

# REMOVAL *of* TENSION

**GLIMPSES IN THE LIFE OF  
REV. RAṄGA AVADHŪTA**









## REMOVAL OF TENSION

### GLIMPSES IN THE LIFE OF REV. RAṄGA AVADHŪTA

**Publishers :**

1. Shri Anil N. Shroff

‘Raṅga-Āśiśa’, Bungalow No. 2

Chembur-Dreamland Co-op. Hsg. Soc.,

A. Soares Road, Chembur,

Mumbai- 400 071. INDIA.

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2. Dr. Dilip R. Bhatt

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Claremont,

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U.S.A.

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Tel.No: (02692) 249455

**Printers :**

Shri Sunil Ghosalkar

‘Grafica’, Mumbai- 400 001.

Tel.No: (022) 56336520.

**First Edition :**

1992.

**Second Edition :**

2003.

**Revised Third Edition :** Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2006.

**No of Copies :**

500

**Price : Rs. 100**

**Published with consent of**

**Śrī Avadhūta Sāhitya Prakāśana Truṣṭa, Nāreśvara.**



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## GLIMPSES IN THE LIFE OF REV. RAṄGA AVADHŪTA

### Writer's Word

This book lays stress on the path treaded by an accomplished and an enlightened soul and how others could tread it. The book is intended to help a goalseeker, who could be a 'do'-it-yourselfer. The reader is supposed to be a traveller on the path of ideal that would raise moral and spiritual stature of a person and if possible achieve freedom at least from the crushing tension of the worldly life around.

This book expects one to purify oneself and lead a spiritually rich life leading to eternal bliss.

Dr. Hariprasad (fondly called Dhirubhai) Joshi, a scholar of Sanskrit and a disciple of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta, inspired this writer to draw a biographic picture of the Saint of Nāreśvara.

There is already an authentic biography of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta by Śrī Amrutlal N. Modi. It is in Gujarātī and the title of the book is 'Nāreśvarano Nātha'. Late Śrī Amrutlal Nathabhai Modi was not only a class-mate and room-mate of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga Vāḷāme during college-days but later transformed into his first and foremost disciple as well. He devoted his whole life in carrying out the mission of his Guruji Rev. Śrī



Raṅga Avadhūta. With the grace of his Guruji, Amrutlal Modi could succeed to turn the dense and terrific wild locality of Nāreśvara area into a divine place of pilgrimage. 'Nāreśvarano Nātha' is published by Śrī Avadhūta Sāhitya Prakāśana Trust, Nāreśvara. Fondly, Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta addressed Śrī Amrutlal Modi as 'Tapasi'- an ascetic and made him 'ever remembered' in Dattabāvanī. Thus for the biography, he was the first authentic person and he has done the job successfully.

Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta always wanted to uplift spiritually the lives of people through Dattopāsanā and make their life holy. Effort is made in this book to bring out the salient features of Datta-worship explained by him. One would like to know what 'Datta' means and how the deity could be worshipped. A devotee has to concentrate his/her constant attention on an idol representing the deity and faithful devotion will bring the worshiper on the ultimate goal merging himself with the deity and he will attain freedom from the shackles of the mundane cycle of birth and death.

What is the main contribution of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta to the thinking world, for practical life? He gave Prāṇayoga, the yoga of breathing by his mantralike aphorism "Śvāse Śvāse Dattanāma Smarātman." Prāṇayoga shows how breathing which is involuntary and linked with life can be employed to raise an



individual's spiritual level. To practical life, his advice is contained in the aphorism 'Parasparadevo Bhava'.

Tension is a feature of modern life especially in the big cities. For the human being, the micro, the sublime, the macro are inter-related factors. How one can make one's life sublime as well as useful to the world around, can be seen in some pages that elaborate two precepts of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta. These two precepts are as good as in the form of 'spells' (mantra). One is "Śvāse Śvāse Dattanāma Smarātman" while the other is 'Parasparadevo Bhava'. They are the two principles to be followed as the first one is subjective while the other one shows how to behave in life around. Every effort is made to help the reader in practising what is stated here.

Though Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta was detached from the world, he was not an inactive man living in seclusion. He was a true leader and guide, lighting the path of his followers in worldly life here and beyond.

I acknowledge the help I received from Śrī Jayantibhai Acharya, Chairman of the Nāreśvara Trust. I cannot forget Dr. H. S. Joshi, Managing Trustee of Nāreśvara Trust for enthusing me in the task. My thanks are due to Shastri Jayendrabhai K. Dave, a Sanskrit scholar and devotee of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta for all his suggestions. I hope I have done some justice to the work assigned to me which I lay at the



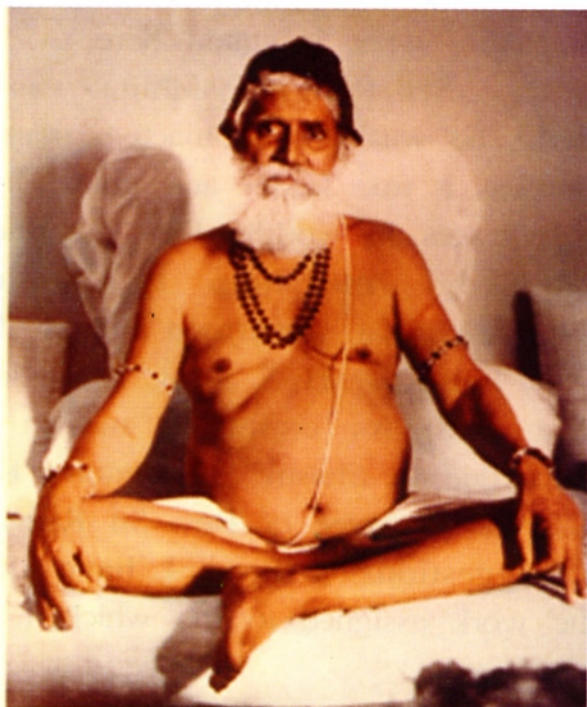
lotus feet of Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtaji. For that is what 'Datta' means. It was He who gave me power to understand it and it is to Him that this humble assignment is offered respectfully.

Raṅga-Dattasya Kāryasya Raṅga-aivādhināyakah;  
Raṅgaiva Samarpitame'tad Caritram Śāntanotu naḥ

**Avadhūtacintana Śrīgurudevadatta**

Mahāśivarātri. Śake 1911  
(V.S.2045) Dt. 23.2.1990

**M. B. Koldhekar**





# REMOVAL OF TENSION

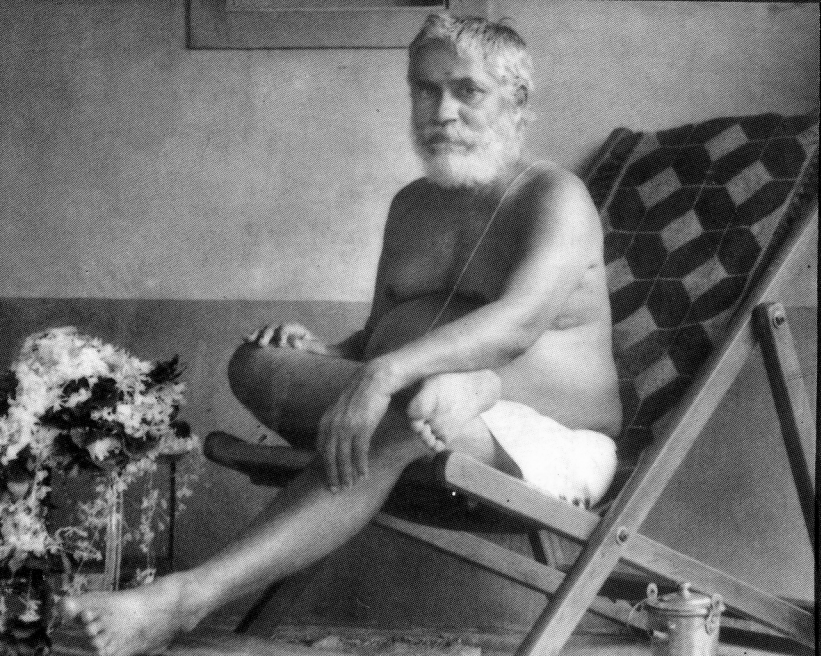
GLIMPSES IN THE LIFE OF REV. RAṄGA AVADHŪTA

From Publisher's Desk

(FIRST EDITION)

The need for Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtaġi's biography in English has been felt long since. Scattered attempts to publish the life-work of Rev. Śrī Avadhūtaġi were made here and there but complete biography was not written, illustrating his ideology as a whole. At such a stage Prof. Koldhekar made a request on his own, wishing to undertake some work connected with the literary activities and life-work of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtaġi and this fulfilled the long felt requirement.

While banking on the late Śrī Modikaka's detailed biography in Gujarātī, Prof. Koldhekar kept in view the readers though living in Western countries and yet feel concerned about our philosophical belongings and are also eager to understand the concepts of the Individual Soul, this mundane world and the Supreme Soul. His speciality lies in addressing such readers in English language. Rev. Śrī Avadhūtaġi established a complex running on Indian lifestyle and Indian traditions. As Rev. Śrī Avadhūtaġi believed in practice rather than precept, his biography, too, wields more weightage.





# REMOVAL OF TENSION

GLIMPSES IN THE LIFE OF REV. RAṄGA AVADHŪTA

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

(THIRD REVISED EDITION)

In the recent years Rev. Śrī Prem Avadhūtājī's travels abroad to the Western countries like America and Canada have inspired many Non-resident Indians settled abroad towards trekking on the spiritual path and their journey of this path has alleviated their physical, mental and spiritual miseries. Several foreigners have also been inspired and initiated and they have started offering Morning and Evening Prayers and Chanting Dattabāvanī. Obviously these people want to know more and more about Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtājī of Nāreśvara, his antecedents, his childhood, his youth, his educational background, penance that he performed his principles, his philosophy, his literary works, his Datta worship and how such a big Āśrama has been raised, where lacs of devotees still visit the samadhi for blessings. How he continues blessing his devotees, remaining aloof from praise, publicity, preaching, paisa (money) and never accepting any offerings in cash or kind.

Now when the demand of such informative literature in English has grown up tremendously, Rev. Prem Avadhūtājī directed me to undertake publishing some books in English language mainly covering the information about popular divine hymn: Dattabāvanī and Morning and Evening Prayers. He also suggested to publish revised versions of some of the old books covering thought- provoking and enlightening Birthday Messages of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtājī and his authentic biography.

I am happy to state that it has been decided to publish several such books and we are now putting in your hands the book- 'Removal of Tension' (revised third edition) which would serve the purpose of tendering a brief biography of Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtājī.

I am indeed grateful to Dr. Dhirubhai Joshi, the Managing Trustee of the Nāreśvara Āśrama Trust and Dr. Subhashbhai Dave, a Trustee of Śrī Avadhūta Sāhitya Prakāśana Trust, for co-operating in correcting the proofs and also incorporating necessary revisions.

Thanks are also due to Shri T.R.Joshi of Gandhinagar, age 83 for correcting the proof very meticulously. I must also take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Shri Rajendrabhai Upadhyay and his family for preparing the graphics and Shri Sunil Ghosalkar for printing the book nicely.



I wish to express my sincere thanks to Śrī Avadhūta Sāhitya Prakāśana Trust, Nāreśvara for granting an unconditional permission to publish this revised edition.

I also hereby acknowledge with thanks some financial sponsorship received from Smt.Saralaben Laxmikant Kapadia, Smt.Hinaben Ketanbhai Kapadia and Smt.Veenaben Bharatbhai Surati, of USA for the publication of this book.

I, most humbly and respectfully bow down my head at the Lotus feet of my Lord and Master Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta Guru Mahārāja and Pūjyaśrī Prem Avadhūtaji who have bestowed upon me and my family the Divine Grace by associating me in such a noble service to my Master.

Once again with a prostrate bow to them, I remain,

Śrī Raṅga Pādukā Kuṭīra,  
8, Kandivali Co.op. Hsg.Soc.,  
Behind Suman Appartments,  
Shanker Lane, Kandivali (W)  
Mumbai- 400 067.  
Dt : 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2006

**ANIL SHROFF**

**“PARASPARDEVO BHAVA”**

**INVOKE THE DIVINE UNTO ONE ANOTHER**



# REMOVAL OF TENSION

## GLIMPSES IN THE LIFE OF REV. RAṄGA AVADHŪTA

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### FORWORD

‘Removal Of Tension: Glimpses in the life of Reverend Raṅga Avadhūta’ sees again a light in the form of its third and revised edition. I express my pleasure on the occasion. This book is not just a biographical sketch of an individual but with the essential background of glimpses in the life of Reverend Raṅga Avadhūta, a realized soul and a renowned Saint, Late Prof. Koldhekar has made an attempt to state a path to a stress-free life. For the purpose he has sincerely exercised his intelligence to elaborate the thoughts and tools suggested by Reverend Avadhūtaji. I have full faith that the work will prove useful to all truth-seekers and path-seekers, here and abroad.

I appreciate the involvement of Shri Anilbhai Shroff and Dr. Subhashbhai Dave to bring out this edition in a new shape.

May our Guru Mahārāja Reverend Raṅga Avadhūta Bāpaji bless all.

Nāreśvara,  
9th August 2005,

**Dhirubhai Joshi**  
Managing Trustee,  
Avadhūta Nivas Trust,  
Nāreśvara.



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

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

Nasal conjunct consonant

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

ङ् वाङ्मय	Vaṅmaya = Vangmaya	न् मन्त्रला	Mantraṇā
ञ् मंथ	Mañca = Mancha	म् पम्पा	Pampā
लृ मण्डल	Maṇḍala		



## CHART-II

### PHONETIC PRONUNCIATIONS OF VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

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#### 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
r̥	(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	Khākī (Army uniform)/ Khādī (Gandhian dress)
ga	(ग)	as	'ga'	in	gum / gun / guts
gha	(घ)	Aspirated	'ga'	as in	aghaṣṭ / ghost
ṇ	(ङ)	as	'ṇ'	in	sing/ring/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 (तंदूर) / 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	(भ)	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 (त्रिशूल=Trident)

ॐ

॥ श्री हतः प्रसन्नोऽस्तु ॥

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न मातुः पर दैवतम्



Pāṇḍuraṅga

Mā Rukmāmbā

Nārayāṇabhāi

## CHAPTER I

### **BIRTH • CHILDHOOD • EDUCATION**

#### **1. COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE**

Devalēm is a beautiful village surrounded by numerous fauna and lush flora. This is situated in Ratnāgiri District in Konkaṇa area. All around are found agricultural products like nuts and coconuts, cashew and jack-fruit, pine-apple and the famous Alphonso variety of mangoes. Fragrance of mangoes is everywhere in the atmosphere. People even today are guileless and simple and they welcome visitors sincerely.

In such a lovely and divine atmosphere, more so in the nineteenth century, there lived the Valāme family, known for their Vedic learning. The family worshipped Lord Śiva of the Khadageśvara temple in the same village and had wonderful celebrations on the Mahāśivarātri day. All people around gathered to pay homage to Lord Śiva and dedicate donations to the revered Paṇḍita Śrī Viṭṭhalapanta, the third son of Jayarāma Bhaṭṭa. Viṭṭhalapanta was firmly attached to devotion, seclusion<sup>1</sup> and meditation, but otherwise he was very practical, particular and helped others in solving ticklish issues and mundane problems.

After the death of his first wife of very early marriage, Śrī Viṭṭhalapanta left for Paṇḍharapura to be



engrossed in devotion and meditation of Viṭhobā, the deity of the place, leaving everything else.

But there's always a 'but' in a man's life. One night he heard in a dream "Go back, I want to come to your family". Viṭṭhalapanta could not make out what this meant. When he had left his family at Devalēm, why should the deity want him to go back to his family? But the dream continued to repeat again and again. At last, he had the vision of the deity who specifically commanded him to go back home and marry Kāśī of Pālī village which is about ten miles from his place. "I shall be born as your son". Now return home!" and Viṭṭhalapanta felt that the deity blessed him too.

So Viṭṭhalapanta returned to his family and conveyed the occurrence of the dream to his father, who was naturally very pleased. They inquired about the girl Kāśī and finally Viṭṭhalapanta married her and renamed her Rukmīṇī. Their worldly life was piously religious.

Viṭṭhalapanta could not stay for long in Devalēm. Sarapotadāra, a landlord in Gujarat, wanted Viṭṭhalapanta to take over the charge and propitiation of the Deity of his temple at Godharā in the Pañcamahāla District of Gujarat as he could not find a better person so erudite, self-less and yet an expert in all Brāhmaṇika rituals of worship.

Thus Viṭṭhalapanta and Rukmīṇī came to Godharā and passed their time in doing all chores of the Lord Viṭṭhala temple and Viṭṭhalapanta soon gained popularity

not only as a pious 'Pūjārī', clergy man looking after the temple but also as a scholar of Vedic rituals. People invited him to perform rituals on various occasions. Viṭṭhalapanta never demanded any remuneration but accepted whatever was offered to him. So he became popular and was respected everywhere.

Time passed by and Rukmīṇī became pregnant. She vowed to go round the Tulasī plant, one lac twenty five thousand times (1,25,000). It is believed that a woman gives birth to a noble son if she goes round and round the Tulasī plant 125000 times, slowly and gracefully like a female elephant.

Every year there used to be celebrations in all Lord Viṭṭhala temples on the eleventh day (Ekādaśī) of the bright half of Kārtika which happens to be the first month of the new Vikrama year. On the ninth day it was Akṣayā Navamī- a very auspicious day and lo! there was a huge fire near the temple at Godhrā. Everybody ran. Rukmīṇī, too, ran for fetching water. There were no fire brigades then! A large number of people threw water over the fire. When people were busy putting off the fire, Rukmīṇī gave birth to a baby boy in a small dark room of the Viṭṭhala temple. Immediately thereafter the fire extinguished. Everybody, including Sarapotadāra, the landlord was delighted! The wise ones commented, "This son of Viṭṭhalapanta is a gift from Lord Viṭṭhala and has come to extinguish the fires that scorch the worldly people". Thus on Monday, the 21st November 1898,

Pāṇḍuraṅga, another name of Lord Viṭṭhala, was born in a very religious brahmin family known for its learning, selflessness and integrity.

## **2. CHILDHOOD**

Childhood reflects the future man. A renounced priest once said, “Give me your child for seven years after birth and he will always follow my way of life and thinking.” Surely, the circumstances and influences of childhood do have a lasting impression. This child Pāṇḍuraṅga did not play with toys but used to stare at idols and pictures of deities.

Once plague broke out in the town and the family had to shift to a village nearby when the child was only nine days old. Was this an indication of the future seclusion? The child’s looks were captivating, so all the visitors used to stare at him. Mother was worried of the child getting possessed and made a tattoo between the eyebrows. Incidentally, this spot between the eyes is known as Āgñā cakra (which controls meditation). Thus the child’s future was chalked out.

Once some people were passing on the road carrying a dead body on a pier and uttering the words “Rāma Rāma.”

Child Pāṇḍuraṅga asked his father,

“What are they saying, father?”

Father replied: “Rāma Rāma.”

“Why?”

“Somebody is being carried to the burning place as, he is dead.”

“Will my mother die?”

“Yes.”

“Can one do something to avoid death?”

“Yes, by chanting the name of Lord Rāma.”

This short dialogue took place when Pāṇḍuraṅga was about a year and a half old.

In his very childhood, Pāṇḍuraṅga was indoctrinated into devotion and recital of the name of God Rāma.

Another incident that left a lasting impression on Pāṇḍuraṅga's temperament was haughtiness of his grandfather's nature. The family was at Devalēm, their native place. The aged and ill grandfather was very weak and one day he could not control himself and passed stools in the bath-room. He called out his daughters-in-law. None out of the three, came up as they were busy in household chores. The grandfather was full of rage and shouted. “You think I am handicapped and dependant! No I am still active” and so saying, when the three ladies rushed with water, he cleaned everything himself. Bearing of grandfather's nature at times echoed in Pāṇḍuraṅga's childhood. Young Pāṇḍuraṅga was insistant-on fulfillment of his wishes without delay. He was a born commander and none with lack of agility could stand by him. It may be mentioned here that Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtājī had directed and disciplined thousands of devotees to follow the right track in mundane life.



### 3. EDUCATION

Every society has its own arrangement for giving its children training in social skills and values. Communities have their rituals for initiating young ones into morals of the adults. Brahmins put on the sacred thread. Pāṇḍuraṅga and his younger brother Nārāyaṇa were initiated into the ritual of becoming a 'dvija' (twice-born) at Devaḷem. While returning to Godharā, they visited the holy places like Narasobā Wāḍī, Audumber and Gāṇagāpura which even today are places of pilgrimage for worshippers of Lord Dattātreya.

By divine coincidence, Rev. Ṭembe Swāmī was camping here. Pāṇḍuraṅga and Nārāyaṇa were dressed in the sacred- thread ceremony new attire. By divine inspiration, child Pāṇḍuraṅga ran towards Ṭembe Swāmī with an intention to offer his respects by placing his head in Swāmīji's lap. But accompanying maternal aunt caught hold of him and persuaded him not to do so. and asked him to offer respectful obeisance by a prostrate bow at his lotus feet from a distance. Ṭembe Swāmī was very happy to see Bāḷa Pāṇḍuraṅga.

"This is our boy" said Ṭembe Swāmī, known as Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī who later came to Gujarat and passed his last days in Garuḍeśvara, near Rājpiplā in the Bharucha district.

Ṭembe Swāmī asked young Pāṇḍuraṅga: "Boy, whom do you belong to?"

‘To You’ was Pāṇḍuraṅga’s reply and he bowed respectfully to Vāsudevānanda Swāmī Mahārāja. Thus was young Pāṇḍuraṅga initiated into spiritual education.

Pāṇḍuraṅga’s schooling was full of events. He was not only a bright pupil but he showed integrity of purpose and a strong moral character too. Here is an event of the school.

‘Stand up on the bench’ once a teacher ordered Pāṇḍuraṅga by way of punishment.

‘Though it is not proper to punish me without any offence I shall stand up on the bench’ were Pāṇḍuraṅga’s cold words in reply.

Incidentally, the teacher saw Headmaster coming towards the class and the teacher said ‘Sit down.’ But Pāṇḍuraṅga did not. The Headmaster wondered as to why a bright student from the first bench had to be punished. On seeing the first rank boy of the class standing on the bench, the Headmaster said, “Valāme, what mischief did you commit ?”

Pāṇḍuraṅga Valāme said, “Sir, ask any one in the class if I have done any thing wrong! Please ask the teacher, why he has punished me!” The Headmaster realised the situation and asked him to sit down. He patted Valāme’s back and remarked ‘That is the right spirit.’

#### **4. READY-WITTEDNESS**

In a social gathering of the school, he had a role to play. On the stage, he recited three lines of a verse in Sanskrit, forgot the fourth one but soon recited a suitable line spontaneously composed on the spot by himself and received an applause.

#### **5. FEARLESSNESS**

Once while walking on a road with his friend Hariprasada Desai, he saw a cane lying on the road.

“Shall we take it?” asked Hariprasad.

“You may, if the owner is found, searching for it, we’ll give it to him” said Vaḷāme.

While they were strolling on, a peon came running after them and said “Stop, you thieves! Where did you get the cane? It belongs to the Collector Sahib.” Pāṇḍuraṅga said fearlessly, “Who knows whose cane it is? It was lying on the road and we picked it up. If we wanted to steal it, would we have come thus?” “Don’t talk non-sense.” The peon got furious and said “Come to the Sahib, you’ll get a thrashing!”

“Come along, what’s your Sahib going to do?”

They came to the bungalow.

The young Collector was pleased to see the boys with the cane and said ‘Bravo boys! Thanks. This stick is a gift from my mother-in-law and it’s her sweet memory. Thanks a lot for bringing it carefully.’

So saying he gave a four-anna coin to both the boys and patted them. Of course, the peon stood aghast while the two returned laughing with joy!!

## 6. CONFIDENCE IN SELF

His School final examination provides an illustration of his brightness, integrity, ready wittedness and self-confidence. In those days, oral examination was conducted by the Principal of the Gujarat College, Ahmedabad who was an Englishman. The boys of Telang High School, Godharā warned Vaḷāme not to be too bold as the examiner might get angry and fail him in the examination.

The principal had a chiroot in his mouth when Vaḷāme, in Dekkani Brahmin Style, bowed with folded hands and the following conversation ensued:

**‘Are you a Brahmin?’**

‘Yes, Sir.’

**‘Why do you Brahmins wear a thread?’**

‘May I, please Sir, answer your question by a question or an answer?’

**‘As you please’.**

‘Sir, why do you put on a Collar and a Tie?’

**‘It is an emblem of my religion- Christianity.’**

‘So it is with us, Hindu Brahmins. Thread is an emblem of my religion.’

**‘Do you cease to be a Hindu Brahmin if you do not put on that sacred thread?’**

‘Do you cease to be a Christian, if you do not put on this Collar and a tie?’

**‘Not at all. But by putting on this, I always remember to be a real disciple of Jesus Christ and cease to do anything forbidden in my religion and try to live a righteous life.’**

“So it is with us, Sir.”

**‘Why this round-shaped clean shaving of head?’**

‘Our country is poor and this sort of shaving costs only one anna while a fashionable hair-cut costs four annas (One fourth of a Ruppee).’

**‘Is there no other advantage?’**

‘Yes, clean shaving keeps the mind cool and good thoughts get full scope.’

**‘Is it so?’**

‘Yes Sir, you may try and experience it yourself. And if you do not feel cool, you may fail me.’

The Principal was so pleased with such bold, intelligent and proper answers that he laughed aloud. What would an examiner feel if the candidate challenges thus!

Principal Robertson laughed and said ‘Friend, go, you stand first in the class!’

Principal Mehta of the Telanga High School, Godharā did not have adequate words of praise for he knew the Englishman would surely put Valāme at the top! And so he stood first in his school career.

Faith, absolute faith in Lord Dattātreya was his source of success. He had no fees to pay for the

second term of his intermediate year. He placed his application before Lord Almighty and went on with his routine without anxiety. His thinking was clear. He thought that if God wanted him to study, He would make necessary arrangements and if that was not done, he would leave studies. And lo! It was the last day for paying the fees and Pāṇḍuraṅga was talking with his friends, some unknown visitor came and asked for P. V. Valāme. Pāṇḍuraṅga himself asked him as to, why he wanted to see Valāme. When the visitor said, 'For giving money.' 'He may be in some other room' Pāṇḍuraṅga said rather jokingly. Friends revealed the truth and the man handed over the money to Pāṇḍuraṅga. Why are you giving the money to me, asked Pāṇḍuraṅga. The visitor said: "Here is a sum of Rs. 150. I've yet to pay Rs. 15 and the interest. I'll do it shortly".

Pāṇḍuraṅga said: "But I don't know about this!" The visitor said: "Your mother had lent this amount to us and it was forgotten. My father while on his death-bed, told me to return the borrowed amount. I shall pay the interest too". "Don't bother about the interest said Pāṇḍuraṅga. I am accepting even this amount because you are pressing me!"

Even in college days, he avoided publicity. Once he was pressed to speak and he did not get up when his name was called. Students insisted that he should speak. The president of the meeting was surprised. Ultimately, Valāme proposed the Vote of Thanks but in such poignant words that even the president praised his speech.



## **7. THE INCIDENT OF THE CRICKET MATCH**

One more incident of his college days throws light on his boldness, leadership and above all, righteous thinking.

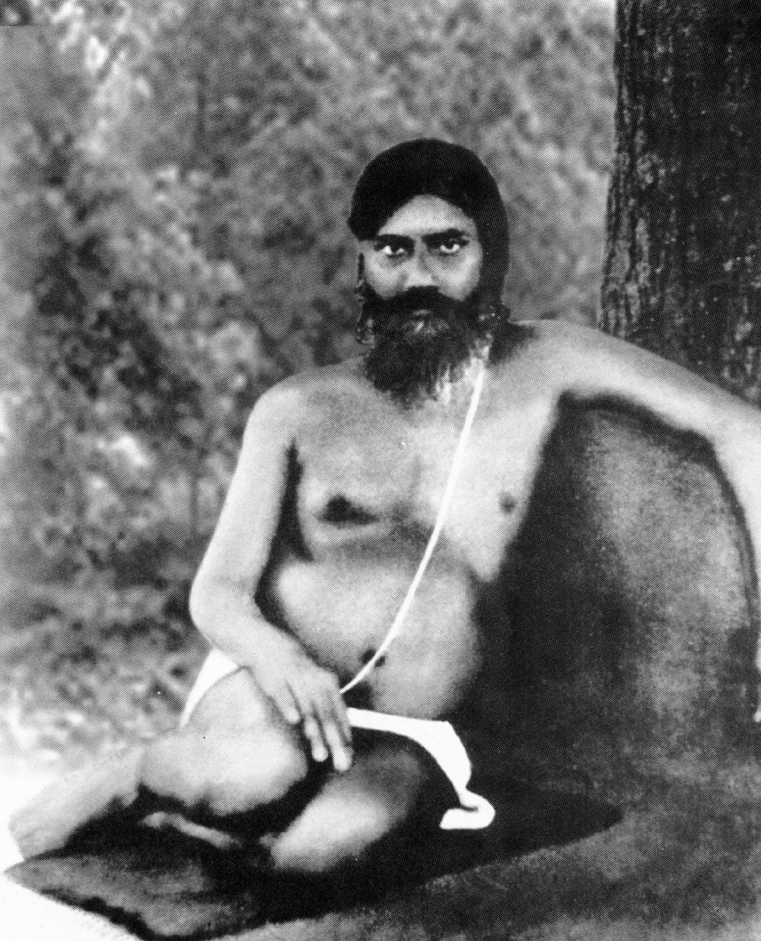
Boys who were caned by a military officer on the College Cricket ground came to Valāme for help and guidance. Valāme heard them patiently and said “No bunking classes-No demonstrations-No crowds-No violence, only silent pen-down strike.” Boys followed him and had hand-outs posted in the city against the contemptible action of the haughty army officer.

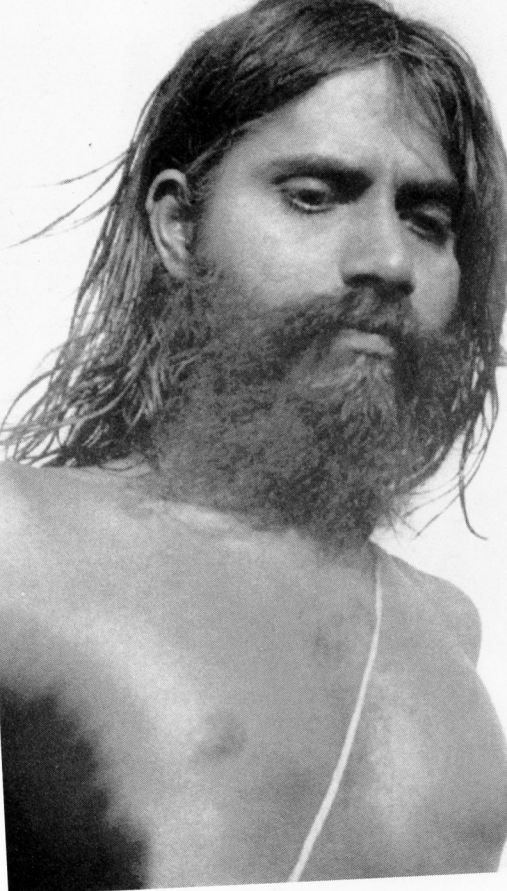
Next day, some students and Pāṇḍuraṅga saw the Principal. He became aware of the student’s firm decision and college prestige. He said “I’m going to Bombay. Will you wait till I return and do everything needed?”

Valāme called off the strike and the classes were full. On return, the Principal sent the report of the incident of the haughty behaviour of the officer and demanded a written submission asking for an apology from the officer concerned. The guilty officer tendered an apology and thus the students succeeded under Valāme’s leadership, initiative and guidance. Real education provides situations and means to develop proper character.









## CHAPTER II

### YOUNG PĀṆDURAṅGA

#### 1. AT MOTHER-INDIA'S FEET

Young Vaḷāme was the leader of youths in his college days and when he was in his senior B.A. Year, Gandhiji gave a call to all youths to leave colleges and courts to join the struggle for freedom of the motherland and for ultimate goal of achieving Svarāja (independence). Vaḷāme was one of those who gave up studies from the Baroda College and joined the movement of awakening the masses in the Pañcamahālas. He moved with stalwarts of Pañcamahālas like Śrī Vāmanarāo, the lion of Pañcamahālas, Māmā Phadake, Chandrashankar Shukla and others.

In December 1919, in the Indian National Congress session held at Nagpur, Śrī Deshbandhu Das moved the resolution of Non-co-operation and it was passed with a thumping majority. A large number of young men from all over India gave up their studies and began to turn up at 'Svarāja Āśrama', Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha, a university at Ahmedabad imparting education on national patriotic lines suitable for the country as against education of the Macaulay type prevalent then in the universities, controlled by the British Government. In the newly started national institution 'Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha, a hostel "Svarāja Āśrama"

was started for students from outside Ahmedabad. One small room was allotted to Śrī Ambalal Vyas and Śrī Amrutlal Modi. Ambalal was a schoolmate of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga from childhood.

One day there was a knock on the door when Amrutlal Modi was baking loaves of bread on fire.

‘Who is it?’

‘Vaḷāme. Is Śrī Vyas in?’

Śrī Ambalal Purushottamdas Vyas opened the door and was surprised to see his classmate from childhood. The two embraced each other while Amrutlal Modi came up there. Ambalal said, ‘Here is the young man I have told you about so often. Pāṇḍuraṅga, meet my partner Amrut Modi.’

Thus Vyas, Modi and Vaḷāme stayed in one of the rooms of Svarāja Āśrama. This joining of hands was going to be a permanent bond between Vaḷāme and Modi as we shall see later.

Events at Svarāja Āśrama created an atmosphere that laid future foundations. Śrī Gidavani was the first principal of Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha. An incident occurred when the famous Advocate Śrī Jayakara came to Vidyāpīṭha. Vaḷāme and his friends wanted to serve simple daily food to the gathering while others were in favour of serving sweet milk cooked with rice, known as Dūdhapāka. As it was a majority opinion, Vaḷāme’s small group made all preparations but at the time of eating, this group stealthily managed to remain absent. The function was delightfully over.



Next day, Śrī Gīdāvani showed his displeasure at the non-cooperation by the small Vālāme's group when Vālāme said, "Sir, when forty million people of our country don't get enough food even for one meal, is it proper to arrange expensive dinners especially while we are struggling for Svarāja?"

Śrī Gīdāvani's own food was very simple consisting of tea without milk, boiled potatoes and onions. So, on hearing Vālāme's argument, he himself felt the seriousness and somehow made the incident reach Gandhiji's ears and Gandhiji came to Svarāja Āśrama. The incident at Jayakara's arrival was discussed, upon which Gandhiji congratulated the small group for taking a correct stand!

## **2. MEETING THE MAHĀTMĀ**

Gandhiji gave the call to the youths of the nation to spread the message of Svarāja to the rural areas. In this connection, Vālāme had a meeting with Mahātmā Gandhiji. The following conversation took place between the two at the meeting.

Gandhiji : Where do you come from?

Vālāme : From the Baroda College, as a representative of students.

Gandhiji : What's the guarantee that you are the representative?

Vālāme : That problem may arise if someone challenges. Your doubt does not seem to be relevant and he added, 'Who appoints lion, as the king of forest!'

Gandhiji was pleased at the straight-forwardness, boldness, ready-wittedness and self-confidence of this youth and said 'Bravo, Bravo! Svarāja would be within reach if there are a hundred such young men in the country!'

Another time, Pāṇḍuraṅga Vaḷāme met Gandhiji while returning from Dakor.

Gandhiji : Where have you been?

Vaḷāme : I am just coming from Ḍākora!

Gandhiji : It's a holy place but too dirty! Isn't it?

Vaḷāme : I was absorbed in, looking at the attractive, pleasant and magnificent idol of the deity and did not think or see anything else. I did not go to Ḍākora to observe the dirty surroundings near the temple. My mission was to get engrossed in the deity. One should think of the mission alone and what is the mission? It is an individual's concern for the noble cause!

Gandhiji was impressed at the clear thinking of Pāṇḍuraṅga and the spiritualistic aptitude even while doing political propaganda. Gandhiji congratulated him for expressing his independent views so forcefully and logically.

### **3. AS A TEACHER**

The wave of Svarāja movement had various off-shoots. One of them was starting schools imparting nationalistic education. The British system of education prevalent in those days, followed Macaulay's line of stressing only the three 'R's, Reading, (W)riting, Recitation. It was scholastic in approach and was not

based on the needs of the people. It produced clerks that could help the British administration. Gandhiji favoured three 'H's instead, Hand, Head and Heart.

Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha, the nationalistic university, gave importance to Khādī, dignity of labour and patriotism. On the same lines, national schools came up all over India stressing the importance of Basic Education and so had Ahmedabad its first nationalistic school in the form of Rāṣṭriyā Ādarśa Vinaya Mandira. Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha gave it the recognition as a Secondary school. Śrī Valāme was appointed as a Sanskrit teacher.

While teaching Sanskrit in his gifted way, Valāme prepared a text book named 'Girvāṇa Bhāṣā Praveśa Part I and II'.\* It was recognised as a text book by Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha and it was introduced in other schools as well. The government schools also introduced it as a text book. The book contained the theme of grammar syllabus alongwith the exercises and selective passages, verses etc. from the treasure of Sanskrit literature of scriptures, epic poetry and prose. His originality could be observed in the following examples and likewise other incidents also.

सर्वे गुणाः काञ्चनमाश्रयन्ते इति मूर्खाः वदन्ति ।

Sarve Guṇāḥ Kāñcanmāśrayante Iti Mūrkhāḥ Vadanti ।

Only the fools say that all qualities rest in gold.

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\* Third Edition published in the year 2006.

The original text is only-

“Sarve Guṇāḥ Kāñcanmāśrayante”. He added the last part ‘Iti Mūrkhāḥ Vadanti’. Thus he made the original text more colourful by his own additions. Again he added one more line as:

सर्वे गुणाः शीलमाश्रयन्ते इति बुद्धाः वदन्ति ।

‘Sarve Guṇāḥ Śīlamāśrayante Iti Buddhāḥ Vadanti.’  
‘The wise-ones say that all qualities rest in character’.

There were many such gems of thoughts in the text book. Look at the following couplet.

मक्षिकाः व्रणमिच्छन्ति धनमिच्छन्ति पार्थिवाः ।

नीचाः कलहमिच्छन्ति शान्तिमिच्छन्ति साधवः ॥

Makṣaikāḥ Vraṇamic‘anti Dhanamicc‘anti Pārthivāḥ |  
Nīcāḥ Kalahamic‘anti Śāntimicc‘anti Sādhavah ||

Flies want wounds (to sit on), the kings desire wealth; the low ones are for quarrels while the saints or good people desire peace.

#### **4. AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE REGISTRAR**

Once there was an inspection in the school. The Registrar came up with his staff. They were going for inspection from class to class and they came to Valāme’s class. He was not there but the class was engrossed in the assignment given to them silently without any noise while the monitor was standing in a corner.

The inspection group of visitors entered the class. Boys stood up, bowed and greeted the Inspectors.

Class-work went on. The group observed the class for a while and left the room.

Śrī Ramshankar Tripathi, the Principal informed the Registrar that the teacher Vaḷāme always wakes up at two in the morning for prayers. So he used to having lunch at this time. He had already sought permission for this, right from the day he joined the school.

In the meanwhile Śrī Vaḷāme arrived. The Inspector saw him and said with a smile, 'Had your meals? So early!'

Vaḷāme said: Yes, Sir. My Sun rises (day begins) at two in the morning while all of you have it at six. You people get hungry in four to five hours time while. I take my food even one hour later than that.

The Inspector saw the brilliance, the implied meaning in the reply and smiled.

While the inspection group was moving away, Śrī Vaḷāme said, 'Sir, please come into the class! I don't know if you have taken a test of the class! A class can be really inspected in the absence of the teacher, isn't it? What the pupils have learnt and grasped and whether their replies reflected their understanding or they are merely mugging up parrot-like. This can be ascertained only when the teacher is absent! Let's go in the class and you can observe how I teach. That way I can also know where I stand and can get some guidance.'

On hearing this, even the principal laughed while the Inspector kept on smiling and moved away!

## **5. DR. P. C. ROY'S VISIT TO SCHOOL**

Dr. Prafulla Chandra Roy, the great Scientist of the day and who later became the Chief Minister of West Bengal came to Gujarat for the foundation stone-laying ceremony of Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha. The teachers and the management of Vinay Mandir planned to present a tribute to Dr. Roy with an eulogy (address) written in Sanskrit language. Valāme drafted the text of the address which was printed on Khādī.

Dr. Roy was invited on this occasion. However, on the day of his arrival, his schedule did not include this function. So Śrī Amrutlal Modi and Śrī Valāme saw Dr. Roy personally and Dr. Roy said: As for my programme here, I am dependent on Principal Gidavani. I have to go wherever he takes me and go where he wants me to. Both of them saw principal Gidavani and said: 'Sir, ours is the first national school. Moreover three of the graduates of the Vidyāpīṭha are working there. The programme is already fixed and the whole school is waiting for your arrival. Will it not be terribly incongruent if our programme is cancelled? In a way, if that happens this would mean the principal of Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha is insulting the institution recognised by Gujarat Vidyāpīṭha itself! The society will think Vidyāpīṭha itself is neglecting or humiliating its own graduates Will it behove the Vidyāpīṭha?'



This straight-forward appeal convinced him and Acharya Gidavani escorted Dr. Roy to the Vinay Mandir. Principal Gidavani was pleased to see the real enthusiasm of the entire school. Dr. Roy was extremely pleased when Śrī Vaḷāme read out the address in Sanskrit. While accepting the casket, Dr. Roy said: 'I have received innumerable caskets of address else where but this is the first one in Sanskrit. Moreover, the feelings expressed herein are so sincere and personal for an outsider of a different province that nowhere else I have felt thus. I congratulate you all for such brilliance and thank you very much for all this.'

Thus Vaḷāme, a Sanskrit teacher, raised himself high in the esteem of the school-management while students crowded around him wherever he went. They were so to say mad after him.





## CHAPTER III

# SPIRITUAL SEEKER PĀṆDURAṅGA

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### 1. TOWARDS ASCETICISM

Even while Śrī Vaḷāme was serving in Vinay Mandir School, he often thought of going to a place of seclusion to meditate. Whether he went to Mt. Ābu or Śūlapāṇeśvara or Kedāreśvara or Utkanṭheśvara, he always kept a keen eye on secluded places convenient for meditation. As a step towards this, he decided not to marry. Even when he was at college, Śrī Sarapotadāra, the landlord who had brought the Vaḷāme family to Gujarat and Godharā in particular, was in search of a suitable bride for this brilliant boy. Whenever the topic came up, Pāṇḍuraṅga kept silence. Once however, he was so much pressed that he said to his mother in Marāṭhī:

‘Mother, I do not want to marry at all’.

Mother asked ‘Why?’

‘I belong to Swāmījī, Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī, and you know it’, was his reply.

‘But you can marry and go through the stage of a gṛahasthī (a householder) and later renounce the world’.

‘No, mother, I am going to remain a ‘Brahmacārī’ (celibate). If, on your word, I marry, I shall not stay with her as a husband and you’ll have to carry over her burden throughout life. For, I am already wedded to

‘Yogaśrī’ (Ascetic ideal).’ Mother tried to argue with him the other way round: ‘But Nārāyaṇa, the younger one, has not finished his studies yet.’

‘I shall wait till he is on his own.’

Once he thought of going to the Himālayas, the coveted abode of all Hindu renouncers but he knew he must have proper guidance. So he went to Sāi Khedā to meet Dada ‘Dhūṇīvālā bābā’. This was a saint who could be approached only by real seekers of emancipation, as he would usually drive away seekers of worldly desires.

It was summer and there were many camps of ascetics and others. Devotees came and offered gifts to Dada who would consign them into the burning fire. As often happens at places of pilgrimage, some Sādhus (ascetics) would persuade the devotees to offer their gifts from a distance and later would take the gifts themselves.

When Pāṇḍuraṅga Vaḷāme went near Dada, with a mango, he took it and began to eat! Pāṇḍuraṅga was pleased to see that his offering was accepted! He bowed and returned as there was a rush.

From others, Vaḷāme knew that Dādā would be alone at mid-night. At mid-night, Vaḷāme saw Dādā sitting alone while a cow was eating something. Dādā had a stick and it seemed as if Dada was beating the cow. But the cow neither moved away nor stopped eating. Vaḷāme noticed that the cow was not being beaten but was actually being caressed! While he was wondering about thus, he heard the words:

“Here is one ready to go to the Himālayas. It is not going to serve his purpose. He should rethink and stay on the bank of the Narmadā river.”

Valāme felt that the words were addressed to him but he was not sure of the entire purport of the words. As he wanted some additional guidance, he went with a Śikha devotee who began to make a supplication:

‘I am very unhappy. Business is in ruins.’ He began to weep.

‘Wait for six months. Everything will be all right’, Dada said.

Nevertheless the Śikha went on requesting for blessings and immediate success and success in business.

Dādā was angry and thrashed his hand with the stick whereupon the Śikha began to shout.

Dādā said, ‘Go away, now’. At this stage Valāme was in a fix. He started moving away when Dādā ordered ‘Where are you going? Sit down’. Thus Valāme tried thrice but had no guidance.

Next time, he said, ‘May I put my head on your feet’.

Dādā: ‘You may!’

When Valāme bowed at the feet, he felt caressing hand of Dādā on his back. He was encouraged and said. ‘I want to carry out a religious practice under your auspices. May I do so?’

Dādā: ‘Child, what is the use of staying here? Your desire will not be fulfilled here and we both will be

ridiculed. Go to a forest. Luck to you in a forest!’ and he went on repeating the words ‘Luck to you in the forest’.

When he left ‘Sāi Kheda’, he began to get the meaning of the words uttered repeatedly in the afternoon. The words were “Himālaya jānevālā āyā hei, Narmadā Kināre Jānekā hei”. he was asked to go to the Narmadā bank instead of the Himālayas.

From ‘Sāi Kheda’ Valāme came to Moraṭakkā in Nimāḍa district. There is Omakāreśvara temple where Śrī Candrasekharānanda Sarasvatī practised penance. This Swāmī was scholarly and very much fond of studying religious books.

When Valāme reached the Āśrama, Swāmījī had left for Indore. So Valāme wrote to him seeking permission to stay for eight-ten months to practise certain worship. He received the reply as follows.

‘I am to take Samādhi (relinquish the physical body) in Kārtika. Go back’. Valāme left the place for Baroda, where Śrī Langade Swāmī (who was lame) was a devoted disciple of Śrī Saccidānanda Sarasvatī the famous Swāmī of Śinora on the bank of Narmadā. This saint was known to have divine powers but was engrossed in innocent and child-like practices that are often found in a Yogi who could see Śrī Guru Datta, the trio of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa.

How to approach such a strange saint as Śrī Langade Swāmī who had an irritable nature. The best



way was to approach his intimate devotee. So he went to such a person who was a teacher.

‘The saint is highly short-tempered and presently I am going to my work, come again,’ said the teacher.

‘I shall come with you,’ said Valāme. When they reached Swāmijī’s place, Valāme requested the teacher thus; ‘Please go and ask if he would see me’. Valāme was permitted to see the saint who said after cordial welcome, ‘Find out a secluded place on the banks of the Revā (Narmadā) where there would be no disturbance. The place could be between Bharucha and Śūlapāṇeśvara on the Northern bank of Narmadā’.

Śrī Valāme said to himself: ‘My Guru Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī does not want me to leave Gujarat. That’s why I was refused a place at Sāi Khedā or Moratakā.’ Destiny wanted Valāme to preach principles of righteousness and Bliss in giving up everything that the word Datta (Given) connoted. He was to follow the path of asceticism while guiding the people around to a divine path even while going through the chores of this mundane life.

Where to go? What sort of a place should it be? Śrī Valāme got proper guidance from Śrī Upāsani Bābā, a saint of Maharashtra who has his seat at Śākori. As if knowing the intention and ideology of thought roaming in Pāṇḍuraṅga’s mind, Bābā said:

The place should comply with what the Bhagvadagītā has said in

यस्मान्नोद्धिजते लोको  
लोकान्नोद्धिजते च यः ।



Yasmān Nodvijate Loko  
Lokān Nodvijate Ca Yah |

(Gītā xii.15)

He for whom no one is put into difficulty  
and who is not disturbed by any one.

The Place be neither too near nor accessible to  
the public, a place where one doesn't get entangled  
or attracted by demands of public and mundane life.

Pāṇḍuraṅga: What objection if people come?

Upāsani Bābā: Accept only food but not money for  
collection or for a second meal. Avoid company and  
suffer if necessary for this. Thus the place be secluded,  
away from habitation and unapproachable.

Pāṇḍuraṅga: How to avoid people?

Bābā: Take my instance. To drive people away,  
I tried to be dirty, played with my own excreta, even  
applied it to the body!

Pāṇḍuraṅga: Did that help?

Bābā: Not much! People tried to bring many  
tempting things. The only way was closing the eyes and  
keeping silence! Of course, One should repeatedly chant  
God's name, meditate and be not driven away from the  
goal. For, once you get interested, you develop a sense  
of possession viz. अहम् मम aham and mama (I and mine),  
Moreover do not think of giving advice unless pressed.  
Nāpruṣṭah Kasyacit Br̥yāt... "Do not speak if not asked"  
is a wise commandment of the scriptures.

Valāme thought of going to Raṇāpura where Śrī Ratanalal, a Brahmin from Sarakheja, a suburb on the outskirts of Ahmedabad worked as a teacher. Through Śrī Ratanalala he came in contact with Śrī Haragovindadasa Kanajibhai Soni, who was a goldsmith and a small time money-render who was popularly known as 'Dāsakākā'. With the help of these two, Valāme decided to stay in an old Śiva temple. This Nāreśvara temple was seven miles away from Raṇāpura. The place was not only secluded but frightening and not at all with a congenial atmosphere! But this was what Valāme, the celibate ascetic, wanted.

It was a very cold evening of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa of V.S. 1982 i.e. 1925 A.D., when a slim young man got down at Māloda railway station (now known as Nāreśvara Road railway station) and walked towards Nāreśvara temple. He was asked to go there in the morning. He accepted the suggestion and stayed in the place, full of insects, mosquitoes and what not! He accepted a place absolutely suitable for his purpose!

## **2. KAPARDIŚVARA TO NĀREŚVARA**

### **“OLD ORDER CHANGETH YIELDING PLACE TO NEW”**

A secluded place may be fierce but has its own beauty also. Valāme saw a big Aśvattha tree with serpents and scorpions along with mangoose and rabbits nearby. Both the elements of cruelty and pity staying together! This was an ideal place for one who intends

to develop non-attachment, love for all and other essential characteristics of a real saint. At such a place, a peacock does not kill a serpent!

A small hut made out of hay and bamboo sticks and later on of bricks was constructed near the present Nāreśvara temple. Change is the law of life and that applied to Kapardiśvara turning into Nāreśvara. In Revākhaṇḍa, there is a narration of Kapardiśvara which was established by Lord Gaṇeśa to worship Śiva so that he may get blessings to face the demons or evil spirits. Even today, a Hindu worships some deity to get direction and strength to face an impending calamity. Śiva puts on a garland of beads of Kapardi and hence the name Kapardiśvara. Thus one who appears poor is the endower of riches! The concept of Śiva is really lofty and compares with the Greek Sage Diosthenes who refuses to go to Alexander for the latter has nothing that can attract him! Everything about Śiva is lofty, his abode, his belongings, his penance and even his way of life!

This Kapardiśvara temple got lost in time as a natural change. After a couple of centuries, Nāropanta, a Brahmin from Deccan, worked as a manager to a landlord. He was a worshipper of Gaṇeśa. In his dream one day, he heard a voice saying 'Get me out, hurry up!' He saw nothing around. The dream and the voice were repeated after a couple of hours. So he spoke out "Lord, who are you? From where and how do I get you out?" Nāropanta heard the voice "I am Śiva lying

under a heap of sand. There's a small tree, too. Get me out!"

Nāropanta told about this dream to people around and because Nāropanta was known for his benevolence and devotion, the local people enthused him to dig. Some of them told about an ancient temple. They found out a tree and heaps of sand and began to dig deeper. Underneath were pieces of stone! Nāropanta now insisted on working with hands only and lo! There it was! A Śiva-liṅga, an idol of Śiva and there was the water pot too. Lord Śiva needs constant trickling of water over Śiva-liṅga. A copper pot with a tiny hole in its bottom and filled with water is kept hanging over the Śiva-liṅga for the purpose. The crowd around started chanting 'Ohm Namah Śivāya'.

An auspicious day was selected to perform the rites to invest life in the idol when the temple was ready and an expert Brahmin well versed in Vedic rituals and rites was invited to perform the religious ceremony. The temple was named after Nāropanta and became famous as 'Nāreśvara.' What is the meaning of Nāreśvara? It means Lord Śiva with attributes of Nārā. Nārā has several shades of meaning. It also means 'water'. The idol was submerged in water two hundred years ago and so it was Nāreśvara as described in the verse here.

आपो नारा इति प्रोक्तास्तत्र मग्नम् यतः पुरः ।  
नारोपन्तेन चोद्धृत्या स्थापितम् तेन हेतुना ॥

Āpo Nārā Iti Proktāstatra Magnam Yatah Purah;  
Nāropantena Coddhrutya Sthāpitam tena hetuna.

“Water is called “nārā”. It was merged in it, as such, before and Nāropanta got it out and performed its establishing ceremony.”

(Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa, Revākhaṇḍa,

Nāreśvaramāhātmya verse 31)

Another meaning of Nārā is a group of living beings. Lord Śiva is also the Lord of living beings inspiring them as such. Even the Gītā has said:

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।

Ísvarah Sarva Bhutānām Hṛddeśe-rjuna Tiṣṭhati |

(Gītā XVIII-61.)

The Almighty resides in the heart of every living being. The verse about ‘Nārā’ meaning ‘Jīvasamūha’ is as follows:

Nāram Jīvasamūhassyāt  
Tasyeśvara Iti Prabho;  
Nāreśvara Iti Khyātaḥ  
Śarvotra Hyumayā Saha.

Nārā could be a throng of living beings. As he is the controller of the living beings, Lord Śiva along with Pārvatī is famous as Nāreśvara.

The place around this Nāreśvara temple was a good resort only for a devotee of Śiva. Śiva himself is described as having smeared himself with the fresh

ashes from the cremation ground and so on (Compare Citā Bhasmālepah- from the famous Mahimna Stotra).

Incidentally smearing with ashes gives good protection in cold! An ascetic is supposed to go through hardships of all sorts and the concept of Lord Śiva and his abode as well as his routine show what conditions, a man in seclusion, in harsh climate and wordly hardships has to face. While an ordinary man may bear these, an ascetic is supposed not only to rise above these but to raise himself to a level where nothing allures him, nor disturbs him from his exalted mental set-up. Only he who can get every thing, can reject it. Poverty or want of material belongings is not for an ascetic, nor a condition of helplessness' but voluntary rejection of wordly affairs is necessary and Śiva is the emblem of all this! His place of abode is the Himālayas, the highest region on the earth and every thing also for Śiva is of the highest order and hence Śiva alone is named 'Íśvara' in the vedic philosophic discourses (Vedānteśu Yamāhurekpurusam). Thus Nāreśvara was a suitable place for Vaḷāme, the seeker of ultimate truth, the highest blessing of Śiva.

Vaḷāme kept his needs to the bare minimum and at the lowest level. His food consisted of three spoonfulls of wheat flour, a little purified butter (ghee), salt, coriander grains and cummim seeds. He would prepare balls of wheat flour dough and boil them in small water. Sometimes he prepared Khichadi a mixture of

rice lentils and some vegetables if available, cooked together with a little salt and turmeric powder. He would offer one morsel to the crow, one to the dog and the rest he would eat up after his rounds of prayers and rites. He may have a glass of milk if Śrī Rambhai Jethabhai Prajapati of Sāyar brought it. This was Valāme, the ascetic's food menu, day in and day out! If something was in short supply, he would eat sprouts of cactus growing widely around! At the most, he would have the luxury of a sort of cooked vegetable!! For he who has control over his tongue, gets easy control over other senses.

### 3. THE NĪMA TREE

One of the trees that was a witness of this ascetic's early days near the Nāreśvara temple happens to be a Nīma tree. This tree is nothing less than an ascetic that faces biting cold, scorching heat and blowing hurricanes without a word of protest. That is a basic philosophy for such beings. This Nīma tree gave shelter to the ascetic. The tree must have developed an affinity for Valāme for as days passed by, the tree instead of growing taller, began to bend down as if bowing to the saint! And other trees around followed this example and they are bowing down with their branches even today. A saint is free from anger, bitterness and such other evil sentiments. A Nīma tree is by nature bitter but this particular Nīma tree loved the saint so much that its sweet feeling towards the saint became a permanent



feature! The bitter tree became sweet!! What a metamorphosis even in vegetation under divine influence! Twice did this Nīma tree lost all its leaves in torrential rains and twice did it blossom again! It looks young even after a hundred years!

If you are disturbed by worries, your brain is restless and your body sleepless, you may sit under this Nīma tree and you'll yourself feel calmness slowly entering into you and turning every particle of yours tranquil! This is an experience of many devotees. One has to try to have it by one's self alone! A sweet tree creates a sweet atmosphere and affects everything around oozing love, sympathy and goodwill!! Whenever you go to Nāreśvara today or after a decade, go through this experience by setting aside some time for this from your itinerary.

#### **4. BUCIO, THE DEVOTEE**

At Nāreśvara, if one walks towards the river Narmadā, one finds a small railing with a patio with words “Śvānabhakta Bucio. V.S.2007, Mārgaśīrṣa Vada 13” meaning “The devotee dog Bucio, Vikram Samvat Year 2007, Mārgaśīrṣa 13 dark half”. This is a Samādhi, a burial place of a devotee dog! The dog would always be with the Saint and kept a watch over the place around in the early days of the saint's stay in Nāreśvara. This dog would never enter the kitchen nor eat anything unless brought to him and offered personally. He never bit anyone.

While the primary construction of the hut was going on, carts would bring building materials at night. Once, Bucio was sitting at a vantage place, keeping a watch on the hut and the road from the village. A cart was coming carrying some materials. While a bit away from the hut, the bullocks stopped and refused to move further even with pricking by the cartman! The cartman was surprised! He wondered what stopped the beasts! The cartman got down and began to enquire. He found the dog obstructing the way. So he went to the dog, patted him fondly and the dog got up. As if the cart got the entry permit and it moved on!

After many years the dog became old, ill and weak and Rukmāmbā, Pāṇḍuraṅga Mahārāja's mother, looked after Bucio by bathing and feeding it! The dog was suffering terribly. Atlast one day, Pāṇḍuraṅga Mahārāja lifted the dog with somebody's help, put it under a shade and said "O Bucia, your pain is unbearable! Now you may go!"

The dog looked gratefully at the saint and breathed its last! Even today, on Bucia's death anniversary, other dogs are fed and offerings given alongwith ceremonial prayers that are recited at a funeral and yearly 'Śrāddha'!! Bucio was really a devotee watch-dog as stated in Uṣaḥ Prārthanā i.e. Morning Prayers "I would like to serve as watch-dog guarding the temple forever, and would not ask anything except appearance or view (of the Deity). The actual Gujarātī verse in Uṣaḥ Prārthanā is:-

જ્ઞાન થઈ મંદિરે નિત્ય ચોકી કરું,  
દરસ વિણ આન નવ કાંઈ માગું !

“Śvāna Thaĩ Mandire Nitya Cokĩ Karum̃,  
Darasa Viṇã Āna Nava Kāim̃ Māgum̃”

## 5. ORDEALS OF EARLY DAYS

Hardships, adverse situations, attitude of apprehension are common features of early days of the saint's stay at Nāreśvara. A saint voluntarily accepts such conditions. As he avoids confrontation, he is taken as weak. Such was an experience once.

Some government assignment brought a Faujadāra (a sub-inspector of police) to Sāyara. He enjoyed a party in a field where dishes were prepared out of new crop of wheat! The Faujadāra came to Nāreśvara temple to offer prayers with his family. After a bath in the river Narmadā and visit to the temple, the officer came to this Sādhu Pūjya Śrī Raṅga Avadhūta Guru Mahārāja or Bāpjĩ as we called him as if he was like other ‘Bāvās’. The faujadāra was in a happy mood and wanted to crack a joke with Pūjya Bāpjĩ.

Faujadāra said: I have heard you work wonders!

You are an alchemist!!

Bāpjĩ : Yes, but not as you are thinking of.

F. : Then, of what sort?

B. : Not making gold out of stones but turning a devil like you into a human being.

- F. : (with furious irritation) Do you know with whom you are talking?
- B. : (non-chalantly) What is the necessity of knowing?
- F. : I'm a Faujadāra. Be careful while talking.
- B. : (with more indifference) You are speaking out of point! Who would take you as Faujadāra while moving with women! A Faujadāra would have a Havāladāra and a Jamādāra around him with a police orderly to escort! Why have you come to frighten us! Who called you? How are you concerned as to why I am lying alone thus? Why have you come to harass me?"

The Faujadāra saw "Tit for Tat" and left the place.

Pāṇḍuraṅga Swāmī used to pass his nights on the slab of stone in the open verandah of the Datta Cottage. He used to get up at two in the morning and hence his night was short. He used to keep awake till midnight gazing at the stars in the sky above.

Once two persons with sharpened and shining blades of steel in hand, wearing dark clothes and face covered with masks came and took position at the head and feet of the saint. The dense forest around, the darkness of night, the frightening solitude and two fierce looking men in front! But Bāpji neither moved nor spoke a word. He was neither daunted nor afraid of anything. He took it as an actor unaffected!

One of these nocturnal visitors said harshly, “Bāvājī! why are you lying here thus? Get up and open the cottage”. The saint did not move and said indifferently. ‘The cottage is not locked. Open it yourself. In it, you’ll find the big sack of an Avadhūta containing all the fourteen worlds! Whatever you can carry, take away from it, there is no restriction! None to prevent, have as much as you please.’

First one : Does anyone come here?

Pāṇḍuraṅga : Some people visit during day and some special visitors like you, come at night! Avadhūta’s court is open all the time for every one! None is prohibited at all!

Second one : Are you not afraid?

Pāṇḍuraṅga : Afraid of what? How can a single person have fear! One may have fear if there is someone else. A simpleton has no cause to be afraid of!

First One : Bāvājī! if some one attacks, what will you do?

Pāṇḍuraṅga : No one has tried so far. One of you hold me and let the other beat, then you will see what I’d do!

Both these shady characters were drunk and were surprised to find such a situation and they said, ‘This is not the right place! Let’s go’.

Both of them rode their ponies and left. The sound of hoofs was heard in the forest for hours on. They moved round and round in the forest! and only at dawn, they could find the right way out of the forest.

Next morning people from the village reported having seen two strange horsemen leaving the area! And Bāpji narrated his experience of the previous night! The listeners were shocked! This is an illustration of the state of fearlessness a meditator may attain. This is 'Abhaya-siddhi'.

Self-centredness is not a vice. A saint is self-centred in a way but he wants to restrict his interest to himself in order that he may attain spiritual heights. Selfishness as a vice often seen in wordly people. Selfishness may be pure and simple in order to get something for one's own self. There is a particular thing to get for a selfish person and he may attain it without waiting for others to do so. He is not anti-social as such, although he may appear to be careless towards social manners!

There are others who are selfish and intend to get something by troubling others and still others who trouble others. Fruits, they enjoy while the blame goes to others!

Such events occurred in the early days of Pāṇḍuraṅga Swāmī's struggle for spiritual achievement. Someone killed a peacock, our National Bird and left the dead peacock near the temple, probably he wanted to take away the big dead bird during night time for money. If the police came to know and inquire, this ascetic

would be involved this way or that! Anyone would think that this sadhu must have killed the peacock. In any case, suspicious impression would be created about him!

When Avadhūtājī saw the dead bird in the morning, he sent a word to the police station in the nearby village! What an ordeal of this mundane world!

## 6. QUALITY OF ENDURANCE

Certain experiences help in achieving physical and mental endurance, a quality of a true ascetic like Avadhūtājī. Someone brought some food and kept it on a plank! and Bāpājī ate it. It was found poisonous. He had blood vomits. He felt death was quiet near but remained undaunted and tranquil. He has described his state of mind and body in the following lines in Sanskrit.

ज्वलतु ज्वलतु देहो बाधतां शीतमुग्रम् ।  
वमतु रुधिरमेत्स्वान्तमुष्णं यथेष्टम् ।  
भ्रमतु शिर इदानीं त्र्युटयतां प्राणग्रन्थि-  
स्थल इव नु द्वारि ह्यद्य मृत्यो स्थितोऽस्मि ॥

Jvalatu Jvalatu Deho, Bādhatām Śītamugram  
Vamatu Rudhirmetat Svāntamuṣṇam Yathēṣṭam  
Bhrhamatu Śira Idānīm Trutyatām Prāṇagaranthi-  
Racal Iv Nu Dvāri Hyadya Mrtyo! Sthito'smi.

Let the body burn repeatedly, let biting cold harass.  
Let this internal blood be vomitted as much  
as possible!

Let the head spin and let the knot of life be torn!



O Death!

I am standing today at your doors steady as a mountain!

These are some of the incidents and events that show the steps he took in order to develop qualities and habits which a real renouncer should have. To pass time in loneliness and seclusion, whether compulsory or voluntary, is an ordeal and an ordinary man with little practice in mental control and self-discipline may lose his balance of body and mind.

Under adverse circumstances, people like Avadhūtaji would say

अजोऽहं निर्विकारोऽहं किं मे देहेन किं मृदा\* ।

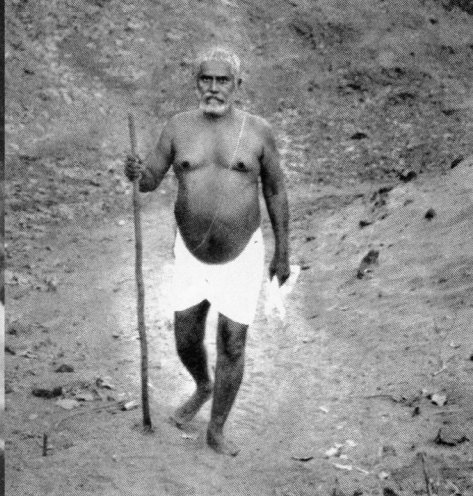
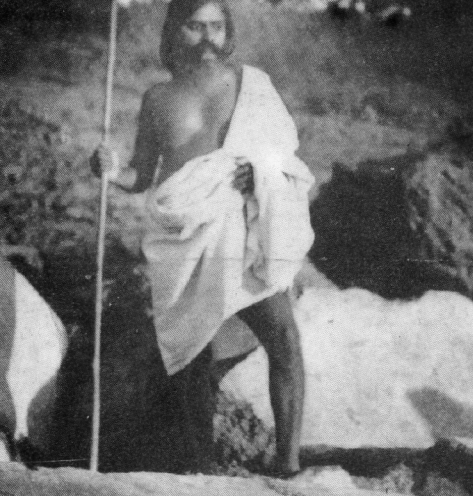
Ajo'ham, Nirvikāro'ham Kim Me Dehena Kim Mṛudā.\*



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\* A verse from 'Antya-prārthanā' by Rev. Śrī Raṅga Avadhūtaji when he was affected by food poisoning.





# CHAPTER IV

## CIRCUMAMBULATION OF THE RIVER NARMADĀ ON FOOT

### (Narmadā Parikramaṇa)

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#### 1. PĀṆDURĀṄGA'S VOW

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The Narmadā is the only river worshipped by those who want to be free from worldly shackles by going round on foot along its banks from one point to the end and back, thus completing a circle. This is defined as Parikramaṇa. Sādhus, Ascetics and renouncers are required to undertake Narmadā Parikramaṇa once in life. The distance to be covered is roughly 3200 kilometers or 2000 miles. An individual undertaking Parikramaṇa is called Parikramaṇa-vāsī and is supposed to go round on foot only! He carries a satchel, a scarf and his clothes. A stick helps in many ways. It can give support, remove thorns and the like from the path, drive away beasts and be a lever to carry the weight of personal belongings. As far as possible, a Parikramaṇa-vāsī is not supposed to be away from the river. His halt is also somewhere close to the banks of the river. At many places, these Parikramaṇa-vāsīs are rendered help. They are offered food, clothes, blankets, medicines, footwear and so on, especially in the Madhya Pradesh region where the

foresters or tribes loot such pilgrims. Not that only the young and the strong take this pilgrimage but the old and the weak are also seen walking around the Narmadā! Though a Parikramaṇa is to be done alone, the aged ones fall back upon the support of others and move in groups.

Pāṇḍuraṅga Vaḷāme took the vow of completing Narmadā Parikramaṇa in 108 days of walking as the ceremony performed at the end of some ritual assigned undertaking. This last and final ceremony is known as 'Udyāpana' to be performed after some anuśṭhāna. An anuśṭhāna is a self-imposed undertaking wherein certain rites and prayers are to be performed regularly for a definite period of time. Usually, an anuśṭhāna is for purifying the mind and body of the worshipper. It may aim at some material gain or a spiritual one. During the anuśṭhāna, certain restrictions in food intake and daily routine are to be observed. Basically, they are for disciplining the body and mind. It may involve keeping a fast or eating certain kinds of light food only and so on. When the assignment is over, the occasion is celebrated as Udyāpana. Gifts in cash or kind are offered to revered and learned Brahmins or a good number of Brahmins are fed and so on. Of course, the relatives and other people are invited to the formal meal.

Pāṇḍuraṅga Swāmī, chose to have the final Udyāpana ceremony of propitiation, in a spiritual way by undertaking Narmadā Parikramaṇa in 108 days of walking.



A word about number 108. The total of the three digits of the number 108 is 9 which is an auspicious number. According to western scholars, the number nine belongs to the planet Mars. To oriental astrologers, Mars has power over number 3 which when trebled turns into 9. One may note that the heads of religious schools are called Mahāmaṇḍaleśvaras. The number 108 is prefixed to this title and the reading is Śīmada 108 Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara.

## 2. AN UNION WITH REVEREND GĀṆḌĀ MAHĀRĀJA

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Life is a very strange phenomenon and so is the working of mind. Sometimes one gets inspiration or a spontaneous intuition to do something unusual. This may come from within or suddenly someone may suggest something. If one is regularly meditating, he gets some sort of instruction or direction during meditation. Such a suggestion may be strange. You may be asked to approach someone who may be a stranger.

One day Pāṇḍuraṅga Swāmī was contemplating over Parikramaṇa, he was repeatedly reminded of Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja. Who was Gāṇḍā Mahārāja? Where was he supposed to be? What should be done to approach him? Pāṇḍuraṅga had no answers to these queries! He only knew that he had to move towards south. Why should Pāṇḍuraṅga and Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja meet? Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja never knew about Pāṇḍuraṅga; still the two were destined to meet! How does destiny

function? How do two strangers meet and become life-companions? Indian philosophy as laid down in the Sanskrit scriptures whether Vedic or Purāṇic is this! Life is a continuity as such and there is a link between past, present and future life. Birth is caused by the combined effects of one's own doings and the attributes or propensities of psychology of an individual such as Satva (pious) Rajasa (blemished) and Tamasa (coloured with abject inclinations). The propensities of Satva lead one to be straight-forward in his dealings, afraid of taking any ill advantage of a situation. So a man with dominance of Satva quality becomes a pious man. Rajasa quality makes one become practical, applying rules to his selfish ends and so on, with the result that a Rajas-dominated man may do evil doings though he is against them in principle. He is a man of the world, very materialistic, thinking of today. One with Tāmāsī-temperament obviously has a dominance of morally low level of propensities. As such, he does not look back in doing something socially or morally evil. The end in view decides the means. Any action is judged from the result to be reached.

No one is hundred percent, a Sātvika or a Rājasik or a Tāmasik. One unit of guṇa (propensity) consists of the following proportion. ( $1 = \frac{3}{4} : \frac{1}{8} : \frac{1}{8}$ )

If a unit has  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of Satva, the person is Sātvika, if  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of Rajasa, he is Rājasik and so on.



Of what is the distribution made! Of the actions of an individual. If the actions are good to the extent of  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the total, the resulting propensity is  $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the Satva class and so on. From where do these actions (Karmas) come? Both the present and the past ones. These propensities and actions (guṇa and Karma) lead to a certain set of actions or kind of life. In practical life, these actions of an individual are concerned with other individuals. Thus relationships are formed.

A person is somebody's father while someone's son and so on. This leads to a link or chain or relationships based on things connected mutually. This is called the law of Karma, of debts one owes to another, viz, a father's to a son, a son's to a father and so on. Because of past ṛñānubandha or a set of obligations, a particular relationship holds between two individuals during this life. Take the relationship of father and son. A father looks after the child till he is of age. Then the son has to fulfil his obligations towards his father. Father's obligations towards his parents and other dead elders are over when the son is born and to the son, when he is of age. There, the obligations of the son towards his parents and ancestors start and so he should give birth to a son to be free from this bond of obligations! Suppose a boy dies in young age? The boy's obligations to parents may have to be fulfilled in some other birth or may be their mutual accounts are closing. In the past birth, the parents may not have fulfilled certain obligations and they got this son to end the past accounts!

Pāṇḍuraṅga Swāmī wanted to start Narmadā Parikramaṇa but was inspired to first go south. He walked towards south inquiring of a saint called Gāṇḍā Mahārāja! He was told to go to Guñja in the Pāthari taluka of Mahārāṣṭra. This Gāṇḍā Mahārāja was himself a disciple of Paramahansa Parivrājaka (P.P.) Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī Swāmī Mahārāja who was the same as the one who had seen Pāṇḍuraṅga as a child and said, “He is my son” and Pāṇḍuraṅga became his disciple. Later Swāmī Mahārāja made Garuḍeśvara, a small village on the bank of the river Narmadā in Gujarat, his residence and place of penance!

Let us see how the law of destiny functions here! Śrī Vāsudevānandajī wanted Gāṇḍā Mahārāja to go through, edit, compile properly and finalise a composition in ‘Ovi’ meter of Marāṭhī! The composition was prepared in Marāṭhī by Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja and named ‘Śrī Guru-murti-caritra’. It was not a difficult task as such but it was difficult for Gāṇḍā Mahārāja!

Who was Gāṇḍā Mahārāja? He was a disciple of Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī. Swāmī Mahārāja happens to be one of the trio that represents Śrī Guru Dattātreya. The first of this trio of this Kaliyuga is Śrīpāda Śrīvallabha. The very famous mantra: “Digambarā, Digambarā Śrīpāda Vallabha Digambarā!” mentions this great sage. Śrīpāda is believed to be Śrī Guru Dattātreya himself. His place of pilgrimage is Kuravapura or Kurugaddi in Andhra Pradesh. It’s a sort of an island in the waters of the river Kṛṣṇā.

The second saint of the Datta trio is Śrī Nṛsimha Sarasvatī, the new birth of Śrīpāda. This saint is profusely worshipped all around Mahārāṣṭra. He is an incarnation of Śrīpāda himself and meant to fulfill whatever was left over by Śrīpāda! Śrī Nṛsimha Sarasvatī was born in a very pious Brahmin family to a mother who in her last birth was promised by Śrīpāda that he would be born to her as her son. Śrī Nṛsimha Sarasvatī uttered “Om” as his first sound! He renounced the world as a principle but passed his days in the life around. His place of pilgrimage is famous even today. It is Gāṇagāpura on the bank of Kṛṣṇā in the present Karnatak! “Śrī Guru Caritra” a highly read volume in Mahārāṣṭra is in Marāṭhī. The fifty two chapters are to be read in seven days if some desire is to be fulfilled! Even today, at least one chapter is read every day in many Mahārāṣṭriana families.

Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī was a Sanskrit scholar and is called Datta-śiṣya or a disciple of Śrī Gurudeva Datta himself. He was born in Māṇagāmva near Sāvantavāḍī, a place known to pilgrims of Śrī Datta. This Swāmiji made Garuḍeśvara, on the bank of river Narmadā in Gujarat, his place of propitiation.

Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja was a Brahmin from Talaṅgapur in the Surat district of Gujarat. When Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī was in Śinor, Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja took lessons in ‘Yoga’ and became an expert ‘haṭhayogī’. He made Guñja in Mahārāṣṭra his centre of activities.

As a rule, a saint should select a new area for himself. Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja was so disciplined that even Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī remarked “here is the first one who would not leave me half-way!” Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja served his Guru so devoutly that the Guru was pleased with him and he was initiated to “Sanyāsa” as Yogānanda Sarasvatī. Thus Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja got his literary assignment and he was at a loss as he did not have command over Marāṭhī language.

One day while he was contemplating over the assignment, his Guru told him during meditation, “Do not worry; a celibate (a brahmācārī) is approaching you”. It was the same moment when Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga got instructions that he should see Gāṇḍā Mahārāja! Such coincidences often occur.

Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja was a staunch devotee of his Guru. While the composition in Marāṭhī was being edited, Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga found some mistakes in the verse. The moment Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja heard this remark, he was red with anger and shouted ‘O celibate! whose mistakes are you pointing out?’ He was so furious that others around thought the celibate Pāṇḍuraṅga was finished! Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga however, appeased him saying, ‘I’m not showing Swāmījī’s mistake but only drawing attention to the flaw in the script! Such a mistake or flaw is called Mudrārākṣasa or ‘Printer’s devil’. It is also a famous pun in literary circles that the letters of the word ‘Sākṣara’ (or a literary composer) turn into

‘Rākṣasa’ (a devil) when the letters are reversed. Thus presence of mind of the young celibate saved the unpleasant consequence.

Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja was so much devoted to his Guru and had deep faith in him that whenever there was any conflict, he would seek guidance from his Guru. And that impressed young Pāṇḍuraṅga. He also began to turn to his Guru (Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī) for guidance. Once some people came to Gāṇḍā Mahārāja. They wanted to make a definite decision about the day for “Pitr-Śrāddha”, the ceremony in which offerings are made to dead forefathers. The issue was technical. Which ‘tithi’ (or particular day of the month) be taken for the performance of religious rites? There were two sets of almanacs viz. the Tilak one and the Nirṇayasāgara. The Tilak’s almanac follows Sāyana calculations while Nirṇayasāgara takes Nirṇaya system of astrologic calculations. In western countries, they follow ‘Sāyana’ system while in India, Nirṇaya system is popular and profusely employed in preparing almanacs. Just as in Gujarat, “Janmabhoomi” and “Sandesh” almanacs are commonly followed. Nirṇayasāgara is found in most of the families in Mahārāṣṭra. Both these systems have their own postulates and principles.

So this ticklish issue as to which almanac be followed was brought to Gāṇḍā Mahārāja. He directed them to Pāṇḍuraṅga Brahmcharī!

What did Pāṇḍuraṅga do? He was really a scholar of Sanskrit and could have discussed the strong points of both sides, but he knew that a debate would not be useful but might be harmful. So he remembered his Guru and replied immediately, “Those whose forefathers had passed away in the earlier half, should follow the old system while those whose forefathers had joined the majority in the later fortnight, should go by the new almanac. It may be noted here that second half of the month of Bhādrapada is known as ‘pitṛpakṣa- the half for the forefathers’. As the Tilak almanac would have this pitṛpakṣa earlier because of the difference in calculations, the rites were to be performed as to the time of death of the forefathers. Thus the pedantic tangle was easily resolved by the young Brahmācārī from Nāreśvara! He followed the basic pillar of Datta philosophy of avoiding confrontation and following a healthy combination and integration.

Before we return to Pāṇḍuraṅga’s Narmadā Parikramaṇa, we may note what he felt about Gāṇḍā Mahārāja. His feelings are expressed in the following verses.

ગાંડા સમ ગુરુભક્ત ના દીઠો બીજો ક્યાંય,  
વારિ જઈ તન્નામ પર વંદન કરું સદાય.

Gāṇḍā sama guru-bhakta nā, dīṭho bījo kyāmya  
Vārī jāum tannāma para Vandana karum sadāya!

Nowhere is seen a devotee of a Guru like Gāṇḍā Mahārāja. I am charmed by his name and bow down to him forever.

Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja breathed his last on Fāgaṇa Vada 12 V.S.1992 i.e. 1936 A.D. His religious seat in Guñja is now looked after by Śrī Cintāmaṇī Mahārāja.\*

### 3. CIRCUMAMBULATION OF THE RIVER NARMADĀ

(Narmadā Parikramaṇa)

Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga Swāmī started his Narmadā Parikramaṇa, taking leave of Śrī Gāṇḍā Mahārāja. During Parikramaṇa, his food consisted of jaggery with water. He walked and walked and once crossed eighty kilometers in a day! He caught fever which remained with him throughout the Parikramaṇa. The moment fever would lessen, he would start walking. Once he started his journey from Bharucha in the morning and reached Nāreśvara in the evening, Thus covering 50 kms.

During Parikramaṇa, he would meet other Parikramaṇavāsīs and try to serve them and listen to their woes. His brilliance attracted several people and some would say: ‘Bābā, why have you set out on this Parikramaṇa? You look well-to-do and happy, why do you go through such hardship?’

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\*He also passed away. Now is Channu Mahārāja looking after the sacred place.

Pāṇḍuraṅga would feel amused but reply naturally “Look, the whole world is groping about in search of happiness. while I have to find out unhappiness as I do not find unhappiness anywhere!” Of course, the listener would not get the hidden meaning of this philosophic statement. He would bow and pass by. How can one see misery when the sea of joy shines in the heart! Such a person finds divine appearance everywhere! The world remains the same as God created it but happiness or unhappiness depends upon one’s own view-point. For an awakened soul, the feel of final delight exists every where and at all times. After all what are vows or religious undertakings for? They should lead one to better understanding of total existence of the relationship of one’s role and the final objective to be kept in view and efforts to be made for.

What is after all Samādhi? It is a state of mind when everything around-whether physical, material or mental is properly controlled. There are no desires or cravings in the heart nor thoughts in mind. Every activity of the mind is directed in Samādhi to a definite goal which has no worldly limitations and leads to Sat-cit-ānanda or “Summum Bonum!” Even Śrī Śaṅkarācārya has said: यत्र यत्र मनो याति तत्र तत्र समाधेयं “yatra yatra mano yāti, tatra tatra samādheyam.” One should be in the state of samādhi whenever the mind wanders! That means all events or experiences are to be rendered into the state of Samādhi where mind thinks of the Nirguṇa



Brahma or amorphous universal soul! According to philosophy, the soul of a person is individual while it is to be submerged into the universal soul both of which have the same attributes. Only the individual soul is to be shorn of its limitations imposed by the body and its cravings. These cravings could be shed off when the mind is freed from them. This is to be done forcefully and continued for a long time before it becomes a habit for the mind not to be allured by worldly attractions but stay constantly with the final bliss.

It is not necessary for an ordinary man to renounce the world or put on a saffron robe or any such religious apparel but continue with worldly struggle from the position one is placed, carry out obligations efficiently. The only thing to be done as the Gītā says is “not to be personally interested or have a selfish attachment as to the end-product of any act or set of actions done. Let the actions have their natural results. Accept them as such without feeling joy or sorrow as the case may be!” But this is not so simple as it seems! To be and yet not to be, to see and yet not be affected mentally by what is seen and so on is very difficult and hence one has to practise continuously. Once such a state is reached, one has attained the stage of Samādhi as Ādya Śaṅkarācārya would look at it. This is real Karmayoga! This is the continuous fight between Jīva and Śīva, the individual and the Supreme Being! Any one can attain such a stage of Sthitapragñā, as visualized in the Gītā!

The path is rigorous, long and tedious. There is no other way except this. As the Upaniṣada's say 'Nānyah Panthāh Vidyate Ayanāya!' (there is no other road for the final march!)

A doubt would crop up here! Should not one renounce the world and go to a secluded place? Should not one join a mission of a particular religion or its sect? If one renounces the world and goes to a lonely place, he is relatively free. His obligations are few as are his needs and activities. Hence such a person is able to concentrate and make efforts for the goal better. He is not much restrained by outer factors. He has to face his inner ones or those he has circumscribed! He controls time and space!

A missionary is better placed than a man of the world as the former's obligations and goals are better defined and circumscribed. His self is of a higher order than that of a worldly man. His attachment is also of a wider nature. The shackles are less rigid. Still they are there. One may be so involved that he nourishes selfish interest for the mission and is coloured. But he is not trying to bridge the gulf between the 'micro' and the 'macro'. Whatever is there in the 'macro' exists in the 'micro' but has to be located and pulled out like the pearls from an ocean! The Universal Soul is not affected by what happens around or by consequences of a situation! The supra-sensory perceptions could be augmented and directed for final bliss! We shall leave the

discussion here for the seekers of knowledge to refer to works on philosophy, perception and Yoga.

A disciplined man undertakes a thing seriously and works it out meticulously. Parikramaṇa is a long journey, day in and day out. Once you take it up, behave like a real Parikramaṇavāsi! Do not give much importance to your body though you have to keep yourself physically fit. Enjoy the assignment mentally too!

Pāṇḍuraṅga clad in 'Kaupin', a waist-cloth, a big conical cap of a circus joker, with a black blanket on the shoulder, a solid bamboo stick in a hand! Moreover, the extra band of loin cloth, he would wind around his legs made him look like a strange creature! Add to this, a big shock of hair flying in the wind scattered on the face!

This strange traveller carried a small shoulder bag which contained a tongue cleaner, tooth-paste, a needle-like thing to prick out thorns, a booklet, or so, a small metallic box for jaggery and a tight tall pot for water! He desired to be a real ascetic and a renouncer mentally too! Mere giving up worldly dress and putting on saffron sheets did not mean renunciation or Sanyāsa. He wanted to be free from worldly happiness and misery. He took keen interest in the travellers around him, listened to their woes and helped them when possible. He was trying to be out of self which often boils down to self-centered and selfish activities. To minimise these, you have to reduce yourself to the minimum of needs

and cravings. For most of the days, his menu consisted of a morsel of jaggery and nectar of the Narmadā. Water is called 'Jivana' in Sanskrit and is really life- giving. It is food and medicine too! To keep oneself clean is the first step to avoid illness. Water is the best lubricant as well as a cathartic agent! It helps to get quick relief in case of blisters, burns and so on. Some say that urine is the best medicine for any disease to be employed in various ways and volumes!! They call it "water of life".

Mother Revā (river Narmadā) was always ready to be at service. Once he was indisposed and exhausted! He thought, he would avoid going to the water of the holy Narmadā for a bath! But he did not want to break his routine and somehow reached the stream. He had a dip and he felt better. Two or three more dips and he felt energetic! He began to feel hungry. Food is a must for life, but where was food? He began to look around! He saw a fresh loaf of Indian bread and a blob of butter! He began to wonder as to who had brought this? For whom this is meant? How can I touch it? Thinking thus he did not touch the bread and went ahead.

Again some distance away there was a loaf of bread but without butter this time! He said to himself, "Surely, mother Reva had come to feed me." He thanked God that supported him. He enjoyed the divine favour. This meant that God was at his back during his Parikramaṇa and this long travel around the Narmadā would end successfully under His care. Ways of Lord Almighty are

strange. A man with faith in the Almighty never gets disappointed. He may come as a visitor or a fellow traveller when one is lost!

Once Pāṇḍuraṅga found himself on a cross road. He took the wrong route and soon landed in a dense forest. There was no road but he kept on walking. After sometime, a wood-cutter came in sight. The wood-cutter said: "Where are you going, O saint? You seem to be a Parikramaṇavāsī. You are on a wrong track. Now follow me." Pāṇḍuraṅga tried to talk to him and found that he belonged to a nearby village. He was going to get opium. In a short while, the roofs of a village were seen. The wood-cutter went towards the river bank. Pāṇḍuraṅga thought that he would now go alone since he was on the regular road. He thought the wood-cutter must be coming behind after drinking water from the river. He looked back but there was no trace of anyone whatsoever! He began to wonder. So when he reached the village he located the opium-dealer and told him to look out for a wood-cutter who may come to him for buying opium. He also requested him to direct the wood-cutter to the Dharmasālā, a free resting place. Swāmījī spent so me time there to meet in order to see the wood-cutter but he did not come! It was a messenger of God, thought Pāṇḍuraṅga and his faith in divine help strengthened.

#### **4. INCIDENTS OF WORLDLY LIFE**

Parikramāvāsīs or pilgrims on feet are given shelter in the Badwāni State where the forest begins. The Parikramāvāsīs are advised not to move on during the rainy season. Arrangements for staying are made for all such Parikramāvāsīs by the State authorities, who serve free food too! On the day when the rainy season begins, the river Narmadā is propitiated in the royal tradition with splendour and grandeur. When Pāṇḍuraṅga reached the place, he was told that the old king had died leaving a five year old child. The state was looked after by the queen's brother. This maternal uncle of the child-king thought of having a very simple ceremony. The young prince did not like this. He addressed the administrator, the maternal uncle thus: "Has father's wealth reduced to cypher in these few days? Every year the celebrations were made with stately arrangements for which there used to be rush in preparations. You seem to be slow. I don't like this." He was adamant that traditions of the state must be tacitly followed. It was a real show of royal spirit in spending on religious functions laid down by forefathers. There was no place for thriftiness in such public festivals.

## 5. AMONG THE SĀDHUS

During the circumambulation of the river Narmadā, he came in touch with a group of Sādhus. They were critical about his dress and ways of worship and daily routine. Some of them wanted to put him to test. One of them said, “O young celibate, you have put on a langot or a loincloth! Do you know the Mantra or spell or the verse from the scriptures on the loincloth? Guru Mahārāja was a ready-witted person with high literary skills. He said, “Why not? Do you want to hear the verse? In which language?” The sādhus said, “In Hindī”. Bāpjī instantly composed a couplet and said,

लोभकी लंगोटी, लालचका धागा,  
दुनिया ठगत फिरे लिये बेरागा.

‘Lobha Kī Laṅgoṭī, Lālaca Kā Dhāgā,  
Duniyā Ṭhagata Phire Liye Berāgā!!’

‘The loincloth is of avarice and greed threaded by allurements; one takes up renunciation to deceive the world!’.

It was shocking for the Sādhus who had come to ridicule Bāpjī but they themselves got ridiculed! The young traveller was exposing the insincere wise-cracks! Some of the Sādhus were impressed favourably and showed respect to this young celebrate! This admixture of solemnity and humour existed side by side in this Saint of Nāresvara and was at times displayed!

There was a group of travellers intending to cross the river. This was about 13 miles from Vimalēśvara. All of them got into a boat. Pāṇḍuraṅga Swāmī also joined them. Soon the boat sailed into the stream. The current was powerful and the boat began to swing heavily. There were whirls at the conjunction and the boat seemed to sink. All Parikramāvāsīs were frightened. They began to pray to mother Narmadā to protect them. The desire to live is very strong at such moments! One has only to experience such a thing! One becomes very sincere while praying in such a situation. Emotions get strengthened by the will power, the will to survive. Even intensity of the feeling is very high.

While every body was a prey to fear, Avadhūtājī did not show any trace of fear. Other Parikramāvāsīs began to say, “Why are you sitting stiff thus? Why don’t you recite the name of Revā at least once!” Avadhūtājī said: “What is there to lose even if mother Revā swallows me and what is there to be gained even if I reach the other bank? Is it not proper that the mother Revā takes us into her lap for that is what this Parikramaṇa is for!” Thus saying he began to smile! Others took him to be mad to say such words but the saint was really praying silently, sincerely and solemnly. He now began to mutter the last stanza of “Vande Narmadām” with saturated devotion!



The full stanza reads as under:

भुक्तिमुक्तिप्रदां	रङ्गमोदप्रदाम्
दुष्ट जनदुःखदां	भक्तजनसौख्यदाम् ।
कलिमलीघापहां	त्रिविधतापापहां
शिवात्मजां	जनिमृतिभञ्जिकां
परदां फलदां हर्म्यदाम् ॥	वन्दे नर्मदाम् !

Bhukti-mukti-pradām	Raṅgāmodapradām
Duṣṭajanaduhkhadām	bhaktajana saukhyadām
Kalimalaughāpahām	trividhataṭāpāpahām
Śivātmajāṁ	jani-mṛti-bhañjikām
paradām faladām	harmyadām    Vande Narmadām!

“I bow down to the Narmadā who is the giver of prosperity and liberation, the bestower of joy to Raṅga (Pāṇḍuraṅga), the giver of misery to the evil ones while happiness to the devoted ones; the remover of the sins of this kali age; destroyer of three types of miseries, the daughter of Śiva, destroyer of birth and death; bestower of the highest fruits, shelter; I lie prostrate before the Narmadā”.

The prayer began to hum in the air and the boat moved on quickly. At the end of the prayer the boat was near the bank of the Abode of Hari which is incidentally the final resort of a human being! The crossing was safe and so the travellers began to bow to this saint too before moving on.

It was at Bharuch that people knew Avadhūta had arrived. They had come to bow Revered Śrī Candrasekhara, the Śaṅkarācārya of Śārādāpīṭha who was camping there. He came to know of Avadhūtajī's arrival. He was acquainted with Pāṇḍuraṅga even from old days when he was Valāme. Revered one was quick-witted and fond of Sanskrit. So H.H. Swāmī Śrī Śaṅkarācārya had love and respect for this young Saint. Now he was meeting Pāṇḍuraṅga after his consecration as the Head of a Seat of Śaṅkarācārya! This position of Śaṅkarācārya is very much honoured by the Hindus of all sects. Even today, the occupants of the four main seats of Dwārakā, Kāñcī, Badri-Kedāra and Śṛṅgerī are much highly educated and scholarly persons.

Revered Śrī Candrasekharajī was extremely happy to see this young celibate who was a very astute scholar of Sanskrit! He was overwhelmed with good feelings for this Avadhūta and said, Come, come, O Celibate!". He made him sit near him. They asked about one another's well-being! Avadhūta said, he was on Parikramaṇa and would reach Nāreśvara in a day or two! But H.H. Śaṅkarācāryajī did not pay attention to this and made a sudden proposal! "Look celibate, how much would the seat of Śaṅkarācārya be glorified if a celibate and a staunch ascetic like you would stay here with me. At present I would offer our seat at Prabhāsapāṭaṇa, where the famous temple of Somanātha, the jyotir-liṅga