spoke out, “My mother was like this” and so saying his voice was choked with suffocation. The loving memory of his mother, for a moment swayed over his emotions. But very soon he was once again calm and composed.

The poet Umiyāśaṅkara Ṭhākar who was dedicated to Gāyatrī went to pay respects to Avadhūtajī and Avadhūtajī gave him a message about Gāyatrī mantra as a token of remembrance. Only then, did it come to light that Avadhūtajī had also continuously chanted Gāyatrī Mantra as his religious vow.

Another devotee of Gāyatrī visited him and he was welcomed as professor Avadhūtajī. This was all spontaneously done; he was also reading his (Avadhūta’s) articles in ‘Gāyatrī Vijñāna.’

60. AVADHŪTA : AN ENIGMA

Avadhūtajī was a multi-faceted personality. In the words of Amrutlal Modi, his character was an embodiment of several kinds of moral virtues; he had on his countenance the radiance of Śukadevajī who was an unyielding celibate, force of Paraśurāma’s virility worthy of a Kṣatriya, aura of Vaśiṣṭha’s forgiveness, composure of Viśwāmitra’s blameless austerities, unwavering, unequalled service of Hanumāna who served

Lord Rāma, firm faith in the spiritual guide that reminds you of Sant Jñāneśvara, matchless intellectual depth and sharpness of Śaṅkarācārya's mind, uncompromising devotion of Dhruva, natural instinct for selfless service that could be marked in Lord Kṛṣṇa, profound spiritual understanding and insight of Yājñawalkya, encyclopaedic inclusiveness of varied experiences of Vyas and non-attachment of king Janak whose renunciation was the fruit of his knowledge.

Avadhūta is a riddle- that is as true for his followers as it was for himself. He often remarked that he was a problem to his own self and could not solve it himself. This is very true of his life.

61. IN HARIDVĀRA

Avadhūtaji, after raising the memorial for his mother at Nāreśvara, 'Mātr-smṛti-śaila' paid a visit to several places and reached Kapadavañja where he casually mentioned, "This is our last station! True it turned out to be the last station of his Gujarat travels.

The birth centenary of Hon. "Gāṇḍā Mahārāja" was to be celebrated and the trustees were expected to reach here to extend an invitation to him. They didn't turn up. So a visit to Jaipur was fixed with the son of Shantilal Pandya.

A programme to visit Haridvāra was also worked out. He spent "Lābha Pañcamī" the fifth day of Diwali in Kapadvanj, then went to Jaipur and there the

71st birthday of Raṅga Avadhūtajī was celebrated with joy and fervour. In his last discourse he blessed the entire gathering of his devotees and followers. He told people to practise repeated recitals of God's names and practice moral discipline; this was a key to get freedom from the cycle of birth and death. This would flood their lives with bliss. They should spend sometime in selfless service. He also asked them to perform good deeds for God's grace and experience true joy in life."

Then he proceeded to Haridvāra. Someone just asked, "Revered one! when are you coming back?" He said, "Do you know of anyone coming back from the doors of The Lord Almighty? And truly he did not return from there! He uttered "Aum" three times and breathed his last on the last day, the darkest one, of Kārtik in V.S.2025. He left his physical body and his soul merged with the Eternal one.

His soulless, physical body was brought by air to Ahmedabad and from Ahmedabad carried to Nāreśvara by a decorated truck.

Thousands of people paid their last homage to this great saint with tearful eyes. Almost all the local news papers carried head line articles in admiration of the life of this departed soul.

His mortal remains were cremated and consigned to flames at the spot where a shrine today stands tall called the Raṅga Mandira. He passed away on the 19th November 1968 and was cremated on 21st Nov.1968, at

midnight. As luck would have it, that happened to be his birthday.

There is a psalm written by Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtaji that can be taken to sum up his own life and vision. Such a song in English literature is known as a SWAN-SONG.

62. SWAN SONG

When this body returns to dust,
to dust it returns,
There'll be a time to ask: who was really he?
Whence had he arrived and alas, where had now
disappeared?
None knew this, yea, why untill this day?
Neither did he speak much nor was wordless,
Neither did he travel too far never stayed at one place.
Whispering, whispering, where has he vanished?
Darkness, thick and wide, now covers the sky,
It spreads here, there, everywhere, stopping nowhere.
There was brightness just for a moment!!
He healed wounds of human hearts, not too many though,
And washed tears from human eyes, true!!
And spoke a few words of love and solace, unheard
indeed!!
He sported with roses and made them blush!
And the nightingales wailed and wailed to no end.
And the wood streams leapt not too high
And he squandered away the treasure of love.

He who received it danced with joy,

Others lost it and cried and cried!

He consecrated pieces of stones for divinity of Lord Śaṅkara.

And also turned Śaṅkara into lifeless stones.

Tears of joy- did Raṅga See.

Born with nothing on hand died too with nothing with him.

Hardly was he here; then what to talk of where is he gone now?

Raṅga remained the same for ever, without any change, there and there.

63. MYSTERIOUS EXPERIENCES

(1) Glimpse of God during circumambulation:

In the lives of saints like Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtājī there are many experiences which can not be easily understood with reason. They are generally taken as miracles.

But Avadhūtājī used to say: A true saint never performs or exhibits miracles. The positive pole of faith and dedication conjoins with the negative pole of self-sacrifice and self-control; this generated light you may call it a miracle, if you like.

There have been many such experiences in Avadhūtājī's life and also in the lives of his many followers. One or two of these may be noted.

Raṅga Avadhūtajī was on a circumabulation of Narmadā. One day he lost his way. He continued walking endlessly but could see no end of his path. Who would guide him on the way out? Whom could he ask either? Day was running out and evening was fast approaching.

He was now worried and prayed to God. At that time he ran across, by chance, a person looking like a wood-cutter. He began, "Revered one, it seems you have lost your way! Come along I will show you the way".

Avadhūtajī followed the stranger for sometime, and when the outskirts of a township were in sight the visage seemed to be moving towards the river. Avadhūtajī reached the town. He looked back- and lo! the visage had vanished!

The wood-cutter had mentioned casually to him that he was going to buy opium. Avadhūtajī stayed three days in that township but no one turned up for buying opium even three days later! Avadhūtajī took it as God's graciousness-joyous offering-and proceeded further.

(2) TRUE MUSLIM

Rev. Avadhūtajī was going to camp in some small town, the population of which was almost totally Muslim. The host with whom he was staying did not enjoy a good reputation; he was known as an uncivilised person in his town.

A follower of Avadhūtajī cautioned him: “Honourable one your host is a wolf in sheep’s garb.” Avadhūtajī just said, If you do not allow people like us to go to such persons how can they reform?

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In the heart a resolute courage Hanumanji- like,

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Success is yours ! Success yours is !

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Quarrels be dissolved, And Love supreme be prevailed.

Om ! Let Divine Peace Prevail.

Peace Physical ! Peace Mental !! Peace Spiritual !!!

World-Friend,

RAṄGA AVADHUTA

APHORISM BY REV. ŚRĪ RAṄGA AVADHŪTAJĪ

1. **PARASPARADEVO BHAVA.**
Invoke the Divine unto one another.
1. **SVĀSE SVĀSE DATTANĀM SMĀRMAṆ.**
Oh Mind! remember Lord Dattātreyā at every moment (Lit. every breath)
3. **BHAKTIRDAMBHO VINĀ BHĀVAM.**
Faithless devotion is hypocrisy.
4. **SVAYAMAŚĪSTU SATKARMA**
A Good deed is boon itself.
5. **MATA MATAIVA KEVALAM**
There is no alternate to mother.
6. **NA MĀTUH PARADAIVATAM.**
There is no divinity greater than mother.
7. **SARVO DATTAH SARVARŪPASTAVARŪPAH.**
Formless and the one with form, all are Lord Dattātreyā only.
8. **GURUKRUPĀ HI KEVALAM!**
SISYA PARAMA MANGALAM.
Master's grace is ever beneficial to the disciples.
9. **PREYASO VĪJĪTE.**
SREYSAH
Spiritual bliss is greater than worldly happiness.
10. **ĀTRA DEVO BHAVA.**
Invoke divinity unto the taught.
11. **SATYAMEVA PARAMĀ TAPAH.**
Truth is the supreme penance.
12. **ŚRĪ DATTAH ŚARAṆAM MAMA**
Lord Dattātreyā is my ultimate refuge.

WANTED ! WANTED ! WANTED !

Who ?

PRECEPTORS

What Sort Of ?

Not just talkers, But Spiritually Alive .

Not oral Pedant, But who awakens one through own Spiritual Practice.

Not Erudite who only precepts others, But one who precepts own-self. Not a Crazy Master, But who exerts to be a disciple of all.

Not who hankers after wealth of the followers,

But who would give a Healing Touch.

Not a fake Idealist, But a Hard Realist. A Dreamer not, But an Awakened.

What the emolument be ?

Self Contentment, Immortal Bliss, Eternal Peace !

Where to apply ?

In the heart-within.

When to start ?

To firm determination when arrived at ; Right Now !

Where to report ?

On the spot where you are; Every Where !

Acknowledgement of the application if any ?

The joy within.

Whom to apply ?

TO THE INNER-SOUL-AVADHŪTA !!

**World - Friend,
RĀṄGA AVADHŪTA**