

articles without mincing any words or beating about the bush. The column carried pseudonyms- “Bhāṅgno 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 Valāme met Gandhiji while returning from Dākora. Gandhiji asked him, “Where had you been?” Valāme replied: I am just coming from Dākora! 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 Raṇac'odārāya'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: छत्रदेवो 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 Valāme 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 ownselves 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. PĀṆḌURAṅGA AS ETHICAL TEACHER

Pāṇḍuraṅga 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: VAḤĀME'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 VaḤāme to her and VaḤāme 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 VaḤāme received full monthly charges from her.

Śrī VaḤāme 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 ("Pothi") with strict adherence to the disciplines of a holy life. In his own way he also practised yogic exercises i.e. Āsanas, 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 ("Pothī"). He had a dream when he was a child, and he heard some inner voice saying "Read 'Pothī'". 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 Rukmīṇī 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 PRĀKṚTA 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 Raṇāpur on the banks of the Narmadā. Pāṇḍuraṅga went there.

In Raṇāpur, 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 Liloda-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 Sākorī, 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

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

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
sovereign-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 consciousness,
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 Rāṅga 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. Avadhūtaji 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". Avadhūtaji 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?"

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

The inspector: "What kind?"

Avadhūtaji, "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.

Avadhūtaji 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 Bhāgavata 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. At 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 Prāgañbhāī Mistry’s farm in Rājapipalā. 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: “Bāpjī, 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 skyclad 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 GĀṆḌĀ MAHĀRĀJA

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

Avadhūtājī, thought to himself as to who was this Gāṇḍā 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 Gāṇḍā 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 parīkramā. 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 Avadhūtājī- the celibate. Avadhūtājī 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 Avadhūtājī 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.

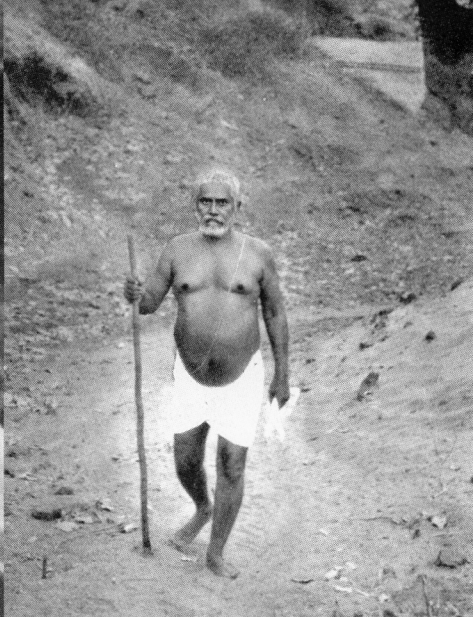
What a humility in this stotra!

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 Amarkaṇṭaka. 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 Vimalaśwara 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 circumambulation from Mōṭakkā. 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 Avadhūtājī 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 Avadhūtājī said yes, he went near and placed his pot of gur and requested him to accept it. Avadhūtājī 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."

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

The person told Avadhūtaji 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”. Avadhūtaji 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. Avadhūtaji 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 Avadhūtājī to stay near the stream of the river. Avadhūtājī 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. Avadhūtājī 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 CandraśekharaŚranā Śaṅkarācārya, the Head of Dwārakāpīṭha. He was acquainted with Śrī Avadhūtājī from early years of life before he was installed as the Head of Dwārakāpīṭha. 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 Avadhūtājī 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. Avadhūtājī 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.”

Avadhūtājī 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 Bhagavāna Dattātreyā. 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 Avadhūtājī 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. Every night the devotional songs were sung by visitors to the hermitage and these form a part of his booklet ‘DattaPañcaPaḍī’ ‘Nāreśvara-Mahātmaya’ was ready and published already when Avadhūtājī 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, Rāṇa-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 Amrutālal 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.