

LIVES OF INDIAN SAINTS

I read a bit about the saints of India in a school. We were not taught in a manner whereby one could get composite knowledge about Indian saints, the sole purpose was to mug up and get through the exams. Ever since I left school, in my subconscious mind, there was a desire to find a book that told me about Indian saints. This desire was fulfilled 23 years later when I found a book “Lives of Saints” by Swami Sivananda.

What is happiness or knowledge if not shared? So I am reproducing the book for you. My comments are in brackets. You are reading this essay due to the superlative efforts of my assistant Ajay who has typed some eighty pages. This essay is dedicated to all Indian saints particularly Veda Vyasa, Sankara, Samartha Ramdas, Namdev, Mirabai, Guru Govind Singh, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Narayan Guru, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharshi and all Bharityas who have sacrificed their lives for the protection of Bharat. Before you go ahead I must say that no civilization, culture can survive if its people adopt the path of non-violence read to mean not retaliating even when you are attacked.

Quoting Swami Sivananda “**Who is a saint?** He who lives in God or the Eternal, who is free from egoism, likes and dislikes, selfishness, vanity, mine-ness, lust, greed and anger, who is endowed with equal vision, balanced mind, mercy, tolerance, righteousness and cosmic love, and who has divine knowledge is a saint.

Saints and sages only can become real advisors to the kings, because they are selfless and possess the highest wisdom. They only can improve the morality of the masses. They alone can show the way to eternal bliss and mortality. Shivaji had Swami Ramdas as his adviser, King Dasaratha had Maharshi Vasishtha as his advisor”.

I have reproduced the chapters as they appear in the book. These are -

1. Saints of Ancient Times.
2. The Prophets.
3. The Acharyas.
4. The Saivite Acharyas of Tamil Nadu.
5. The Alwars or Vaishnava Mystics of South India.
6. Saints of Maharashtra.
7. Saints of North India.
8. Women Saints.
9. The Punjabi Sardar / Sikh Gurus.
10. Saints of Recent Times.

At the beginning of each chapter I give the list of saints as they appear in the book. In my wisdom I have covered the lives of the more important saints where I have focused more on their early life, evolution, teachings and less on miracles. Some well known saints have not been included, for which I have no answer and Swami Sivananda is no more.

The saints of Ancient Times were Maharshi Vyasa, Sage Yajnavalkya, Yogi Bhusanda, Dattatreya, Yogi Jaigisavya, Thirumula Nayanar.

MAHARSHI VYASA

In ancient days, our forefathers, the Rishis of Aryavarta, went to the forest to do Tapasya during the four months following Vyasa Purnima – a particular and important day in the Hindu calendar. On this memorable day, Vyasa, an incarnation of the Lord Himself, began to write his Brahma Sutras. Our ancient Rishis did this Tapasya in caves and forests. But times have changed and such facilities are not common nowadays although Grihasthas and Rajas are wanting who are able and willing to place at the disposal of the members of the fourth Ashrama such help and facilities as they can afford. The forests and caves have given place to the rooms of Sadhus in their own Gurudwaras and Mutts. One has of necessity to suit himself to time and place; and change of place and situation should not be allowed to make such a difference in our mental attitudes. Chaturmas begins from the Vyasa Purnima Day when, according to our Shastras, we are expected to worship Vyasa and the Brahma Vidya Gurus and begin the study of the Brahma Sutras and other ancient books on 'wisdom'.

Our mythology speaks of many Vyasa; and it is said that there had been twenty-eight Vyasas before the present **Vyasa-Krishna Dvaipayana** took his birth at the end of Dvapara Yuga. Krishna Dvaipayana was born of Parasara Rishi through the Matsyakanya-Satyavathi Devi - under some peculiar and wonderful circumstances. Parasara was a great Jnani and one of the supreme authorities on astrology and his book Parasara Hora is still a textbook on astrology. He has also written a Smriti known as Parasara Smriti which is held in such high esteem that it is quoted by our present-day writers on sociology and ethics. Parasara came to know that a child, conceived at a particular Ghatika or moment of time, would be born as the greatest man of the age, nay as an Amsa of Lord Vishnu Himself. On that day, Parasara was travelling in a boat and he spoke to the boatman about the nearing of that auspicious time. The boatman had a daughter who was of age and awaiting marriage. He was impressed with the sanctity and greatness of the Rishi and offered his daughter in marriage to Parasara. Our Vyasa was born of this union and his birth is said to be due to the blessing of Lord Siva Himself who blessed the union of a sage with a Jnani of the highest order. Although of a low caste.

At a very tender age Vyasa gave out to his parents the secret of his life that he should go to the forest and do Akhanda Tapas. His mother at first did not agree, but later gave permission on one important condition that he should appear before her whenever she wished for his presence. This itself shows how far-sighted the parents and the son were. Puranas say that Vyasa took initiation at the hands of his twenty-first Guru, sage Vasudeva. He studied the Shastras under sages Sanaka and Sanandana and others.

He arranged the Vedas for the good of mankind and wrote the Brahma Sutras for the quick and easy understanding of the Srutis; he also wrote the Mahabharata to enable

women, Sudras and other people of lesser intellect to understand the highest knowledge in the easiest way. Vyasa wrote the eighteen Puranas and established the system of teaching them through Upakhyanas or discourses. In this way, he established the three paths, viz., Karma, Upasana and Jnana. To him is also attributed the fact that he continued the line of his mother and that Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura were his progeny. Vyasa's last work was the Bhagavata which he undertook at the instigation of Devarshi Narada who once came to him and advised him to write it as, without it, his goal in life would not be reached.

Vyasa is considered by all Hindus as a Chiranjivi, one who is still living and roaming throughout the world for the well-being of his devotees. It is said that he appears to the true and the faithful and that Jagadguru Sankaracharya had his Darshan in the house of sage Mandana Misra and that he appeared to many others as well. Thus, in short, Vyasa lives for the welfare of the world. Let us pray for his blessings on us all and on the whole world.

Everybody knows that there are six important systems of thought developed by our ancients known as the Shad Darshanas or the six orthodox schools of philosophy, viz., Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta. Each system has a different shade of opinion. **Later, these thoughts became unwieldy, and to regulate them, the Sutras came into existence,** Treatises were written in short aphorisms, called "Sutras" in Sanskrit, meaning clues for memory or aids to long discussions on every topic. In the Padma Purana, the definition of a Sutra is given. It says that a Sutra should be concise and unambiguous; but the brevity was carried to such an extent that the Sutra has become unintelligible and particularly so in the Brahma Sutras. Today we find the same Sutra being interpreted in a dozen ways. The Brahma Sutras written by Vyasa or Badarayana for that was the name which he possessed in addition are also known as Vedanta Sutras as they deal with Vedanta only. They are divided into four chapters, each chapter being subdivided again into four sections. It is interesting to note that they begin and end with Sutras which read together mean "the inquiry into the real nature of Brahman has no return "; meaning that "going by that way one reaches Immortality and no more returns to the world" About the authorship of these Sutras, tradition attributes it to Vyasa. Sankaracharya, in his Bhashya, refers to Vyasa as the author of the Gita and the Mahabharata, and to Badarayana as the author of the Brahma Sutras. His followers-Vachaspathi, Anandagiri and others identify the two as one the same person, while Ramanuja and others attribute the authorship of all three to Vyasa himself. The oldest commentary on the Brahma Sutras is by Sankaracharya; he was later followed by Ramanuja, Vallabha, Nimbarka, Madhva and others who established their own schools of thought. All the five Acharyas mostly agree on two points, viz., (i) that Brahman is the cause of this world and (ii) that knowledge of Brahman leads to final emancipation. But they differ amongst themselves on the nature of this Brahman, the relation between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul, and the condition of the soul in the state of release. According to some, Bhakti and not Jnana, as interpreted by Sankara, is the chief means of attaining liberation.

Vyasa's life is a unique example of one born for the dissemination of spiritual knowledge. His writings inspire us and the whole world even to this day. May we all live in the spirit of his writings !

(For all those who believe that upper and lower caste had this Chinese wall between them please note that Vyasa's mother was of low caste. Vyasa would be remembered for arranging the Vedas and writing the Holy Geeta. When ever I am confused or feeling low I go the best friend ie the Geeta. I go to any page, after an hour reading I feel better with a clear mind. A friend tells me that everytime she reads the Geeta she learns something new, comes out with a different interpretation).

SAGE YAJNAVALKYA

The name of Yajnavalkya of Mithila stands distinguished both in the Srutis and in the Smritis. Yajnavalkya is especially known for his unsurpassed spiritual wisdom and power. The seer of a Veda Samhita from Bhagavan Surya, the revealer of Brahma Jnana to Janaka, Maitrey! And other, Yajnavalkya hails supreme among sages of sacred memory. As to his obtaining the Shukla Yajurveda Samhita from Bhagavan Surya, there is the following history.

Yajnavalkya was the son of the sister of Mahamuni Vaishampayana, the Vedacharya of the Taittiriya section. He was studying the Taittiriya Samhita from Vaishampayana who was also his Guru. Vaishampayana had many other disciples too and they all were students of the Taittiriya Shakha.

Once all the Rishis decided to form an association near the Meru mountain and made a rule that any Rishi who absented himself at the appointed hour should incur the sin of Brahmahatya (the sin of killing a Brahmin) for seven days. On that appointed day fell the Sraddha ceremony of Vaishampayana's father. Vaishampayana thought, "Somehow I have to perform my father's ceremony. If the sin of Brahmahatya comes to me, my disciples will observe the expiatory penance therefor". So Vaishampayana did not attend the meeting of the Rishis. And accordingly he incurred the sin of Brahmahatya.

Then Vaishampayana said to his disciples, "Now I have to expiate this great sin of Brahmahatya. Therefore, you all will observe, for my sake, an expiatory penance for seven days".

At once Yajnavalkya stood up and said, "O Guru! All these are poor-spirited young students. They will not be able to undergo such a hard penance. So, instead of all, I myself alone shall observe it in the manner in which nobody else can". Vaishampayana told Yajnavalkya not to undertake it alone. But Yajnavalkya persisted. The preceptor was offended at this audacious attitude of the disciple and said, "O proud one, you are very conceited. You get away from me. Enough of you who is disposed to despise wise Brahmins. Give back to me immediately whatever you have learnt from me".

Upon the order of the Guru, Yajnavalkya, the son of Devarata, vomited out the collection of the Yajus in the form of food. The other disciples ate that food taking the form of the Tittiri birds, because they were very eager to receive the same. They then had the direct revelation of those Yajurveda collections. As the Tittiri birds ate this Veda, it is thenceforth called the Taittiriya Yajurveda. It is also known as Krishna (black) Yajurveda on account of its being vomited substance.

Then Yajnavalkya determined not to have any human Guru thereafter. Thus he began to propitiate the Sun-God, Surya. Yajnavalkya worshipped and extolled the Sun, the master of the Vedas, for the purpose of acquiring the fresh Vedic portions not known to his preceptor, Vaishampayana.

Yajnavalkya said, “Prostration to the glorious Aditya, who in the form of the Atman, abides in all beings. I bow to Him who surrounds all like Akasa, who is one and not separated or distanced by limiting conditions. O Great God, O Creator, I contemplate upon that glowing sphere which lights and warms the whole worlds ! O God who burns all miseries wrought by unrighteous activities, who burns ignorance, which is the seed of activity! O Lord, I worship Thy lotus-like feet praised and worshipped by the rules of the three worlds. Give me those portions of the Veda which are not known to others”.

The Sun-God, the glorious Lord Hari, pleased with Yajnavalkya’s penance, assumed the form of a horse and taught the sage such fresh portions of the Yajurveda as were not known to any other. This portion of the Yajurveda goes by the name of Shukla Yajurveda. It is also known as Vajasaneya Yajurveda, because it was evolved in great rapidity by Surya in the form of a horse through his manes. Yajnavalkya divided this Vajasaneya Yajurveda again into fifteen branches, each branch comprising hundreds of Yajus Mantras. Kanva, Madhyandina and others learnt those branches.

Yajnavalkya married two wives. One was Maitreyi and the other Katyayani. Of the two, Maitreyi was a Brahmavadini. When Yajnavalkya wished to divide his property between the two wives before starting for the fourth Ashrama of his life, Maitreyi asked whether she could become immortal through wealth. Yajnavalkya replied that there was no hope of immortality through wealth and that she would only become one among the many who were well to do on earth. On hearing this, Maitreyi requested Yajnavalkya to teach her what he considered as the best. Then Yajnavalkya elaborately described to her the sole greatness of the Absolute Self, the nature of Its existence, the way of attaining infinite knowledge and immortality etc. **This immortal conversation between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi is recorded in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.** The central theme of the discourse is this: “All things are dear, not for their sake, but for the sake of the Self. This Self alone exists everywhere. It cannot be understood or known, for It alone is the Under stander and the Knower. Its nature cannot be said to be positively as such. It is realized through endless denials as ‘not this, not this’. The Self is self-luminous, indestructible, unthinkable”.

The other wife Katyayani the daughter of Bharadhwaja, was of common intelligence, and through her Yajnavalkya had three sons Chandrakanta, Mahamegha and Vijaya.

Yajnavalkya, though a great Brahmajani, was a great Karmakandi too. He caused many Yajnas to be performed and himself became the Acharya of those great Yajnas. He was a celebrated Srotriya and a Brahma-nishtha Guru. Once King Janaka of Videha wanted to know from which real Brahma-nishtha to receive Brahma Vidya. In order to find out who was the real Brahma-nishtha, Janaka performed a huge Bahudakshina sacrifice to which all the Rishis from far and wide were invited. And he offered one thousand cows with their calves, all their horns beings decked with enormous gold. Then he proclaimed to the assembled ones, “Whosoever is the best Brahmana amongst you may drive these cows home”. None dared to get up and take away the cows as they were afraid of censure by the others. But Yajnavalkya stood up and asked his disciple Samasravas to drive the cows home.

The other Brahmanas got angry and said to one another, How can he declare himself to be the best among us? Thereupon several Rishis challenged Yajnavalkya with many questions on transcendental matters to all of which Yajnavalkya gave prompt reply. There was a great debate in which Yajnavalkya won over all the others. Janaka was convinced that Yajnavalkya was the best Brahma-nishtha and received Brahma Vidya from him thereafter.

The third and the fourth chapters of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad abound with the great philosophical teachings of Yajnavalkya. Yajnavalkya was also the author of the famous Yajnavalkya Smriti. His other works are Yajnavalkya Shakha, Pratijna Sutra, Satapatha Brahmana, and Yoga-Yajnavalkya.

At the sacrifice of Janaka, there was an exchange of words between Yajnavalkya and Vaishampayana. But on hearing that Yajnavalkya had obtained a fresh Veda from the Sun-God, Vaishampayana was much pleased and he requested Yajnavalkya to teach that Veda to his own disciples also. Yajnavalkya consented and taught his Veda to the disciples of Vaishampayana. In the end, Yajnavalkya took Vidvat Sannyasa and retired to the forest.

Yajnavalkya was one of the greatest sages ever known. We find him arguing with and overcoming even his teacher Uddalaka at the court of Janaka. His precepts as contained in the Upanishads stand foremost as the crest-jewel of the highest teachings on Brahma Vidya.

DATTATREYA

Anasuya is generally quoted as the model of chastity. She was the wife of Atri Maharishi, a great sage and one of the sapta Rishis. She was well established in Pativrata Dharma. She served her husband with intense devotion. She did severe Tapas for a very long time in order to beget sons equal to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

Once Narada took a small ball of iron-the size of a gram-grain-to Sarasvati and said to her, “O Sarasvati Devi! Please fry this iron ball. I will take this iron-ball-gram during my travel”. Sarasvati laughed and said, “ O Rishi Narada! How can this iron ball be fried? How can this be eaten?” Narada afterwards went to Mahalakshmi and Parvati and requested them to fry the iron ball. They also laughed at Narada Rishi Then Narada said, “O Devis! See, I will get it fried by Anasuya, wife of Atri Maharishi, a great Pativrata who lives in the earth-plane”.

Then Narada came to Anasuya and requested her to fry the iron-ball-gram. Anasuya put the iron ball in the frying pan, meditated on the form of her husband and put a few drops of water which were used in washing the feet of her husband on the iron ball. The iron ball was at once fried. Narada went to Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati, ate before them the fried iron ball-gram and gave them also a little of it. He greatly praised the glory of Anasuya and her chastity. Then Narada resolved to fulfil the wish of Anasuya to beget sons equal to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

Narada said to Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati: “You also could have fried the iron ball, if you all had done service to your husbands with faith, sincerity and devotion. Make a request to your husbands to test Anasuya’s Pativrata Dharma”.

Then Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati requested their husbands to test the Pativrata Dharma of Anasuya, wife of Atri Maharishi, and ask her to give them Nirvana Bhiksha, that is, to give them alms in a naked condition.

The Tri-Murtis, through Jnana-Drishti, came to know of the action of Narada and the Tapas and the wish of Anasuya. They agreed. The Tri-murtis put on the garb of Sannyasins, appeared before Anasuya and asked her to give them Nirvana Bhiksha. Anasuya was in a great dilemma. She could not say ‘No’ to the Bhikshus. She had to maintain her Pativrata Dharma also. She meditated on the form of her husband, took refuge in his feet and sprinkled over the three Sannyasins a few drops of water which were used for washing the feet of her husband. The Tri-Murtis were converted into three children on account of the glory of the Charanamrita. At the same time, there was accumulation of milk in the breast of Anasuya. She thought that those children were her own children and fed them with the milk in a nude state and put them to the cradle. She was eagerly expecting the arrival of her husband who had gone for taking his bath.

As soon as Atri Rishi came back home, Anasuya related to him all that had happened during his absence, placed the three children at his feet and worshipped him. But Atri knew all this already through his divine vision. He embraced all the three children. The three children became one child with two feet, one trunk, three heads and six hands. Atri blessed his wife and informed her that the Tri-Murtis themselves had assumed the forms of the three children to gratify her wish.

Narada went to Brahma-Loka, Vaikuntha and Kailasa and informed Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati that their husbands had been turned into children through the

power of the Pativrata Dharma of Anasuya when they asked her Nirvana Bhiksha and they would not return unless the Devis asked for Bhartri Bhiksha (Bhiksha of husband) from Atri. Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati assumed the forms of ordinary women, appeared before Atri and asked for Pati Bhiksha : “O Rishi, kindly give us back our husbands”. Atri Rishi duly honoured the three ladies and with folded hands prayed to them that his wish and the wish of Anasuya should be fulfilled. Then the Tri-Murtis appeared in their true forms before Atri and said, “This child will be a great sage according to your word and will bear the name of Dattatreya”. Then they disappeared.

Dattatreya attained manhood. As he had the rays of the Tri-Murtis, and as he was a great Jnani, all the Rishis and ascetics worshipped him. He was gentle, peaceful and amiable. He was always followed by a great multitude of people. Dattatreya tried to get rid of them, but his endeavors were all in vain. Once when he was surrounded by many people, he entered a river for bathing and he did not come out of it for three days. He entered into Samadhi inside the water. On the third day, he came out and found that the people were still sitting on the banks of the river awaiting his return. He did not succeed in getting rid of the people by this method.

So Dattatreya adopted another plan. He created a beautiful girl and a bottle of wine out of his Yogic power. He came out of the waters holding the girl in one hand and the bottle of wine in the other. The people thought that Dattatreya had fallen from his Yoga and so they left him and went away.

Dattatreya threw away all his personal possessions, even the scanty clothing he had, and became an Avadhuta. He went out preaching and teaching the truths of Vedanta. Dattatreya taught his Gita, named Avadhuta Gita, to Lord Subrahmanya. This is a most valuable book that contains the truths and secrets of Vedanta and the direct experiences of Self-realization.

Once, while Dattatreya was roaming in a forest happily, he met king Yadu, who on seeing Dattatreya so happy asked him the secrets of his happiness and also the name of his Guru. Dattatreya said that the Atma alone was his Guru and yet he had learned wisdom from twenty-four individuals and that they were therefore his Gurus. Dattatreya then mentioned the names of his twenty-four Gurus and spoke of the wisdom that he had learnt from each. Dattatreya said: “ The names of my twenty-four teachers are :-

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| 1. Earth | 9. Python | 17. Dancing girl Pingala |
| 2. Water | 10. Ocean | 18. Raven |
| 3. Air | 11. Moth | 19. Child |
| 4. Fire | 12. Honey-gatherer | 20. Maiden |
| 5. Sky | 13. Bee | 21. Serpent |
| 6. Moon | 14. Elephant | 22. Arrow-maker |
| 7. Sun | 15. Deer | 23. Spider |
| 8. Pigeon | 16. Fish | 24. Beetle |

1. I have learnt patience and doing good to others from the earth, for it endures every injury that man commits on its surface and yet it does him good by producing crops, trees, etc.
2. From water I have learnt the quality of purity. Just as the pure water cleanses other, so also the sage, who is pure and free from selfishness, lust, egoism, anger, greed, etc., purifies all those who come in contact with him.
3. The air is always moving through various objects, but it never gets attached to anyone of them; so I have learnt from the air to be without attachment, though I move with many people in this world.
4. Just as fire burns bright, so also the sage should be glowing with the splendor of his knowledge and Tapas.
5. The air, the stars, the clouds, etc., are all contained in the sky, but the sky does not come in contact with any of them. I have learnt from the sky that the Atma is all pervading and yet it has no contact with any object.
6. The moon is in itself always complete, but appears to decrease or increase, on an account of the varying shadow of the earth upon the moon. I have learnt from this that the Atma is always perfect and changeless and that it is only the Upadhis or limiting adjuncts that cast shadows upon it.
7. Just as the sun, reflected in various pots of water, appears as so many different reflections, so also, Brahman appears different because of the Upadhis (bodies) caused by its reflection through the mind. This is the lesson I have learnt
8. I once saw a pair of pigeons with their young birds. A fowler spread a net and caught the young birds. The mother pigeon was very much attached to her children. She did not care to live, so she fell into the net and was caught. The male Pigeon was attached to the female pigeon, so he also fell into the net and was caught. From this I learnt that attachment was the cause of bondage.
9. The python does not move about for its food. It remains contented with whatever it gets and lies in one place. From this I have learnt to be unmindful of food and to be contented with whatever I get to eat (Ajahara Vritti).
10. Just as the ocean remains unmoved even though hundreds of rivers fall into it, so also, the wise man should remain unmoved among all sorts of temptations, difficulties and troubles. This is the lesson I have learnt from the ocean.
11. Just as the moth, being enamoured of the brilliance of the fire, falls into it and is burnt up, so also, a passionate man who falls in love with a beautiful girl comes to grief. To control the sense of sight and to fix the mind on the Self is the lesson I have learnt from the moth.
12. Just as black bee sucks the honey from different flowers and does not suck it from only one flower, so also I take only a little food from one house and a little from another house and thus appease my hunger (Madhukari Bhiksha or Madhukari Vritti). I am not a burden on the householder.
13. Bees collect honey with great trouble, but a hunter comes and takes the honey easily. Even so, people hoard up wealth and other things with great difficulty, but they have to leave them all at once and depart when the Lord of Death takes hold of them. From this I have learnt the lesson that it is useless to hoard things.

14. The male elephant, blinded by lust, falls into a pit covered over with grass, even at the sight of a paper-made female elephant. It gets caught, enchained and tortured by the goad. Even so, passionate men fall in the traps of women and come to grief. Therefore, one should destroy lust. This is the lesson I have learnt from the elephant.
15. The deer is enticed and trapped by the hunter through its love of music. Even so, a man is attracted by the music of women of loose character and brought to destruction. One should never listen to lewd songs. This is the lesson I have learnt from the deer.
16. Just as a fish that is covetous of food falls an easy victim to the bait, so also, the man who is greedy of food, who allows his sense of taste to overpower him, loses his independence and easily gets ruined. The greed for food must therefore be destroyed. It is the lesson that I have learnt from the fish.
17. There was a dancing girl named Pingala in the town of Videha. She was tired of looking out for customers one night. She became hopeless. Then she decided to remain content with what she had and then she had sound sleep. I have learnt from that fallen woman the lesson that the abandonment of hope leads to contentment.
18. A raven picked up a piece of flesh. It was pursued and beaten by other birds. It dropped the piece of flesh and attained peace and rest. From this I have learnt the lesson that a man in the world undergoes all sorts of troubles and miseries when he runs after sensual pleasures and that he becomes as happy as the bird when he abandons the sensual pleasures.
19. The child who sucks milk is free from all cares, worries and anxieties, and is always cheerful. I have learnt the virtue of cheerfulness from the child.
20. The parents of a young girl had gone in search of a proper bridegroom for her. The girl was alone in the house. During the absence of the parents, a party of people came to the house to see her on a similar mission. She received the party herself. She went inside to husk the paddy. While she was husking, the glass bangles on both hands made a tremendous jingling noise. The wise girl reflected thus: "The party will detect, by the noise of the bangles, that I am husking the paddy myself and that my family is too poor to engage others to get the work done. Let me break all my bangles except two on each hand". Accordingly, she broke all the bangles except two on each hand. Even those two bangles created much noise. She broke one more bangle in each hand. There was no further noise though she continued husking. I have learnt from the girl's experience the following: Living among many would create discord, disturbance, dispute and quarrel. Even among two persons, there might be unnecessary words or strife. The ascetic or the Sannyasin should remain alone in solitude.
21. A serpent does not build its hole. It dwells in the holes dug out by others. Even so, an ascetic or a Sannyasin should not build a home for himself. He should live in the caves and temples built by others. This is the lesson that I have learnt from the snake.
22. The mind of an arrow-maker was once wholly engrossed in sharpening and straightening an arrow. While he was thus engaged, a king passed before his

shop with his whole retinue. After some time, a man came to the artisan and asked him whether the king had passed by his shop. The artisan replied that he had not noticed anything. The fact was that the artisan's mind had been so solely absorbed in his work that he had not known the king's passing before his shop. I have learnt from the artisan the quality of intense concentration of mind.

23. The spider pours out of its mouth long threads and weaves them into cobwebs. It gets itself entangled in the net of its own making. Even so, man makes a net of his own ideas and gets entangled in it. The wise man should therefore abandon all worldly thoughts and think of Brahman only. This is the lesson I have learnt from the spider.
24. The Bhringi or the beetle catches hold of a worm, puts it in its nest and gives it a sting. The poor worm, always fearing the return of the beetle and the sting, and thinking constantly of the beetle, becomes a beetle itself. Whatever form a man constantly thinks of, he attains in course of time. As a man thinks, so he becomes. I have learnt from the beetle and the worm to turn myself into Atma by contemplating constantly on It and thus to give up all attachment to the body and attain Moksha or liberation”.

King Yadu was highly impressed by the teachings of Dattatreya. He abandoned the world and practised constant meditation on the Self. Dattatreya was absolutely free from intolerance or prejudice of any kind. He learnt wisdom from whatever source it came. All seekers after wisdom should follow the example of Dattatreya.

THIRUMULA NAYANAR

Thirumula Nayanar was a great Yogi in Kailas. He had all the eight major Siddhis through the grace of Nandi, the Vahana of Lord Siva. He was a friend of Agastya Muni. He came down from Kailas and stayed in Kashi. Then he went to Chidambaram and Thiruvavaduthurai and other places near Madras. He worshipped Lord Siva in the temple at Thiruvavaduthurai and stayed there for some time.

Once Thirumula Nayanar went to a garden on the banks of the river Cauvery. There he saw the dead body of a caretaker of a herd of cows. He noticed that all the cows surrounded the dead body of the cowherd and were crying bitterly. This touched the heart of Thirumular. He pitied the cows very much. He left his body in a certain place and entered the dead body of the cowherd. He looked after the cows throughout the day and sent them back to their respective houses. The wife of the cowherd, who was not aware of the death of her husband, invited Thirumular who was wearing the physical body of her husband. Thirumular refused. He wanted to enter his own body. When he searched for his body, it was not found in its place. Then he thought it was all the grace of Lord Siva. With the body of the cowherd, he went to Aduthuraj and sat underneath an Asvattha tree on the western side of the temple and wrote a valuable book called

Thirumantiram in Tamil. It is a book of three hundred verses which contain the essence of the vedas.

The Prophets

Chapter 2

The saints under this chapter are Parsvanatha, Buddha, Mahavir, Guru Nanak. I have covered Parsvanatha, Mahavir and Guru Nanak.

PARSVANATHA

Parsva is regarded as an incarnation of Indra. He was the son of king Visvasena of Kashi, a descendant of the Ikshvaku family, and queen Bama Devi, daughter of King Mahipala. He was the twenty-third Tirthankara. He was born on the eleventh day of the dark fortnight in the month of Pousha in the year 872 B.C. Parsvanatha began to practice the twelve vows of a householder when he was only eight years old.

Prince Parsva was now sixteen years old. He was sitting on the throne. His father Visvasena said, "My son, in order to continue our celebrated royal dynasty, you must marry now. At the desire of Nabhi Raja, Rishabha had to marry".

Parsvanatha was very much frightened when he heard the words of his father. He said, "My life-period will not be so extensive as that of Rishabha. I am to live only a few score years. I have already wasted sixteen years in boyish sports. I must enter the order in my thirtieth year. Should I then have a married life for so short a period in the hope of getting pleasures which are, after all, only imperfect, transient and illusory?"

Parsvanatha's heart was filled with a spirit of renunciation. He reflected within himself : "For long years I enjoyed the status of Indra and yet the lust for pleasures did not decrease. Enjoyment of pleasures only increases the lust for pleasures, just as the addition of fuel only increases the virulence of fire. Pleasures at the time of enjoyment are pleasant, but their consequences are surely disastrous.

"The soul experiences from beginning less time the sufferings of birth, old age, etc., on account of its attachment to the objects of this world. To satisfy the cravings of his senses, man wanders in the realm of pain. So that he may have sensual gratification, he does not heed the moral injunctions and he commits the worst vices. He kills living animals to enjoy the pleasures of the senses. Lust is at the roof of theft, greed, adultery and all vices and crimes.

"As a consequence of sinful acts, the soul is forced to migrate from birth to birth in the kingdom of the lower animals etc., and to suffer the torments of hell. This lust for pleasures must be shunned ruthlessly. So long I have wasted my life. I am not going to spend any more time in the vain pursuit of pleasures. I shall be serious and practice right conduct."

Prince Parsva had the twelve Anuprekshas or meditations. He resolved to abandon the world. He took leave of his parents and then left his house. He retired into the forest. He became absolutely naked. He turned towards the north and bowed to the great Emancipated Siddhas. He plucked five tufts of hair from his head and became a monk.

Parsva practised fasting. He observed with scrupulous care the twenty-eight primary and the ninety-four secondary rules of the order of monks. He was found lost in meditation. He attained the pure omniscience. He attained the final liberation in the Sammeda Hill, which is known today as the Parsvanatha Hill. Parsvanatha preached in Kashi, Kosi, Kosala, Panchala, Maharashtra, Magadha, Avanti, Malava, Anga and Vanga. Many joined the Jain faith. Parsvanatha spent seventy years in preaching.

Mahavira modified and enlarged what had already been taught by Parsvanatha. He did not preach anything that was absolutely new. Parsvanatha lived for one hundred years. He abandoned his home when he was thirty years old. He left home in 842 B.C. and attained Nirvana in 772 B.C. Glory to Parsvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara!

BUDDHA

In the sixth century before the Christian era, religion was forgotten in India. The lofty teachings of the Vedas were thrown into the background. There was much priest craft everywhere. The insincere priests traded on religion. They duped the people in a variety of ways and amassed wealth for themselves. They were quite irreligious. In the name of religion, people followed in the footsteps of the cruel priests and performed meaningless rituals. They killed innocent dumb animals and did various sacrifices. The country was in dire need of a reformer of Buddha's type. At such a critical period, when there were cruelty, degeneration and unrighteousness everywhere, reformer Buddha was born to put down priest craft and animal sacrifices, to save the people and disseminate the message of equality, unity and cosmic love everywhere.

Birth

Buddha's father was Suddhodana, king of the Sakhyas. Buddha's mother was named Maya. Buddha was born in B.C. 560 and died at the age of eighty in B.C. 480. The place of his birth was a grove known as Lumbini, near the city of Kapilavastu, at the foot of Mount Palpa in the Himalayan ranges within Nepal. This small city Kapilavastu stood on the bank of the little river Rohini, some hundred miles northeast of the city of Varanasi. As the time drew near for Buddha to enter the world, the gods themselves prepared the way before him with celestial portents and signs. Flowers bloomed and gentle rains fell, although out of season; heavenly music was heard, delicious scents filled the air. The body of the child bore at birth the thirty-two auspicious marks (Mahavyanjana) that indicated his future greatness, besides secondary marks (Anuvyanjana) in large numbers.

Astrologer's prediction

On the birth of the child, Siddhartha, the astrologers predicted to its father Suddhodana: "The child, on attaining manhood, would become either a universal monarch (Chakravarti) or abandoning house and home, would assume the robe of a monk and become a Buddha, a perfectly enlightened soul, for the salvation of mankind". Then the king said: "What shall my son see to make him retire from the world?" The astrologers replied: "Four signs". "What four?" asked the king "A decrepit old man, a diseased man, a dead man and a monk-these four will make the prince retire from the world" replied the astrologers.

Renunciation

Gautama left his home forever, wealth, dominion, power, father, wife and the only child. He shaved his head and put on yellow robes. He marched towards Rajgriha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha. There were many caves in the neighboring hills. Many hermits lived in those caves. Siddhartha took Alamo Kalamo, a hermit, as his first teacher. He was not satisfied with his instructions. He left him and sought the help of another recluse named Uddako Ramputto for spiritual instructions. At last he determined to undertake Yogic practices he retired into the forest of Uruvila, the modern Buddha Gaya. He practiced severe Tapas and Pranayama for six years. He was determined to attain the supreme peace by practicing self-mortification. He abstained almost entirely from taking food. He did not find much progress by adopting this method. He was reduced to a skeleton. He became exceedingly weak.

Enlightenment

Buddha gave out the experiences of his Samadhi: "I thus behold my mind released from the defilement of earthly existence, released from the defilement of sensual pleasures, released from the defilement of heresy, released from the defilement of ignorance".

In the emancipated state arose the knowledge: "I am emancipated, rebirth is extinct, the religious walk is accomplished, what had to be done is done, and there is no need for the present existence.

"I have overcome all foes; I am all-wise; I am free from stains in every way; I have left everything and have obtained emancipation by the destruction of desire. Myself having gained knowledge, whom should I call my Master? I have no teacher; no one is equal to me. I am the holy one in this world; I am the highest teacher. I alone am the absolute omniscient one (Sambuddho). I have gained coolness by the extinction of all passion and have obtained Nirvana. To found the kingdom of the law (Dharmo) I go to the city of Varanasi. I will beat the drum of immortality in the darkness of this world".

Lord Buddha then walked on to Varanasi He entered the deer-park' one evening. He gave his discourses there and preached his doctrine. He preached to all without exception, men and women, the high and the low, the ignorant and the learned-all alike. All his first disciples were laymen and two of the very first were women. The first convert was a rich

young man named Yasa. The next were Yasa's father mother and wife. Those were his lay disciples.

Buddha argued and debated with his old disciples who had deserted him when he was in the Uruvila forest. He brought them round by his powerful arguments and persuasive powers. Kondanno, an aged hermit, was converted first. The others also soon accepted the doctrine of Lord Buddha. Buddha made sixty disciples and sent them in different directions to preach his doctrine.

Buddha told his disciples not to enquire into origin of the world, into the existence and nature of God. He said to them that such investigations were practically useless and likely to distract their minds.

Every Buddhist monk takes a vow, when he puts on the yellow robe, to abstain from killing any living being. Therefore, a stay in one place during the rainy season becomes necessary. Even now the Paramahansa Sannyasins of Sankara's order stay in one place for four months without killing countless small insects, which come into existence during this period.

Buddha's teachings

Lord Buddha preached: "We will have to find out the cause of sorrow and the way to escape from it. The desire for sensual enjoyment and clinging to earthly life is the cause of sorrow. If we can eradicate desire, all sorrows and pains will come to an end. We will enjoy Nirvana or eternal peace Those who follow the Noble Eightfold Path strictly, viz., right opinion, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right employment, right exertion, right thought and right self-concentration will be free from pain and sorrow. This indeed, O mendicants, is that middle course which the Tathagata has thoroughly comprehended, which produce insight, which produces knowledge, which leads to calmness or serenity, to supernatural knowledge, to perfect Buddhahood, to Nirvana.

"This again, indeed, O mendicants are the noble truth of suffering. Birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, association with unloved objects is painful, separation from loved objects is painful, the desire which one does not obtain, this is too painful-in short, the five elements of attachment to existence are painful. The five elements of attachment to earthly existence are form, sensation, perception, components and consciousness.

"This again, indeed, O mendicants, is the truth of the cause of suffering. It is that thirst which leads to renewed existence, connected with joy and passion, finding joy here and there, namely, thirst for sensual pleasure, and the instinctive thirst for existence. This again, indeed, O mendicants, is the noble truth cessation of suffering which is the cessation and total absence of desire for that very thirst its abandonment, surrender, release from it and non-attachment to it. This again, indeed, O mendicants, is the noble truth of the course which leads to the cessation of suffering. This is verily the Noble Eightfold Path, viz., right opinion, etc."

MAHAVIRA

Mahavira was born in 599 B.C. He lived for 72 years. He abandoned home in 569 B.C. He attained omniscience in 557 B.C. and entered into Nirvana in 527 B.C. He was the last Tirthankara.

Mahavira lived a life of absolute truthfulness, a life of perfect honesty and a life of absolute chastity. He lived without possessing any property at all. Mahavira was born of Sidhatha, Raja of Kundalpura, and Queen Trisala, who was known by the name Priya Karni. 'Maha' means great and 'Vira' means a hero. 'Tirtha' literally means a ford, a means of crossing over. Metaphorically, it denotes a spiritual guide or philosophy, which enables one to cross over the ocean of recurring births in this world. 'Kara' means one who makes. The whole word Tirthankara means a Jain holy teacher.

Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism. He revised the Jain doctrines. He was more a reformer than the founder of the faith. In Jain metaphysics, "Time" is divided into cycles. It is claimed that in each half-cycle, twenty-four Tirthankaras, at long intervals, preach anew the doctrines. Mahavira was the twenty-fourth, and like the others, is claimed to have been omniscient. Mahavira was also known by the names Vardhamana (i.e., ever advancing) and Sanmati. At the age of eight he observed the twelve vows of Ahimsa, etc. He was obedient to his parents and served them with great faith and devotion. He was an able statesman. He did not marry.

Mahavira was immersed in Self-contemplation. He knew that the pleasures of this world were transitory and that they strengthened the fetters of Karma. He knew that renunciation would lead to the attainment of eternal bliss. People were quite astonished at the virtuous nature of Mahavira at such a tender age. He was very much interested in meditation. He cultivated the arts of music and literature. Thirty years of Prince Vardhamana's life passed off in this way.

Vardhamana saw, through his clairvoyant vision, that he had been passing through innumerable births. He thought, "How many births have gone by fruitlessly! **I clearly see that the Soul is essentially separate from the Karma matter.** (similar to what the Geeta says). I have still wasted away thirty years of my life. I have not practiced any penance. I have not renounced the world in order to attain pure Knowledge. The infatuation which is at the roof of all evils is not yet destroyed".

Prince Vardhamana became extremely penitent. He resolved to give up everything worldly. He gave up attachment to his parents, friends and relatives. He thought over the twelve Anuprekshas or matters of deep thinking according to the Jain scriptures:

1. All worldly things are temporary.
2. The Soul alone is the sole resort.
3. This world is beginningless and crooked.
4. There is nothing to help the Soul, but the Soul itself.

5. Body, mind, etc., are essentially separate from the Soul.
6. The Soul is essentially pure and the body, etc., are essentially impure.
- 7. The Soul's bondage is due to the inflow of Karma in it.**
8. Every being ought to stop this inflow.
9. Emancipation is attained when Karma is absolutely got rid of.
10. The emancipated Souls remain at the foremost top of the filled spaces.
11. In this world, to have the birth of a human being and to meditate on the nature of the Soul are the greatest blessings.
12. To have the three jewels as described by the Omniscient is the only morality.

Mahavira thought over these twelve things and decided finally that he must abandon home.

Mahavira's mother said, "My beloved son, you will not be able to bear the severity of the austerities. There is time yet for it. You must help your father in governing the kingdom. You can become a monk after some years".

Mahavira said, "Adorable mother! All the objects of the world are evanescent like water bubbles. Where can one get happiness in this world, which is the abode of disease, sorrow, pain and death? I must leave this world".

Mahavira distributed all his wealth to the poor with his own hands. He went to the forest. He took off even the piece of cloth, which he was wearing and became absolutely nude. He turned to the north and said, "Salutation to the Siddhas!" He rooted out with his own hands five tufts of hair from his head and became a monk.

Mahavira practised rigorous austerities. He fasted for many days. He meditated on the pure nature of the Soul.

Mahavira was tested by the celestials. A group of handsome women surrounded him. But Mahavira remained unmoved and unperturbed. He attained omniscience. He preached his message of peace for thirty years after the attainment of omniscience. He wandered in Magadha, Mithila, etc. Many kings became his disciples.

GURU NANAK

Birth

Whenever there is a big catastrophe in the land, whenever there is decline of righteousness, whenever there are oppression and chaos in the land, whenever the faith of the people in God wanes, great men or saints appear, from time to time, to enrich sacred literature, to protect Dharma, to destroy unrighteousness and reawaken the love of God in the minds of the people. India was in a bad plight. Babar invaded India. His armies assaulted and sacked several cities. The ascetic captives were forced to do rigorous work. There was wholesale massacre everywhere. The kings were bloodthirsty, cruel and tyrannical. There was no real religion. There was religious persecution. The real spirit of religion was crushed by ritualism. The hearts of the people were filled with falsehood, cunningness, selfishness and greed. At such a time Guru Nanak came to the world with a message of peace, unity, love and devotion to God. He came at a time when there was fight between the Hindus and the Mohammedans when real religion was replaced by

mere rituals and forms He came to preach the gospel of peace, brotherhood or the unity of humanity, love and sacrifice.

Nanak, the Khatri mystic and poet and founder of the Sikh religion, was born in 1469 A.D. in the village of Talwandi on the Ravi, in the Lahore district of Punjab. On one side of the house in which Guru Nanak was born, there stands now the famous shrine called 'Nankana Sahib'. Nanak has been called the 'Prophet of the Punjab and Sind'. Nanak's father was Mehta Kalu Chand, known popularly as Kalu. He was the accountant of the village. He was an agriculturist also. Nanak's mother was Tripta. Even in his childhood, Nanak had a mystic disposition and he used to talk about God with Sadhus. He had a contemplative mind and a pious nature. He began to spend his time in meditation and spiritual practices. He was, by habit, reserved in nature. He would eat but little.

Today the English media and large sections of Sikhs believe that Sikhism is a different religion. This is what Sardar Khushwant Singh had to say in the Outlook "The roots of Sikhism lie deep in the Bhakti form of Hinduism and Vedanta. While the Adi-Granth is essentially a distillation of Vedanta in Punjabi, the last Dasam – tenth is a compilation of tales of the valor of Hindu goddesses. Out of the 15,028 names of Gods that appear in the Adi Granth, Hari occurs over 8,000 times, Ram 2,5333 times followed by Prabhu, Gopal, Govind and other Hindu names for the divine. The popular Sikh coinage Wah Guru appears only 16 times". To read more go to the essay Hinduism and Sikhism are Different Religions AAH HA! [Click here for more.](#)

Guru Nanak's Wanderings

Nanak lived in this world for a period of seventy years. He wandered from place to place. He went to Sayyidpur in the district of Gujranwala. He then proceeded to Kurukshetra, Hardwar, Brindavan, Varanasi, Agra, Kanpur, Ayodhya, Prayag, Patna, Rajgir, Gaya and Puri. He traveled throughout India. He made four extensive tours. He went to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mecca and Medina also. He traveled to Bengal, the Deccan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Arabia, Baghdad, Kabul, Kandahar and Siam. He held controversies with Pundits and Mohammedan priests. He debated with the Pandas of Gaya, Hardwar and other places of pilgrimage. He dispelled the clouds of ignorance and doubts of many people. He enjoined on all people to live righteously and with brotherly love and hospitality. He preached and taught: "Do Nama Smarana. Love God. Be devoted to one God. Serve your fellow beings. God is all-in-all. Pray. Praise Him always. Attain the bliss of union with Him". Nanak succeeded remarkably in changing the minds of men and winning their love and confidence and in directing them along the path of righteousness and devotion.

Guru Nanak proceeded to Multan. He halted by the side of a river. Multan was a place filled with Fakirs always. Prahlad was born at Multan. Shams Tabriez and Mansoor also lived there. The Pirs came to know that Guru Nanak had come to Multan. They sent him milk in a cup, filled to the very brim. Nanak put inside the cup some Batashas – small hollow lumps of sugar-and a flower above them and returned milk. Mardana told

his master that a thing like milk should not be returned and should be drunk by him. Guru Nanak replied, "Look here, Mardana. You are a simpleton.

The Pirs have played a small trick. They have not sent this milk for my use. There is deep philosophy at the back of it. There is profound significance. The meaning is that Multan is already full of Pirs and Fakirs, just like the cup that is filled with milk to the very brim, and that there is no room for another religious teacher. I have also paid them in the same coin. My answer is that I will mix with them like the Batashah and would predominate over them like the flower placed in the cup of milk". The Pirs and the Fakirs then came to see Guru Nanak. Nanak sang a song. The proud and arrogant Pirs came to their senses now. They became very humble. They said to Guru Nanak : "Pardon us, O revered Guru ! We were surely self-conceited. Kindly give us spiritual instructions and bless us". Guru Nanak blessed them and gave them instructions.

Two Miracles

There is a remarkable incident in connection with Nanak's visit to Mecca. At Mecca, Nanak was found sleeping with his feet towards the Kaaba, before which the Mohammedans prostrated themselves when performing their prayer. Kazi Rukan-ud-din, who observed this, angrily remarked : "Infidel! How dare you dishonor God's place by turning your feet towards Him?" He also kicked Nanak. Nanak silently replied, "I am tired. Turn my feet in any direction where the place of God is not". Kazi Rukan-ud-din took hold of Nanak's feet angrily and moved them towards the opposite direction. The mosque also began to move. The Kazi was struck with wonder. He then recognised the glory of Guru Nanak. (seems a bit far-fetched though but see the truth behind the thoughts).

Guru Nanak visited Hassan Abdul in the Attock district in the North Western Frontier in 1520 A.D. He sat under a Peepul tree at the foot of a hillock. On top of the hill, there lived a Mohammedan saint named Vali Quandhari. There was then a spring of water on top of the hill. Mardana used to get water from the spring. Guru Nanak became very popular in a short time. The Mohammedan saint became jealous. He forbade Mardana from taking water out of the spring. Mardana informed Guru Nanak of the conduct of the Mohammedan saint. Guru Nanak said to Mardana, "O Mardana! Do not be afraid. God will send water down to us soon". The spring that was on the top of the hill dried up immediately. There arose a spring at the foot of the hill where Guru Nanak halted. The saint was very much enraged. He hurled a big rock from the top of the hill down to the spot where Nanak was sitting. Guru Nanak stopped the rock by his open hand. The impression of his hand on the rock exists even now. Then the saint came to the Guru, prostrated at his feet and asked for pardon. Guru Nanak smiled and pardoned the arrogant saint. There now stands a beautiful shrine by the side of the spring which is called "Punja Sahib".

Teaching of Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak felt that it would be improper to postpone Nama Smarana or remembering the Name of the Lord, even by a single breath, because no one could tell whether the breath that had gone in would come out or not. Nanak says, "We are men of one breath. I know not a longer time-limit". Guru Nanak calls him alone a true saint who remembers the Name of the Lord with every incoming and outgoing breath. The ideal is practical and within the reach of every man. He tells the people not to lose any time but to begin at once. He also says that there are no barriers of race, class, caste, creed or color, which check the progress of any in reaching the goal. He realized the great truth of the brotherhood of religions. He preached the universal brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God to all people.

Guru Nanak was a reformer. He attacked the corruptions in society. He strongly protested against formalism and ritualism. He carried the message of peace and of love for everybody. He was very liberal in his views. He did not observe the rules of caste. He tried his level best to remove the superstitions of the people. He preached purity, justice, goodness and the love of God. He endeavored to remove the moral putrefaction that was prevalent amongst the people and to infuse real spirit in the worship of God and true faith in religion and God. He introduced the singing of God's praise along with music, as a means of linking the soul of man with God. Wherever he moved, he took Mardana with him to play on the rebeck while he sang. He said, "Serve God. Serve humanity. Only service to humanity shall secure for us a place in heaven". Guru Nanak had great reverence for women. He allowed them to join all religious gatherings and conferences and to sing the praises of God. He gave them their full share in religious functions.

Guru Nanak clearly says: "The road to the abode of God is long and arduous. There are no short cuts for rich people. Everyone must undergo the same discipline. Everyone must purify his mind through service of humanity and Nama Smarana. Everyone must live according to the will of the Lord without grumbling or murmuring. How to find Him? There is one way. Make His will your own. Be in true with the Infinite. There is no other way". The first stage in making the divine will one's own is attained through prayer for divine grace or favour-Ardas for Guru Prasad. Guru Nanak attaches very great importance to prayer. He says that nothing can be achieved by man without divine favor. He says: "Approach God with perfect humility. Throw yourself on His mercy. Give up pride, show and egoism. Beg for his kindness and favor. Do not think of your own merits, abilities, faculties and capacities. Be prepared to die in the pursuit of His love and union with Him. Love God as a woman loves her husband. Make absolute unreserved self-surrender. You can get divine favor and love".

The beautiful composition of mystic poems uttered by Nanak is contained in 'Japji'. It is sung by every Sikh at daybreak. The 'Sohila'. Contains the evening prayers. In 'Japji'. Guru Nanak has given a vivid and concise description of the stages through which man must pass in order to reach the final resting place or abode of eternal bliss. There are five stages or Khandas. The first is called Dharm Khand or "The Realm of Duty". Everyone must do this duty properly. Everyone must tread the path of righteousness. Everyone will be judged according to his actions.

The next stage is Gyan Khand or “The Realm of knowledge” where the spirit of divine knowledge reigns. The aspirant does his duty with intense faith and sincerity. He has the knowledge now, that only by doing his duty in a perfect manner, he can reach the abode of bliss or the goal of life.

The third stage is Sharam Khand. This is “The Realm of Ecstasy”. There is the spiritual rapture here. There is beauty. The Dharma has become a part of one’s own nature. It has become an ingrained habit. It is no more a mere matter of duty or knowledge.

The fourth stage is Karam Khand or ‘The Realm of Power’. The God of power rules over this realm. The aspirant acquires power. He becomes a mighty hero. He becomes invincible. The fear of death vanishes.

The fifth or the final stage is Sach Khand or “The Realm of Truth”. The formless One reigns here. Here the aspirants becomes one with God. He has attained Godhead. He has transmuted himself into Divinity. He has attained the goal of his life. He has found out his permanent resting place. Now ends the arduous journey of the soul.

Guru Nanak again and again insists thus: “Realise your unity with all. Love God. Love God in man. Sing the love of God. Repeat God’s Name Sing His glory. Love God as the lotus loves water, as the bird Chatak loves rain, as the wife loves her husband. Make divine love thy pen and thy heart the writer. If you repeat the Name, you live; if you forget it, you die. Open your heart to Him. Enter into communion with Him. Sink into arms and feel the divine embrace”.

Nanak has given a beautiful summary of his teachings in one of his hymns as follows: -

Love the saints of every faith :
Put away thy pride.
Remember the essence of religion
Is meekness and sympathy,
Not fine clothes,
Not the Yogi’s garb and ashes,
Not the blowing of the horns,
Not the shaven head,
Not long prayers,
Not recitations and torturing,
Not the ascetic way,
But a life of goodness and purity,
Amid the world’s temptations.

“Vahe Guru” is the Guru Mantra for the followers of Guru Nanak. The other important Mantra for repetition is: “Ek Omkar Satnam Karta Purkh Nirbhav Nirvair, Akalmurat Ajuni Savai Bhang Gur Parsad-God is but one, His Name is true, He is the Creator, He pervades the whole universe, He is without fear, He is without enmity, He is immortal, He is birth less, He is self-born and self-existent, He is the remover of the

darkness (of ignorance) and He is merciful”. The Lord is eternal. He has no beginning and no end.

The Granth Sahib

Guru Nanak invented the Gurumukhi characters by simplifying the Sanskrit characters. The holy Granth of the Sikhs is in Gurumukhi. It is worshipped by the Sikhs and the Sindhis. Every Gurudwara has a Granth Sahib. The holy Granth, popularly known as Adi Granth, contains the hymns of the first five Gurus. They were all collected, arranged and formed into one volume called Guru Granth Sahib by the fifth Guru. It contains a few selections from the hymns of Kabir and other contemporary Vaishnavite saints. Later on, the hymns of the ninth Guru were incorporated in the Holy Granth by the tenth Guru. The compositions of Guru Nanak are very extensive.

The Granth Sahib begins with the following: “There is but one God whose name is true-the Creator”. It contains a code of high morals. Purity of life, obedience to Guru, mercy, charity, temperance, justice, straightforwardness, truthfulness, sacrifice, service, love and abstinence from animal food are among the virtues on which great emphasis is laid; While lust, anger, pride, hatred, egoism, greed, selfishness, cruelty, back-biting and falsehood are vehemently condemned.

The Acharyas

Chapter 3

This chapter included Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallbha, Nimbarka, Ramananda, Gauranga, Saint Arunagiri. I have covered Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha and Ramananda.

SANKARA

Chaos pervaded all through India in the matter of religion and philosophy. Sect after sect, such as Charvakas, Lokayathikas, Kapalikas, Sankhyas, Buddhas and Madhyamikas sprang up. The number of religions rose as high as seventy-two. There was fight amongst sects. There was no peace anywhere. Chaos and confusion reigned supreme. There was superstition and bigotry. Darkness prevailed over the once happy land of Rishis, sages and Yogins. The once glorious land of the Aryans was in a miserable state. Such was the state of the country at the time that just preceded the Avatara of Sankaracharya.

The existence of Vedic Dharma in India today is due to Sankara. The forces opposed to Vedic religion were more numerous and powerful at the time of Sankara than they are today. Still, single-handed, within a very short time, (he lived all of 32 years) Sankara overpowered them all and restored the Vedic Dharma and Advaita Vedanta to its pristine purity in the land. The weapon he used was pure knowledge and spirituality. The previous avatars, like Rama and Krishna, used physical forces because the obstacles to Dharma in those days arose from the physical obstructions and molestations of the Asuras. The menace to Dharma in the Kali age arose from obstacles that were more

internal than external, more mental than physical. The seeds of Adharma were then working in the minds of almost everyone. Hence the evil had to be combated purely by the weapon of knowledge and self-purification. It was in order to forge this weapon and wield it with efficacy that Sankara took birth in the brahmin Varna and entered the Sannyasa order early in life. The previous Avatars like Rama and Krishna took birth in the Kshatriya Varna, because in their days they had to wield military weapons in the restoration of Dharma.

Birth

Sankara was born in a very poor family in the year 788 A.D. in a village named Kaladi, six miles to the east of Alwaye. Kaladi is a railway station on the Kochi-Shoranur rail link. Sankara was a Nambudiri Brahmin. Rajasekhara, a Zamindar, built a Siva temple in Kaladi and formed an Agrahara for Brahmins who were in the service of the temple. Vidyadhiraja was doing Puja in the temple. He had only a son named Sivaguru. Sivaguru studied the Shastras and married at the proper age. He had no child. He and his wife Aryamba prayed to Lord Siva to bless them with a son. A son was born to them in the Vasanta Ritu or the spring season at noon, in the auspicious Abhijit Muhurta and under the constellation Ardhra. This son was Sankara.

Sankara's Digvijaya

Sankara's philosophical conquests are unique in the world. He had his triumphant tour all over India. He met the leaders of different schools of thought. He convinced them by arguments and established the supremacy and truth of the religion that he expounded in his commentaries. He went to all the celebrated seats of learning. He challenged the learned men to discussion, argued with them and converted them to his opinions and views. He defeated Bhatta Bhaskara and condemned his Bhashya on the Vedanta Sutras. He then met Dandi and Mayura and taught them his philosophy. He then defeated in argument Harsha, author of Khandana Khanda Kadya, Abhinavagupta, Murari Misra, Udayanacharya, Dharmagupta, Kumarila and Prabhakara.

Sankara then proceeded to Mahishmati. Mandana Misra was the chief Pundit of the court of Mahishmati. Mandana was brought up in the Karma Mimamsa faith and so he had intense hatred for the Sannyasins. He was performing Sraaddha ceremony when Sankara somehow dropped down there. Immediately Mandana Misra became very furious. An ugly conversation was started when the Brahmins, who were present there for dinner, interposed and pacified Mandana Misra.

Then Sankara challenged Mandana to a religious controversy. Mandana agreed. Bharati who was the wife of Mandana Misra and who possessed scholarly erudition was appointed as the umpire. It was agreed beforehand that Sankara, if defeated, would become a householder and marry; and that Mandana, if defeated, would become a Sannyasin and receive the robe of a Sannyasin from the hands of his own wife. The controversy began in right earnest and continued for days without any interruption. Bharati did not sit and listen to their controversy. She threw two garlands, one each over the shoulders of each of the disputants, and said: "He whose garland begins to fade first

should consider himself defeated”. She left the place and began attending to her household duties. The controversy went on for seventeen days. The garland of Mandana Misra began to fade first. Mandana Misra accepted his defeat and offered to become a Sannyasin and follow Sankara.

Bharati was an Avatara of Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning. Once the sage Durvasa chanted the Vedas before Brahma and his wife in a big assembly. Durvasa committed a small mistake. Sarasvati laughed at it. Durvasa became enraged and gave a curse that she would take birth in the world. Hence Sarasvati had to take birth as Bharati.

Bharati now interposed and said to Sankara: “I am the other half of Mandana. You have defeated only one half of Mandana. Let us have a controversy”. Sankara objected to have controversy with a woman. Bharati quoted instances wherein there had been controversies with women. Sankara then agreed and this controversy also went on uninterruptedly for seventeen days. Bharati passed from one Shastra to another. At last she found out that she could not defeat Sankara. She decided to defeat him by means of the science of Kama Shastra.

Sankara asked Bharati to give him an interval of one month for his preparation to hold controversy with her in the science of Kama Shastra. She agreed. Sankara went to Kashi. He separated his astral body from his physical body by means of his Yogic powers and left his physical body in the hole of a big tree and asked his disciples to take care of that physical body. He then entered into the dead body of Raja Amaruka which was about to be cremated. The Raja rose up and all the people rejoiced at the astounding incident.

The ministers and queens soon found out that the revived Raja was a different person, with different qualities and thought. They realized that the soul of a great Mahatma had entered the body of their Raja. Therefore, messengers were sent out to search for a human body hidden somewhere in lonely forests and caves and to burn it when found. They thought that if they did so, the new Raja might remain with them for a long time.

Sankara was acquiring all the experience of love with his queens. Maya is very powerful. In the midst of those queens, Sankara entirely forgot all about his promises to his disciples about his going back to them. The disciples began to search for him. They heard about the miraculous resurrection of Raja Amaruka. They immediately proceeded to the city and had an interview with the Raja. They sang a few philosophical songs which at a once revived the memory of Sankara.

The disciples immediately repaired to the place where the physical body of Sankara was kept hidden. By that time the messengers of the queen had found out the physical body and had just begun to set fire to it. The soul of Sankara just then entered his own body. Sankara prayed to Lord Hari to help him. There was a shower of rain immediately and that extinguished the flames.

Then Sankara returned to the residence of Mandana Misra. He resumed the old controversy and answered all the questions raised by Bharati satisfactorily. Mandana

Misra gave all his property as a gift to Sri Sankara and Mandana was made to distribute it to the poor and the deserving. He then became a disciple of Sankara. Sankara initiated him into the holy order of Sannyasa and gave him the name of 'Sureswara Acharya'. Sureswara Acharya was the first Sannyasin who took charge of the Sringeri Mutt. Bharati also accompanied Sankara to Sringeri and there she is worshipped even today.

Sankara ascended the seat of omniscience after inviting Vedic scholars from all parts of India and answering their numerous questions. Sankara, by vanquishing all the religious opponents of his day-and they belonged to no less than seventy-two different schools-and establishing the superiority of the Vedic Dharma, had become the Jagadguru of all. Sankara's success over the other religious sects was so complete that none of them have since been able to raise their head in the land. Most of them have disappeared altogether. After Sankara's time, although a few Acharyas have appeared, none of them have been able to vanquish those who differed from them as Sankara did and establish unquestioned supremacy.

Sankara's End

Sankara proceeded to Kamarup-the present Guwahati in Assam and held a controversy with Abhinava Gupta, the Shakta commentator, and won victory over him. Abhinava felt his defeat very keenly. He made Sankara suffer from a severe form of piles through black magic. Padmapada removed the evil effects of the black magic. Sankara became quite alright. He went to the Himalayas, built a Mutt at Joshi and a temple at Badri. He then proceeded to Kedarnath higher up in the Himalayas. He became one with the Linga in 820 A.D. in his thirty-second year.

Sringeri Mutt

In the northwest of the State of Mysore, nestling in the beautiful foothills of the Western Ghats, surrounded by virgin forests, lies the village of Sringeri and here Sankara established his first Mutt. The river Tunga-a branch of the river Tungabhadra-runs through the valley closely touching the walls of the temple; and its pure and limpid waters are as famous for drinking purposes as the waters of the Ganges are for bath (Ganga Snanam, Tunga Panam). Sringeri is a place of great sanctity and its beauty has to be seen to be appreciated. The Mutt is 'still going strong' as the phrase goes. The homage paid to the Mutt by countless aspirants and devotees is as much due to the greatness of illustrious men like Vidyanarya who have been at its head ever since its foundation as to the renown of the founder himself.

It may not be out of place to mention here that it took thirty years for the well-known Sanskrit professor Max Muller to translate the commentary on the Rig Veda, written by Vidyanarya, also known as **Sayana**. The learned professor, in his preface, says that not a single day passed in the thirty years without his devoting at least ten minutes on the translation. There is also a little interesting incident that when the manuscript was found to be illegible in some places, he got an authorized transcription from the first original still preserved in the Sringeri Mutt, through the influence of the then Maharaja of Mysore.

The famous holy shrine of Sri Sarada is an equal source of attraction to the devotees. Many are the Mutts and monasteries in India where holy men or their successors sit, and where Hindus from all parts of India gather, but none so great or so famous as Sringeri, the original seat of Adi Sankaracharya. The Sringeri Peetha is one of the oldest monasteries of the world flourishing for over twelve centuries now. It is the first of the four seats of learning established by Sankaracharya, the other three being Puri, Dwaraka and Joshimutt near Badrinath in Uttaranchal, each one of them representing one of the four Vedas of the Hindus.

Sankara placed his four eminent disciples (Sureswara Acharya, Padmapada, Hastamalaka and Trotakacharya) in charge of the Sringeri Mutt, Jagannath Mutt, Dwaraka Mutt and Joshi Mutt respectively. The most famous Sannyasin in the succession of gurus of the Sringeri Mutt was, of course, **Vidyaranya, the great commentator on the Vedas and the father of the dynasty of Vijayanagar**. He was the Dewan of Vijayanagaram. He became a Sannyasin about 1331 A.D.

The eleven Sannyasins before Vidyaranya were Sankaracharya, Viswarupa, Nityabodhaghana, Jnanaghana, Jnanottama, Jnana Giri, Simha Girisvara, Isvara Tirtha, Narasimha Tirtha, Vidya Sankara Tirtha and Bharati Krishna Tirtha.

The historic and sacred pontifical throne of the Sringeri Mutt is known as Vyakhyaana Simhasana or seat of learning. Tradition has it that this seat was given to the great Sankara by Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning, in appreciation of the philosopher's vast scholarly erudition. Thirty-five Acharyas had sat on the pontifical throne before his present holiness in regular and uninterrupted succession.

Dasanami Sannyasins

Sankara organized ten definite orders of Sannyasins under the name 'Dasanamis' who add, at the end of their names, any one of the following ten suffixes: Sarasvati, Bharati, Puri (Sringeri Mutt); Tirtha, Asrama (Dwaraka Mutt); Giri, parvata and Sagar (Joshi Mutt); Vana and Aranya (Govardhana Mutt).

The Paramahansa represents the highest of these grades. It is possible to become a Paramahansa by a long course of Vedantic study, meditation and Self-realisation. The Ativarnashramis are beyond caste and order of life. They dine found all over India.

Some anecdotes

Sankara was going along the street one day with his pupils to take bath in the Ganges when he met a Chandala who was also passing along the street with his dogs by his side. The disciples of Sankara shouted and asked the Chandala to clear off the road. The Chandala asked Sankara: "O venerable Guru! You are a preacher of Advaita Vedanta and yet you make a great difference between man and man. How can this be consistent with your teaching of Advaitism? Is Advaita only a theory?" Sankara was very much

struck by the intelligent query of the Chandala. He thought within himself, “Lord Siva has assumed this just to teach me a lesson”. He composed then and there five Slokas called the ‘Manisha panchaka’. Every Sloka ends thus: “He who has learnt to look on the phenomena in the light of Advaita is my true Guru, be he a Chandala or be he a Brahmin”. There are other anecdotes too which I have ignored to make write up shorter.

Sankara’s philosophy

Sankara **wrote Bhashyas** or commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Gita. The Bhashya on the Brahma Sutras is called Sareerik Bhashya. Sankara wrote commentaries on Sanat Sujatiya and Sahasranama Adhyaya. It is usually said, “For learning logic and metaphysics, go to Sankara’s commentaries; for gaining practical knowledge, which unfolds and strengthens devotion, go to his works such as Viveka Chudamani, Atma Bodha, Aparoksha Anubhuti, Ananda Lahari, Atma-Anatma Viveka, Drik-Drishya Viveka and Upadesa Sahasri”. Sankara wrote innumerable original works in verses that are matchless in sweetness, melody and thought.

Sankara’s supreme Brahman is Nirguna (without the Gunas), Nirakara (formless), Nirvisesha (without attributes) and Akarta (non-agent). He is above all needs and desires. Sankara says, “This Atman is self-evident. This Atman or Self is not established by proofs of the existence of the Self. It is not possible to deny this Atman, for it is the very essence of he who denies it. The Atman is the basis of all kinds of knowledge. The Self is within, the Self is without, the Self is before and the Self is behind. The Self is on the right hand, the Self and the Self is behind. The Self is on the right hand, the Self is on the left, the Self is above and the Self is below”.

Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam-Anandam are not separate attributes. They form the very essence of Brahman. Brahman cannot be described, because description implies distinction. Brahman cannot be distinguished from any other than He.

The objective world-the world of names and forms-has no independent existence. The Atman alone has real existence. The world is only Vyavaharika or phenomenal.

Sankara was the exponent of the Kevala Advaita philosophy. His teachings can be summed up in the following words:

Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya,
Jeevo Brahmaiva Na Aparah

Brahman alone is real, this world is unreal; the Jiva is identical with Brahman.

Sankara preached Vivarta Vada. Just as the snake is superimposed on the rope, this world and this body are super imposed on Brahman or the Supreme Self. If you gain knowledge of the rope, the illusion of the snake will vanish. Even so, if you gain knowledge of Brahman, the illusion of the body and the world will vanish.

Sankara is the foremost among the masterminds and the giant soul that Mother India has produced. He was the expounder of the Advaita philosophy. Sankara was a giant metaphysician, a practical philosopher, an infallible logician, a dynamic personality and a stupendous moral and spiritual force. His grasping and elucidating powers knew no bounds. He was a fully developed Yogi, Jnani and Bhakta. He was a Karma Yogi of no mean order. He was a powerful magnet.

There is not one branch of knowledge which Sankara has left unexplored and which has not received the touch, polish and finish of his superhuman intellect. For Sankara and his works, we have a very high reverence. The loftiness, calmness and firmness of his mind, the impartiality with which he deals with various questions, his clearness of expression—all these make us revere the philosopher more and more. His teachings will continue to live as long as the sun shines.

Sankara's scholarly erudition and his masterly way of exposition of intricate philosophical problems have won the admiration of all the philosophical schools of the world at the present moment. Sankara was an intellectual genius, a profound philosopher, an able propagandist, a matchless preacher, a gifted poet and a great religious reformer. Perhaps, never in the history of any literature, a stupendous writer like him has been found. Even the Western scholars of the present day pay their homage and respects to him. Of all the ancient systems, that of Sankaracharya will be found to be the most congenial and easy of acceptance to the modern mind.

RAMANUJA

In the year 1017 A.D., Ramanuja was born in the village of Perumbudur, about twenty-five miles west of Madras. His father was Kesava Somayaji and his mother was Kantimathi, a very pious and virtuous lady. Ramanuja's Tamil name was Ilaya Perumal. Quite early in life, Ramanuja lost his father. Then he came to Kancheepuram to pursue his study of the Vedas under one Yadavaprakasha, a teacher of Advaita philosophy.

Ramanuja traveled throughout the length and breadth of India to disseminate the path of devotion. He visited all the sacred places throughout India including Kashi, Kashmir and Badrinath. On his way back he visited the Tirupathi hills. There he found the Saivites and the Vaishnavites quarrelling with one another, one party contending that the image of the Lord in the Tirupathi hills was a Saivite one and the other party saying that it was a Vaishnavite one. Ramanuja proposed that they should leave it to the Lord Himself to decide the dispute. So they left the emblems of both Siva and Vishnu at the feet of the Lord, and after locking the door of the temple, both parties stayed outside on guard. In the morning, when they opened the doors, it was found that the image of the Lord was wearing the emblems of Vishnu, while the emblems of Siva were lying at its feet as left there the evening before. This decided that the temple was a Vaishnavite one and it has remained so ever since.

Ramanuja then visited all the Vaishnavite shrines in South India and finally reached Srirangam. Here he settled himself permanently and continued his labors of preaching the Visishtadvaita philosophy and writing books. Thousands of people flocked to him everyday to hear his lectures. He cleansed the temples, settled the rituals to be observed in them, and rectified many social evils, which had crept into the community. He had a congregation of 700 Sannyasins, 74 dignitaries who held special offices of ministers and thousands of holy men and women, who revered him as God. He converted lakhs of people to the path of Bhakti. He gave initiation even to washermen. He was now seventy years old, but was destined to live many more years, establish more Mutts, construct more temples and convert many more thousands of people.

Ramanuja was the exponent of the Visishtadvaita philosophy or qualified non-dualism. Ramanuja's Brahman is sa-videsha Brahman, i.e., Brahman with attributes. According to Ramanuja's teachings, Lord Narayana or Bhagavan is the Supreme Being; the individual soul is Chit; matter is Achit. Ramanuja regards the attributes as real and permanent, but subject to the control of Brahman. The attributes are called Prakaras or modes. Lord Narayan is the Ruler and Lord of the universe. The Jiva is His servant and worshipper. The Jiva should completely surrender himself to the Lord. The oneness of God is quite consistent with the existence of attributes, as the attributes of Shaktis depend upon God for their existence.

MADHVA

Madhvacharya was a great religious reformer and an orthodox commentator on the brahma Sutras and the ten Upanishads. He was born in 1199 A.D. at Velali, a few miles from Udipi in the district of South Kanara in South India. He was a Tulu Brahmin by birth. He was born of Madhya Geha and Vedavati. Vedavati was a virtuous woman. Madhva is regarded as an incarnation of Vayu, the Wind-God. The father gave him the name Vasudeva.

Madhva distinguished himself in physical exercises and field games. He had a wonderful physique. He could wrestle, run, jump and swim. So people gave him the nickname Bhima. Madhva took to the study of the Vedas and the Vedangas and became wellversed in them. He took Sannyasa in his twenty-fifth year. Achyutaprakashacharya initiated him. Madhva was now known by the name Purna Prajna. Achyutaprakashacharya found that Madhva was a brilliant Sannyasin with efficient knowledge in Vedanta and other scriptures. He put Madhva as head of the Mutt in his place. Madhva received the name of Ananda Tirtha now. He went on an extensive tour in Southern and Northern India to preach his gospel of Bhakti. He made several converts. He went to Badrinarayan, and soon after his return, he wrote his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedanta Sutras. He built several temples at Udipi, the principal centre of the Madhva sect. Most of the orthodox Madhvas try to go to Udipi at least once in their life.

Madhvacharya is the great exponent of the Dvaita school of philosophy. His Vaishnavism is called Sad-Vaishnavism in order to distinguish it from the Sri-Vaishnavism of Ramanujacharya. According to his philosophy, the Supreme Being is Vishnu or Narayana. Every follower of the Madhva school should have a firm belief in the Pancha-bheda-five real and eternal distinctions-viz, the distinction between the Supreme Being and the individual soul, between spirit and matter, between one Jiva and another Jiva between the Jiva and matter, between a one place of matter and another. The phenomenal world is real and eternal. The worship of Vishnu consists in (I) Ankana, marking the body with His symbols, (ii) Namakarana, giving the names of the Lord to children and (iii) Bhajana, singing His glories. Madhva laid much stress on constant practice of the remembrance of God (Smarana).

He says, "Form a strong habit of remembering god. Then only it will be easy for you to remember Him at the moment of death". Madhva pointed out that when the Lord incarnated, no Prakrita Deha or material body was put on by Him. He prescribed a rigorous kind of fasting to his followers.

Renunciation, devotion and direct cognition of the Lord through meditation lead to the attainment of salvation. The aspirant should equip himself with the study of the Vedas, control of the senses, dispassion and perfect self-surrender, if he wants to have the vision of the Lord. These are some of the important teachings of Madhvacharya, the renowned exponent of the dualistic school of philosophy.

VALLABHA

Vallabhacharya, the founder of the Vaishnavite cult of Rajasthan and Gujarat, was born of Lakshmana Bhatta and Illamma in 1479 A.D. at Champaranya, Raipur, in Madhya Pradesh. He was a Telugu Brahmin and a contemporary of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He is regarded as an Avatara of Agni.

Vallabha lost his father when he was eleven years of age. He completed, in his twelfth year, his study of the Vedas, the six Darshanas and the eighteen Puranas at Varanasi. From Varanasi he went to Brindavan. Then he visited all the sacred places in India.

The important works of Vallabha are Vyasa Sutra Bhashya, Jaimini Sutra Bhasya, Bhagavata Tika Subodhini, Pushi Pravala Maryada and Siddhanta Rahasya. All these books are in Sanskrit. Vallabha has written many books in Brij Bhasha also.

Vallabha's followers have built a temple on the spot of his birth at Champaranya. This temple is very popular and is much visited by them as a place of pilgrimage.

Vallabhacharya was the exponent of pure Monism or the Shuddhadvaita school of philosophy. Sri Krishna is the highest Brahman. His body consists of Satchidananda. He is called Purushottama. Vallabha's followers worship Bala Krishna (Vatsalya Bhava).

Vallabha laid great stress on Pushti (grace) and Bhakti (devotion). Maha Pushti is the highest grace or Anugraha that helps the aspirant to attain Godhead. Things come out of the Akshara (Satchidananda) like sparks from fire. These are his salient teachings.

RAMANANDA

Sri Ramananda, a great pioneer of the Bhakti movement in Hindustan, was fifth in apostolic succession to Sri Ramanuja, a disciple of Yamuna Muni and an exponent of the Visishtadvaita philosophy or qualified monism. Ramananda was born in Prayag, the modern Allahabad, in 1299 A.D. He was born of Punyasadan, a Kanyakubja Brahmin and Sushila. He attained Mahasamadhi in 1410 A.D.

Sri Ramananda was a great Vaishnava Acharya and a devotee. His followers worship Lord Rama. They are known as Ramanandis or Ramavats. The mendicant members of the sect are known as Vairagis.

Ramananda admitted all, high and low alike, into his Satsang. Among his twelve disciples, there were Brahmins, a Mussalman, a weaver, a Rajput, a Jat, a barber, a cobbler and two women. The twelve disciples were: Kabir, the weaver; Raidas, the cobbler; Pipa, the Rajput king; Dhanna, the Jat; Sena, the barber; Narhariyananda, Sursurananda, Sukhananda, Bhavananda and Anantananda; and Padmavati and Surasari, two lady disciples.

Ramananda's disciples laid great emphasis on two basic principles, viz., that perfect devotion consists of perfect love towards God and that all servants of God are brothers. Among the twelve disciples of Ramananda, Kabir, Sena and Raidas founded branch-sects of their own.

Ramananda imbibed the Vaishnavite philosophy of Sri Ramanuja, but he disseminated Bhakti towards Rama and Sita which appealed more to the masses.

The initiatory Mantras of the sect are Sri ram and Om Ram Ramaya Namah. The Ramanandis' marks on the forehead are the same as those of the followers of Ramanuja, except that the red perpendicular line on the forehead is varied in shape and extent, and is generally narrower.

The followers of Ramananda are numerous in Gangetic India. They encompass the whole of the country along the banks of the Ganga and the Yamuna.

The Saivite Acharyas of Tamil Nadu

Chapter 4

The chapter included Appar, Sundaramurti, Thiru Jnana Sambandhar, Manickavasagar. I have covered Appar, Sundaramurti and Manickavasagar.

APPAR OR THIRUNAVUKKARASAR

Appar is one of the four Samaya Acharyas. He was a contemporary of Sambandhar. He was a Vellala of Thiru Amur in the district of Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu. He was born of Pugazhanar and Maathiniar. The parents gave the name “Marulneekkiar” (dispeller of darkness or ignorance) to appar. Appar means ‘father’. Sambandhar gave Marulneekkiar this name. The name Appar was first used by Sambandhar in addressing him in one of several meetings between them. Appar’s soul-stirring and sublime odes earned him the title “Thirunavukkarasar” or “the Lord of Speech”. Appar was a God-inspired soul. He sang devotional odes or Padigams during his pilgrimage to various shrines. He flourished in the middle of the seventh century A.D. He was a mystic and a poet. Appar became a Jain and read all its scriptures till one day under the influence of his sister he became a devotee of Lord Shiva.

The Teachings of Appar

By means of his poems, Appar laid the foundation of the **Saiva Siddhanta School** of philosophy. Appar’s poems are full of imagination, spiritual insight, religious emotion and high spiritual realization.

Appar was more learned than Sambandhar. He had a very powerful personality. He led an exemplary life as a Siva bhakta. He put an end to the influence of Jainism. He always praises the five letters or panchakshara. He says, “The rare jewel of the Brahmins is the Veda with its six Angas. The rare jewel for the Saivites is the Panchakshara”. Appar’s exemplary life, mellifluous poetry, vast erudition and profound religious fervor attracted countless people. He had countless admirers and disciples. He had great influence. Appar’s works consist of three hundred poems that form three books out of twelve in the Tamil collection of Saivite poetry known as Thirumurat.

Appar says: “Everything is the manifestation of Lord Siva. Siva is Narayana, Brahma, the four Vedas, the holiest, the oldest, perfect. Though Siva is all these, He is none of these. He is without name, without birth, death or disease. He is at once the transcendent and the immanent.

“Love of lord Siva must be felt and manifested. Pray. Worship. Weep. Dance. Lord Siva is the music or melody in the song, the sweetness in the fruit, the thought in the mind, the luster in the eyes. He is neither male nor female. He is without dimensions.

“Subdue the senses. Practice regular meditation. Practice Sariyai, Kiriya, Yogam and Jnanam. Develop dispassion. Transcend the three bodies. Unite the individual soul with the Supreme Soul or lord Siva. You will attain eternal bliss and immortality. You can behold Lord Siva if you look for him with the light of wisdom issuing forth from the wick of life, fed with the Ghee of meditation in the lamp of mind, within the house of your body.

“Plough with truth. Plant the seed of desire for knowledge. Weed out falsehood. Irrigate the mind with the water of patience. Supervise your work by looking within or introspection or self-analysis. Build the fence of Yama-Niyama or right conduct or right rules. You will soon attain Sivanandam or the eternal bliss of Siva.

Regard your body as the temple of lord Siva, your mind as the worshipper, Truth as purity that is necessary for worship, the jewel of the mind as the Linga, love as Ghee and milk. Perform Puja to Lord Siva thus. Lord Siva cannot be obtained without meditation on the Panchakshara and without making the mind one-pointed.”

May you all follow the precepts and teachings of Appar and attain the Siva-Pada, the immortal abode of eternal bliss!

SUNDARAMURTI

There was a Brahmin by name Sadayanar in Navalur in Tamil Nadu. He was very pious and devoted to Lord Siva. He had a pious son named Nambiyarurar or Alala Sundarar. Alala Sundarar attained manhood. He was known by the name Sundaramurti Nayanar also.

Sundaramurti Nayanar is one of the four Saiva Acharyas. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva. Lord Siva of Thiruvannainallur appeared before Sundaramurti in the form of an aged Brahmin on the eve of his marriage. The Lord said that Sundarar was his bond slave and so ought to work for Him in his house. The name of the Lord was Taduttatkonda Piran or the Lord who obstructed and saved Sundarar from Samsara.

Sundaramurti visited several temples. He went to adigai virattanam. Lord Siva appeared before Sundaramurti and placed his sacred feet on his head. Sundarar then went to Thiruvarur. Lord Siva made Sundarar His friend.

Sundaramurti sang the glories of Siva in different sacred places. They are collected in book form. It is called **Thevaram**. All devotees sing Thevaram even today. The hymns sung by Sundaramurti, Appar or Thirunavukkarasar and Thiru Jnana Sambandhar are called Thevaram. The hymns sung by Manickavasagar are called Thiruvachakam.

Sundaramurti had the Sakhya Bhav towards Lord Siva. Therefore he was quite friendly with the Lord, took any kind of liberth with Him and asked gold, pearl garland, musk, a garland of precious stones, spectacles, clothes, fragrance, jewels, house which can go with the swiftness of wind, golden flowers. Palanquins & one third of the riches of Thiruvarur. He did not ask for these things on account of any desire for enjoyment. He had no selfish desires. He did not keep the things. He utilized them for those who depended on him.

Sundaramurti showed to the world the path of Sakhya Marga or Sakhya Bhav in Bhakti.

MANICKAVASAGAR

Manickavasagar was a Brahmin by birth. He took his birth in Tiruvadavur, seven miles from Madurai on the banks of the Vaigai River. He must have lived between 650 A.D. and 692 A.D. Some say that he flourished in the tenth or the eleventh century. He secured the friendship of the King of Madurai, Arimardana Pandyan, and became his Chief Minister. He was also known by the name Vadavurar.

The Pandyan king sent Manickavasagar with a lot of wealth to purchase horses for the State. Manickavasagar started on his journey. On his way he heard the Kirtan of Siva in a garden in Thiruperundurai. Lord Siva assumed the form of a Siva Yogi and seated himself underneath a tree with his Siva-Ganas as disciples. He came there to initiate Manickavasagar in Siva-Jnana.

Thereupon Manickavasagar met Lord Siva. The Lord ordered him to visit all the places of pilgrimage and then go to Chidambaram. Manickavasagar visited Tiruvannamalai, Kancheepuram and other places, sang his Thiruvachakam, and lastly went to Chidambaram. Thirukoovali was written by him in Chidambaram.

Then Manickavasagar entered into discussion with a Buddhist teacher and defeated him. Sarasvati made the Buddhist teacher and his disciples dumb. Then the Buddhist king approached Manickavasagar and said, "You made my teacher and all his disciples dumb. If you can make my dumb daughter speak, I and my subjects will embrace Saivism" Manickavasagar then put some questions to the dumb daughter of the king. She began to speak. Then the Buddhist king and all his subjects became Saivites. Manickavasagar then made the Buddhist teacher and his disciples speak once again.

Then Lord Siva approached Manickavasagar in the form of a Brahmin. Manickavasagar repeated the whole **Thiruvachakam** to the Brahmin. The Brahmin wrote down everything on palmyrah leaves and wrote in the end, "Manickavasagar repeated this, Thiruchittambala Udayar wrote this". Then the Brahmin kept everything on the Panchakshara Step of the Chitsabai. The Brahmins of Chidambaram showed this to Manickavasagar and requested him to tell the meaning of the verses. Manickavasagar said, "This Thillai Nataraja is the purport of these stanzas". He at once merged himself in the feet of Nataraja at the age of thirty-two.

The poems of Manickavasagar are fifty-two in number. They are all collected together under the title Thiruvachakam. They are most beautiful, sublime and inspiring. They contain ornamental poetry. South Indians sing Thiruvachakam daily. The hearts of those who hear these hymns melt at once.

Dear readers! You can understand from the life of Manickavasagar that Lord Siva becomes the slave of His devotees.

This chapter included the three Ancient Alwars, Periyalwar, Nammalwar, Kulasekhara Alwar, Thondaradipodi Alwar, Thiruppan Alwar, Thirumangai Alwar, Thirumazhisai Alwar, Andal and Saint Alavandar. I have covered three Ancient Alwars, Periyalwar, Nammalwar, Kulasekhara Alwar, Thondaradipodi Alwar, Thiruppan Alwar, Thirumangai Alwar and Thirumazhisai Alwar.

Whenever there is a decay of righteousness, people become irreligious great saints take birth for the spiritual upliftment of the people. The Alwars incarnated in South India to save the people from such a crisis, rekindled the flame of Bhakti in South India. They sang the glory of Lord Hari. The Alwars came from all castes. Four of them were orthodox Brahmins. Two of them were non-Brahmins. One belonged to the depressed class. One was a woman. Four were Ayonijas, i.e. not born out of a womb. One was Kshatriya. The Vaishnav saints were twelve in number.

They were known as Alwars because they immersed in God-love. The hymns of the Alwar saints are known as Nalayira Divya Prabhandam, a book of four thousand verses. These hymns were collected by the great scholar Nada Muni. The Divya Prabhandam is a sacred treasure of divine knowledge that contains the quintessence of the Vedas, Itihasas and the Puranas in an attractive form.

THE THREE ANCIENT ALWARS

Poygai Alwar (Saroyogi), Bhudattalwar and Peyalwar are the three most ancient Alwars. They were born-saints. They are called the 'Pioneers of the Alwars'. Poygai Alwar was born at Kancheepuram in the 862, 962nd year of the Dvapara Yuga, i.e., nearly 5,500 years ago. Bhudattalwar was born the next day in Tirukadarmalai, the present-day Mahabalipuram. Peyalwar was born the next day at Mamayilai, now called Mylapore.

Poygai Alwar is regarded as the incarnation of Panchajanya or the conch of lord Hari. Bhudattalwar is regarded as the incarnation of His Gadha or mace. Peyalwar is regarded as the incarnation of Nandaka, the sword of lord Hari.

Poygai Alwar laid great stress on Jnana. Bhudattalwar laid great stress on Bhakti and Peyalwar on renunciation. They realized and uttered the same essential truths. They never felt or uttered any depreciation of lord Siva. They realized and sang the essential unity of Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu. They were far superior to the bigoted commentators of later days.

The verse of these three ancient Alwars are collectively known as **Antadis**. In an Antadi, the last word of each verse forms the first word of the succeeding one.

The ancient Alwars showed perfect tolerance towards Saivism. Poygai Alwar says that there is but one God who is variously called Siva and Hari, that His vehicle is either Garuda or a Bull, and that His action is either destruction or preservation. He says also

that the Supreme Lord is one and the same, though He appears in two forms as Hara and Narayana. Peyalwar also states that he saw the Lord at Venkata Hill as Siva with His matted locks and axe, and as Hari with His discus and crown.

The message of these ancient Alvars is: “Control the senses. Remain in the holy company of devotees. Do total surrender to lord Narayana. Repeat His Name always. Worship Him. Meditate on Him. Sing His glory. He is the Lord of the three worlds. He is your prop and refuge. Obtain His grace. You will attain bliss and immortality. His grace alone can save you. He abides in your heart”.

PERIYALWAR

Periyalwar means ‘Great Alwar.’ Periyalwar was known by the name Vishnuchitta also as his mind was ever absorbed in Lord Vishnu. He was the foster-father of Andal.

All the Alvars or Vaishnavite mystics of South India form the body and limbs of Nammalwar. Periyalwar forms the head. The other Alvars prayed to the Lord for wisdom and liberation, but Periyalwar, out of Vatsalya Bhav towards the Lord, cared much for His well-being and blessed Him: “His holy feet may remain in undiminished effulgence for millions and millions of years to come-Pallandu”. Hence, a prominent position is given to Periyalwar.

A pious Brahmin named Mukundachary lived with his chaste and devoted wife Padma in Srivilliputhur in the Tirunelveli district. He was daily praying to the Lord for the gift of a child. His prayer was granted. Periyalwar or Vishnuchitta was born. He is regarded as the incarnation of Garuda, the vehicle of Lord Hari.

The Parliament of Religions was held in Madurai. Professors of every faith in the country attended the conference. Vaishnavites, Saivites, Saktas, Jains, Buddhists and Pasupadas were all present on this unique occasion. Heated discussions went on. No one satisfied the king.

Lord Hari appeared in the dream of Vishnuchitta or periyalwar and said, “Awake Vishnuchitta, start at once for Madurai. A big religious conference is being held there under the patronage of the king. Take part in the conference. I assure you of full success. Give to the king and the people the message of devotion to Lord Hari”.

Vishnuchitta attended the conference and took a prominent part in it. The king welcomed him and paid him due respects. Vishnuchitta answered all the questions put to him by the scholars. He said, “Lord Hari is the Supreme Deity. He is the highest Truth. He is the Protector. Take refuge in Him alone. Do total, unreserved, ungrudging self-surrender. Repeat His Mantra Om Namo Narayanaya. Obtain His grace. He will liberate you. He will make you immortal. He will give you supreme peace and eternal bliss. Through His grace only you can conquer Maya. He abides in the heart of all beings. He is

all-pervading. He is all merciful. He is infinite. Sing His glory. Do Japa of his Name. Worship Him. Be ever attached to His lotus feet”.

A miracle happened now. The moneybag, which was fixed in a high place, broke loose and fell at the feet of Vishnuchitta by itself. The king was quite convinced. He was highly satisfied.

Periyalwar has given us two poems. The first is the Pallandu in twelve verses. The other is a collection known as Periyalwar Thirumozhi in four hundred and sixty-one charming verses of fine melody. Pallandu is given the foremost place in the collection of works of all the Alvars. What Pranava is to the Vedas, so is Pallandu to the works of the Alvars.

Periyalwar Thirumozhi treats of the Lilas of Lord Krishna. It contains the essence of the Bhagavatam. He passed away at the age of eighty five.

NAMMALWAR

Nammalwar is the first great mystic and poet. He is the greatest among the Alvars. ‘Nammalwar’ means ‘Our Alwar’. He is also known by the names Satakopar and Vakulabharanar. Nammalwar is the popular name.

Tradition says that Nammalwar was born in Thirukkuruher, now called as “Azhwar Thirunagari”, in the Tirunelveli district, on the banks of the Tambraparani, on a Friday, which was a Full Moon day in Vygasi, Pramadhi, in the 43rd year after the birth of the Kali Age.

Nammalwar was born of Kariar or Karimaran and Udaiya Nangaiyar. Kariar was a Vellala Pillai. His ancestors were all devoted worshippers of Lord Hari. Kariar was married, while young, to Udaiya Nangaiyar, daughter of the Vaishnava Sthanik of the village of Thiruvanparisaran, lying on the other side of the Western Ghats. Udaiya Nangaiyar was a chaste woman. Nammalwar was known by the names of Maran and Senamsa.

Madhurakavi a learned Brahmin from the Chola country who was well versed in the Vedas came to Maran’s village and asked him an abstruse philosophical question. “if within a dead thing a small thing were to take birth, what will the latter eat and where will it sleep? The meaning is: If within the inanimate matter or body, the subtle soul or Jiva were to take birth, what would it feed on and where would it rest? Maran replied “The small thing will feed on it and rest therein. It means The subtle soul encashed in matter of prakirti will feed on it. The Prakirti will enjoy pleasure and pain the body and rest in it. Or it will enjoy God and rest in God”.

Madhurakavi was struck with admiration at the subtle and wise answer. He became Maran’s disciple. He determined to remain by the side of his Guru and learn wisdom at his feet. Maran sang soul-stirring hymns such as Thiruvirutham, Thiruvashiriam, Peria Thiruvantadi and Thiruvaimozhi. Madhurakavi carefully wrote

down the song-as they were sung-on palm leaves and published them after the death of Nammalwar.

The popular view is that Thiruvirutham contains the essence of the Rig Veda, that Thiruvasiriam contains the essence of the Yajur Veda, that Peria Thiruvantadi contains the Atharva Veda and that Thiruvaimozhi contains the essence of the Sama Veda. This is not correct. There is no semblance between Nammalwar's works and the Vedas. The only thing that is common to both Nammalwar's works and the Vedas is that both contain descriptions about God and the means of attaining God-realization.

Nammalwar ever lived in divine consciousness. He had cosmic consciousness. He experienced "Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagat. The whole world is full of Vishnu". He would embrace a tree or a calf or a pillar say: This is my Lord Hari". He would point out to the blue sky and say: "Here is my blue-colored Krishna". He shed profuse tears. He sang, wept and danced. He passed away at the age of 35.

KULASEKHARA ALWAR

Kulasekhara was a pious king of the Kerala or Chera dynasty of South India. He was a king at Calicut and was the son of King Dritavratha. He was born at Tiruvanjikkulam in the 28th year of the Kali Era, in Prabhava, Masi, Sukla Paksha, Dvadasi, Thursday, when the star Punarvasu was in ascendancy.

Kulasekhara was an ardent devotee of Sri Rama. He found happiness in worshipping Lord Rama and in the service of His devotees. He was learned, wise and devoted, He had knowledge of Sanskrit and Tamil. He was proficient in the Vedas. He was chivalrous. He attained victories over the then princes of South India. He had titles such as Koodanayaka and Kongarkone. He ruled his dominion justly and wisely.

His Works

As Kulasekhara was an ardent devotee of Lord Rama, called in Tamil 'Perumal' and as he identified himself with the Lord, he was called Kulasekhara Perumal and his Tamil them was called 'Perumal Thirumozhi', a collection of 105 verses. It is included in the first part of the Divya Prabhandam. Half of the collection glorifies the temples that he had visited. The twenty verses on Lord Krishna are pregnant with Madhurya Bhav. The ten verses that pertain to Chitrakut give a description of the chief incidents in the life of Lord Rama. It is the strong belief of the Vaishnavas that a repetition of these ten verses would bestow on one as much merit as a reading of the whole Ramayana.

Kulasekhara stayed at Srirangam for several years. He sang Mukunda Mala in Sanskrit. It consists of forty stanzas. This is a very reputed work of Kulasekhara.

Kulasekhara has sung many hymns on the Lilas of Sri Krishna and Sri Rama, on the love of the Gopis and the glory of Krishna, and on the glory of Rama and His chivalrous deeds.

THONDARADIPPODI ALWAR

Thondaradippodi Alwar was born in a Choliya Brahmin family in Thirumandangudi. The traditional date of his birth is Tuesday, Krishna Paksha, Chaturdasi, Margazhi, Prabhava, in the 28th year of the Kali Era. He was named Vipranarayana. He was devoted to God Ranganatha of Sriangam. He is regarded as the incarnation of the Tulasi garland of Lord Hari. He had a flower garden in Srirangam and offered garlands daily to the Lord.

Thondaradippodi Alwar was well versed in the Vedic lore. He had intense Vairagya. He lived in a hut in his garden and lived upon the Prasad of Lord Ranganatha. He sang the glory of the Lord.

Thondaradippodi Alwar lived for 105 years at Srirangam and then attained the abode of Lord Hari. His beautiful hymns are Thirumalai and Thiruppalliezhuchi.

Thondaradippodi Alwar and Thirumangai Alwar were contemporaries; and hence, thondaradippodi Alwar also seems to have belonged to the 6th century A.D.

THIRUPPAN ALWAR

Thiruppan Alwar was born in Woraiyur, near Tiruchirapalli. His traditional date of birth is Durmathi, Karthigai, Krishna Paksha Dvitiya, Wednesday, in the 342nd year of the Kali Era. He was known by the name Munivahana as he was carried to the temple on the shoulders of Saranga Muni. He is regarded as the incarnation of Srivatsa, a mark on Sri Vishnu's chest.

THIRUMANGAI ALWAR

Thirumangai Alwar was born in Thirukuraiyalur in the chola Desa. His traditional date of birth is Nala, Karthika, Full Moon, Thursday, in the 398th year of the Kali Era. Thirumangai Alwar was known by the names Parakala and Nila. He is regarded as the incarnation of the bow Saranga of Lord Hari. He was a petty chieftain. He was a brave warrior and a dauntless hero. He was the commander of the army of the Chola king.

Nila wanted to marry Kumudavalli, a pious virgin who lived in Thiruvali. She was a great devotee of Lord Hari. She refused to marry one who was not a SriVaishnava. Then Nila got himself initiated into Vaishnavism. Then Kumudavalli said, "This outward conversion is nothing. You must daily feed 1008 Bhaktas for one year and bring their Prasad to me every day". Nila consented. He fed 1008 Vaishnavas daily for a year. Kumudavalli then married Nila and they lived happily.

Nila composed the sacred hymns known as Peria Thirumozhi, Thirukuruthandagam, Thirunedunthandagam, Thiruvezhukoorirukkai, Siria Thirumadal and Peria Thirumadal. He said with tears of repentance, "I have wasted my life in lust.

The lord has saved me. I committed atrocious crimes. I plundered even the Lord. I was very wicked. The Name of the Lord has saved me. Hail, Hari! Hail, Vishnu”.

A voice was heard from above: “Fear not, Thirumangai Alwar! You have not offended Me. Go to Srirangam. Complete the construction of the temple. Disseminate Bhakti far and wide. Worship Me with the garlands of your beautiful hymns and then come to Me”.

Thirumangai Alwar went from temple to temple and composed hymns in respect of eighty-six temples. He met the great Sivacharya Thiru Jnana Sambandhar at Sirgazhi and was honored by him. Thus he seems to have belonged to the 6th century A.D.

Thirumangai Alwar brought away a golden image of the Buddha from Nagapattinam and used the gold in it to build the temple walls of Srirangam. He reached the abode of eternal bliss, Vaikuntha, in his 105th year.

Nammalwar came to Srirangam from Azhwar Thirunagari. Thirumangai Alwar gave him a grand reception and listened with intense devotion to his inspiring hymns.

Thirumangai Alwar’s message is: “Repeat constantly the names of lord Vishnu. Remember Him always. Do total self-surrender unto the lord and obtain His grace. Be attached to His lotus feet. Lord Narayana is our savior and redeemer. He is the ocean of compassion. Serve the Bhaktas. A Bhakta and the Lord are one. Sing His glory. Dance in divine ecstasy. Live in Lord Hari. Repeat His thousand names. Study Vishnusahasranama”.

THIRUMAZHISAI ALWAR

Thirumazhisai Alwar was also known by the name Bhaktisara. He was called after his birthplace as Thirumazhisai Alwar. He was the son of sage Bhrigu, one of the Brahma Rishis, and an Apsara or heavenly nymph named Kanakangi or Kanakavati. His birthplace was Mahisara or Mahisarapuram, corrupted into Mazhisai or Thirumazhisai, a village near Madras.

Thiruchandaviruttam is a poem that consists of a hundred and twenty stanzas. Nanmukhan Thiruvantadi is a poem consisting of ninety-six verses. Both of them have been included in the Divya Prabhandam, a collection of the Tamil works of all the Alvars. As Thirumazhisai Alwar was a convert from Saivism to vaishnavism, we see in his works traces of bigoted devotion.

The Alwar made Kumbakonam his permanent place of residence. He died there at a very advanced age. Tradition says that he lived for four thousand and seven hundred years through his Yogic powers.

This Alwar’s message is: “Narayana is the Supreme Lord. He is the sole refuge. There is great power in the names of the Lord. Yama, the Lord of Death, whispers into

the ears of his messengers that they should not approach the devotees of Lord Hari. Feel His presence everywhere. He dwells in your heart. He is your protector at all times and stages. Love the Lord. Do self-surrender and obtain His grace. You will attain eternal bliss and immortality”.

Saints of Maharashtra

Chapter 6

The saints included are Samarth Ramdas, Namdev, Ekanath, Tukaram, Damaji, Chokamela, Akalkot Swami, Gorakumbar and Jnanadev. I have covered Samarth Ramdas, Namdev, Ekanath, Tukaram and Jnanadev.

SAMARTHA RAMDAS

Ramdas was one of the greatest saints of the world. He was the inspirer of Shivaji. He was born of Suryaji Panth and Renuka Bai in Jamb, 'Maharashtra, in 1608 A.D. His original name was Narain'.

Ramdas was a contemporary of Sant Tukaram. He was a great devotee of Hanuman and Lord Rama. He had Darshan of Lord Rama even when he was a boy. Lord Rama Himself initiated him.

Ramdas did Purascharana of the Rama Mantra of thirteen letters Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Rama thirteen lakhs of times at Tafali, near Nasik, on the banks of the Godavari. After the Purascharana was over, once again Ramdas had Darshan of Lord Rama. It is said that Ramachandra ordered Ramdas to visit holy places such as Nasik, Haridwar, Kasi, etc.

Ramdas sprinkled over a dead body holy water uttering the names of Rama and the dead body was restored to life. Ramdas had to do this, because he had blessed a woman who had just lost her husband.

Ramdas was an Advaitin and a Bhakta in one. He had this very noble quality that he never hated any religion or nation. His main object was to spread the Hindu religion throughout India.

Ramdas had not visited Pandharpur, as he had not known the existence of this holy place. One day, the tradition says, Lord Panduranga Vittal, in the form of a Brahmin, with a batch of three hundred pilgrims, appeared before Ramdas and asked him whether he had any objection to see Lord Krishna. Ramdas replied in the negative. Panduranga then took Ramdas to Pandharpur, and when the Bhaktas approached the temple, the Brahmin disappeared. Ramdas then knew that it was none other than the lord that had brought him to that holy place. He entered the temple, and to his great surprise, found Sri Rama standing alone on a brick.

It is said that Sri Rama ordered Ramdas to go to the banks of the Krishna and help the cause of Shivaji, the incarnation of Siva and founder of the Kingdom of Maharashtra. Ramdas came to the Krishna and went about preaching from Mahabaleshwar to Kolhapur. He established eleven principal seats of Maruti that emphasized the importance of physical development. He installed the shrines of Sri Ramachandra at Champavati and introduced Sri Rama Navami Mahotsava and the procession of Sri Rama's chariot. **It was at the place called Singanvadi that Shivaji became the disciple of Ramdas.**

Shivaji placed the sandals of his Guru on the throne and acted as regent of the kingdom under the order and guidance of his Guru and adopted as ensign the flag of orange colour. There is a beautiful and romantic incident current in the Maharashtra country about Shivaji's adoption of the Gerua flag and his ruling the kingdom in the name of Saint Ramdas. Ramdas asked Shivaji to rule the kingdom in his (Ramdas's) name, to take the Gerua Chaddar for his banner and defend its honour with his life, and to think that the kingdom did not belong to himself but treat it as trust to be ruled justly and well before God. And thus had come the Gerua banner to Shivaji.

His Preachings and Life

Ramdas's ways were very peculiar. He appeared to the outside world as a mad man. He had a small bow. He used to have, by his side, a large number of stones with which he pelted every object he saw. To men really interested in his teachings, he gave the Mantra Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram.

Ramdas had eleven hundred disciples, of whom three hundred were women. The women disciples were also expert preachers and were virtuous. Ramdas sent his disciples to all parts of India to spread the Hindu religion. **His disciples and Mutts in the North directly or indirectly helped Shivaji and his work.** Ramdas's organization in the South, round about Thanjavur, helped Shivaji's son Rajaram to go to Jinji and carry on the Twenty Years' War with Aurabgzeb. When Ramdas visited Thanjavur, Venkoji, who was the step-brother of Shivaji, became his disciple. Ramdas appointed Bhimaswami, his direct disciple, as the Mahant of the Thanjavur Mutt.

(One wonders would Shivaji Maharaj been the same person if it were not for Ramdas. Not only did the Swami motivate, encourage Shivaji to protect his motherland and ask him to rule justly but he also used his disciples to help Shivaji as referred to in the above para. As human beings we need to realize the importance of a good advisor. While I am all for using one's intellect one cannot know all, we must always try and benefit from the knowledge / experience of the more learned. If you were to compare the quality of Shivaji's Guru/ advisor with the ones that Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Vajpayee have, you can guess why India as a nation has not lived up to its potential).

Last Day

Ramdas generally preferred to live in the forest, where he would say, he had better meditation. In his last days, Ramdas devoted his time partly to literary activities and partly to the systematic building up of his disciples and mutts, both in the north and in the

South. The literary works of Ramdas such as Dasabodh, Manache Shlok (verse addressed to the mind), Karunashtakas (hymns to God) and Ramayana (describing only the conquest of Lanka by Sri Rama and the vanquishing of Ravana) are very popular. It was as a tribute to Ramdas's extraordinary patience and determination in rehabilitating the Hindu religion in India that people named him Samartha Ramdas, a name that he richly deserved. This great Guru of Maharashtra breathed his last in 1682 at Sajjangad, near Satara, a fortress that was given to him by Shivaji for his residence.

Ramdas repeated the Rama Mantra with his last breath. At the time of his departure from the world, a dazzling light emanated from his body and ramdas was absorbed in the image of Lord Rama.

The last instructions of Ramdas to his disciples were: "Do not think much of your bodily wants. Have Satsang with devotees. Keep the image of Lord Rama in your heart. Repeat the name of Lord Rama always. Annihilate lust, greed, anger, hatred and egoism. See Lord Rama in all creatures. Love all. Feel His presence everywhere. Live for Him alone. Serve Him in all beings. Make total and unreserved surrender unto Him. You will always live in Him alone. You will attain immortality and eternal bliss".

NAMDEV

Namdev of Maharashtra was a saint of mediaeval India. He was not a servant of Lord Krishna, but His companion. Namdev was an Amsa of Lord Krishna.

Namdev was a contemporary of Jnanadev, the famous saint of Maharashtra, being his senior in age by about five years. He was born in 1269 A.D. He came from a family of tailors who were sincere devotees of Vittala of Pandharpur. The family members were observing the Wari of Pandharpur, i.e., going on pilgrimage twice a year on the first eleventh day of the Ashadh and Kartik months. The family originated from a village called Narsibamani on the bank of the river Krishna near Karad, in district Satara. Being a great devotee of Vittala and wishing to improve his material prospects, Dama Setti, the father of Namdev, had moved to Pandharpur a year or two before his son's birth.

One day, as Namdev's mother was busy, she asked Namdev to take the place of offerings to Vithoba. Namdev went to the temple, placed the plate of eatables before Vithoba and asked Him to accept the offering. However, when Namdev did not find any evidence of acceptance by Vithoba, he cried so bitterly that Vithoba actually assumed a human form and accepted the offerings gratefully. Namdev's mother was surprised when her son come back in great joy with an empty plate and explained to her that Vithoba had accepted the offerings by actually consuming the eatables presented in the plate. So the next day, she herself accompanied Namdev (but without his knowledge) to see and verify for herself the correctness of Namdev 's explanation. The same performance was repeated and the mother had the satisfaction of seeing the lord actually accepting their offerings. Her joy and pride in Namdev was unbounded. She felt grateful to the lord that she was the mother of such a great devotee.

Lord Vithoba his only interest - In other respects, however, Namdev was the despair of his parents, and later, of his wife and other relatives. From the beginning he had no interest in worldly affairs; he neglected studies in school; he would not take interest in his father's profession as a tailor, or in any other trade. His sole interest was to spend day night in devotion to Vithoba. His parents were getting old; the family prosperity was waning. Therefore, their dearest wish was that Namdev, while devoting a reasonable spare time to his devotions, should help in maintaining the family in comfort.

In the meantime, Namdev married Radha Bai. Radha Bai was a worldly-minded woman. In response to Namdev's invitation, Vittal attended the naming ceremony of Namdev's child in the guise of a human being, named the child "Narayana" and gave good gifts on the occasion.

There was extreme poverty in the house of Namdev. Namdev neglected his worldly duties. Namdev's mother and wife abused Lord Krishna. Under the guise of Dharma Setti of vaikunthapuram and the pretence of past friendship with Namdev, the Lord visited Namdev's house, gave magnificent gifts to Radha Bai and disappeared.

Adopting a Guru - Greatly mortified, Namdev repaired to Vithoba and complained to Him of his humiliation. He said that he saw no necessity for him to have a Guru as he had intimate relationship with Lord Krishna Himself. Lord Krishna said that Namdev did not really know Him. Namdev denied this. Lord Krishna challenged Namdev and asked him to find out His identity that day. Namdev agreed. Lord Krishna took the form of a Pathan horseman and passed before Namdev. Namdev could not recognize the Lord. Namdev agreed to go to a Guru Lord. Vithoba then advised him to adopt Visoba Khechar as his Guru.

"If you want to be absolutely happy, fill this world with Bhajan and the sacred Name of the Lord. The Lord is the world itself. Give up all ambitions or desires. Let them take care of themselves. Be content only with the name of Vittal. You need not undergo any hardship or penance in order to go to heaven. Vaikuntha will come to you of itself. Do not be anxious of this life or of your friends or relatives. They are like the illusions of a mirage. One has to spend a short space of time here like the potter's well that goes on rotating even after the potter has left. Make the best of it by keeping the name of Vittal ever in your mind and on your lips and by recognizing Him everywhere and in everyone. This is my experience of life.

He took his Samadhi at Pandharpur at the age of twenty-six in 1295 A.D. Namdev was not an author of any big treatise; but he left behind him a large number of Abhangas or short poems, full with the nectar of Bhakti and love towards God. These are exceedingly sweet. Most of these are lost, but there are extant about four thousand Abhangas, which to this day are a great source of inspiration to all who would read them. Some of the Abhangas are found in the Sikh Adi Granth.

The essence of Namdev's message is: "Always recite the Name of the Lord. Constantly remember Him. Hear His glory. Meditate on the Lord in your heart. Serve the

Lord with your hands. Place your head at His lotus feet. Do Kirtan. You will forget your hunger and thirst. The Lord will be near you. You will attain immortality and eternal bliss”.

EKANATH

Ekanath is a well-known saint of Maharashtra. He was born of Suryanarayana and Rukmini in the year 1533 A.D. at Paithan in Maharashtra. The fire of devotion was kindled in his heart even when he was a boy of ten years. This was all due to his previous Samskaras. The Gita says: “There he regains the understanding acquired in his former body and strives still further for perfection”. (Ch. VI-43)

Once Ekanath heard an Akasa Vani, a voice from the sky, which said: “See Janardana Panth at Devagiri. He will put you in the proper spiritual path and guide you”.

Ekanath immediately proceeded to Devagiri, met Janardana Panth and prostrated at his feet. Janardana accepted Ekanath as his disciple. Janardana was the Dewan of the province of Devagiri. Ekanath lived with his Guru for eight years and served him with heart and soul.

Ekanath had great love for the untouchables He had equal vision. He saw Lord Krishna in all creatures. Once, some Mahars, who were passing by the house of Ekanath, stopped in front of his house as they were attracted by the sweet smell of palatable dishes that were being prepared for the death anniversary of Ekanath’s father. Ekanath at once invited them and fed them sumptuously. He got food prepared again and invited the Brahmins The Brahmins were offended. They said, “O Ekanath, you fed the Mahars first. We will not take food at your home”. Ekanath then invoked his forefathers directly through his power of devotion and fed them in person.

Ekanath was a great devotee. Lord Krishna Himself assumed the form of a poor Brahmin boy, and under the name of Kandia, lived as a water-carrier in the house of Ekanath for a period of twelve years rendering such service as bringing water for the Puja, making sandal-paste for worship, removing the leaves after dinner, etc. After this period, Kandia disappeared miraculously.

Ekanath wrote the Bhagavat, which holds the same place of respect in Maharashtra as Tulsidas’ Ramayan holds in Northern India. It is popularly known as **Ekanath Bhagavatam and is found in every house in Maharashtra.**

At the age of sixty-six, in the year 1599 A.D., Ekanath passed away. A staunch Bhakta, a great Bhagavata, an ideal householder and a great saint, he still shines as a model for all people.

TUKARAM

Tukaram was born in 1608 A.D. at a village called Dehu in Pune district. It is about seven miles from Alandi-the place honoured by the Samadhi of Jnaneshwar-and about three miles from the railway station at Shelarwadi on the railway line running from

Bombay to Pune. Tukaram came of a well-to-do Sudra family belonging to the tradesman class called Moray. The family had established itself at Dehu for a long time. They had accepted Vithoba of Pandharpur for worship and they had also constructed a temple of their own dedicated to Vithoba. The family members, since many generations, had also accepted the 'Wari' of Pandharpur, i.e., the annual pilgrimages to Pandharpur on the eleventh day of the month of Ashadh (June-July) and again on the eleventh day of the month of Kartik (October-November). The childhood of Tukaram was almost uneventful.

As a consequence of the many misfortunes, Tukaram was so much disgusted with life that he left his house and village and disappeared into the Bhamnath forest nearby. For fifteen days he stayed there concentrating on the Almighty without food, water or sleep. After the fifteenth day, he realised his Supreme self and Vithoba visited him in His true form.

Tukaram now began to spend his life more and more in devotional practices, study of the poems and works of Jnanadev, Namdev and Ekanath, gita, Bhagavata, etc., with the result that slowly, but unconsciously, he began to make poems. Then one day, he had a dream in which Namdev appeared with Pandurang, woke him and advised him to make devotional songs. They would not hear of any excuses. Pandurang gave him the necessary inspiration and Namdev told him to complete the one hundred crores of poems which he had intended to make and of which he had completed ninety-four crores and forty lakhs, leaving a balance of five crores and sixty lakhs for Tukaram. **The divine art of making poems came naturally to Tukaram and as they were of the nature of Bhakti, the people began to be more and more attracted to Tukaram**-more so as he did not seek anything materially for himself or for his own worldly welfare.

Whenever Tukaram began to perform bhajan or Kirtan, people began to flock to the place, and with very few exceptions, people of all classes began to consider him as a saint and treat him with respect. This was of course resented by a small number of people and they tried their best to discredit him; and having failed in this, they sent a report against Tukaram to Rameshwar Shastri who was regarded as a learned Brahmin of the time.

Tukaram tried to convince the Shastri that he was a very innocent person. But Rameshwar was adamant and would not listen to any argument. He told Tukaram finally that he saw, in the poems of Tukaram, a deliberate attempt to explain the principles of the Srutis which Tukaram, as a Sudra by caste, had no right to do; he must therefore stop making poems of that sort in future, and as for the poems he had already made, they should be drowned in the Indrayani river.

Tukaram held all Brahmins in great reverence, and therefore, he immediately brought out of his home all the poems, bound them together, tied a big syone round the bundle, and threw it into the river. Tukaram's traducers, who were jealous of him, were greatly pleased. Tukaram did not mind their taunts, but he was worried. Here he was, merely singing the praise of God in his poems, and that was not the monopoly only of the Vedas

and the Srutis. Moreover, he had been commanded by Panduranga Himself to spread Bhakti among the people through the poems.

Tukaram then sat on the bank of the river Indrayani in constant prayer to Pandurang to show him the correct path. For thirteen days he thus sat unmoved, without water, food or sleep. On the last day, one of Tukaram's followers, in a dream, saw Pandurang coming to him and telling him, "Go to the river; there you will find the poems of Tukaram floating on the surface intact". At once the man went to the river and brought to the bank the bundle of poems. Tukaram was moved by the mercy of god and delivered five poems blaming himself for doubting the world of God and for putting Him to so much trouble of having to preserve the poems in water for thirteen days. This, however, was not sufficient for Tukaram who always held the word of a Brahmin as worthy of respect as that of the Holy Scriptures and he had the orders of Rameshwar Shastri not to make poems any more.

Soon after this event, Rameshwar one day passed through the village of Vagholi and came to a village where a Muslim Fakir by name Anagadshah was staying. In Anagadshah's compound, there was a big fountain throwing cool water all round. Rameashwar, seeing that fountain, was tempted to take a bath in the waters. Anagadshah was annoyed to see a stranger trespassing into his compound and cursed him that all his body should feel a burning sensation inwardly. Immediately Rameshwar began to suffer from the effects of the curse. All his efforts to make his body cool failed, and in despair, unable to bear the pangs, he went to Alandi and sat before the Samadhi of Jnaneshwar and prayed to him to relieve him of the burning sensation in his body. At night he saw Jnaneshwar in a dream. Jnaneshwar addressed him: "You entertain hatred in your mind towards Tukaram, who is the greatest devotee of Vithoba. Go and surrender to Tukaram; all your bodily pains will vanish". Rameshwar, however, was afraid to go in person to Tukaram. He knew by that time all that had taken place at Dehu and he had come to recognize the greatness of Tukaram and therefore was afraid that Tukaram might curse him. So he sent a letter to Tukaram apologizing and asking for forgiveness. Tukaram had nothing but supreme love towards everybody, towards even his persecutors. On receiving the letter, he sent a reply to Rameshwar in the following verse:

"If the mind is pure, even your enemies become your friends; you have no danger from cruel animals like tigers or serpents. Even poison becomes as beneficial to you as the nectar of heaven. All unhappiness will be converted into happiness and even suffering due to the burning of the body will vanish. You will come to love all creatures as you love yourself; you will entertain equal towards all. Tuka says, 'Narayan has showered His mercy on me. That is why I feel like this towards all beings'."

As Rameshwar read the reply and came to the words, "and even suffering due to the burning of the body will vanish", his body became free of all suffering and thus it was firmly impressed on him that he had done great injustice to Tukaram. From that time Rameshwar became a great admirer and an ardent follower of Tukaram.

By this incident, Tukaram's name and fame spread far and wide; but he himself remained poor. He was always doing bhajan and Kirtan and he earned nothing. The burden of maintaining the family consisting of himself, wife and children fell on his poor wife. Tukaram was so absorbed in his Bhajan that generally he forgot about his dinner. His wife had to take his food, search for him and serve him wherever he was to be found. Mostly he was found on the Bhamgiri hill. Tukaram's wife had to undergo many difficulties in maintaining the family; but she was a good though she was apt to lose her temper sometimes. Before his death, Tukaram himself acknowledged her devotion and purity.

Shivaji was a great admirer of Tukram and sent him a large number of costly presents and also invited him to his court. Tukaram refused both the presents and the invitation, saying that he had nothing to do with earthly kings. Then Shivaji himself came to Tukaram and stayed with him for several days and pressed him to accept some presents which Tukaram steadily refused. One day, Shivaji was so much impressed and moved by the praises, songs and bhajan of Tukaram that he, for the moment, wanted to give up his kingdom and take to Bhajan and follow Tukaram. But Tukaram dissuaded him from doing so. He reminded Shivaji of his duty to his subjects, to Hindu religion and to Dharma and finally advised him thus: "In order to realise God, it is not necessary to give up food or water and go to a forest. If the worldly pleasures come to you of themselves, enjoy them by all means, but only in the name of god who dwells in all of us. Do not desire anything and do not give up anything. This is my simple and only advice to you". Shivaji returned to his court a happier and a more contented man.

He prayed to the Lord that he might be taken away soon to His lotus feet where he could remain worshipping Him continuously forever and anon. When Tukaram's end was near, he told his friends that he would be going away in a few days. The night before his departure, Tukaram performed a Kirtan which was memorable in many respects. The subject was Harikatha. Tukaram said, "Harikatha is like the union of three holy rivers-God, the devotee and His Name. By listening to it, all one's sins are burnt off and one is purified. Even the pebbles lying around become holy and fit to be worshipped. Those among you who wish to be fit for heaven should take the holy Prasad. This is the easiest way to attain heaven". The next morning Tukaram said to his wife, "You will soon get a son called 'Narayan' and he will make you happy.

"Though you all bear the responsibilities of family life, never forget Pandurang never forget to worship Him and sing his praises. Pandharpur is very near you. It is the Vaikuntha on this earth. Go and worship the Lord there. It is my experience that the Name of the Lord alone will save you at the time of death. All of you have protected and maintained me in your midst for such a long time.

I can never repay you and I am very grateful to you. I shall ever pray to Vithoba to bless you all and take you all to heaven after this life. This is my goodbye to you all and this is my advice to you. I prostrate before you and beseech you with tears never to forget the Name of the Lord. Always do Kirtan and Bhajan of Lord Narayana. Do not be anxious about your material welfare. The lord will look to it. This is all ephemeral. The Lord's

Name is eternal. Depend on it only. Ever sing the praises of the lord. Do Japa of Ramakrishna Hari and He will always save you? This is my last request and advice”.

Thus passed away one of the great saints of Maharashtra with God’s Name on his lips, singing praises of Him. Tukaram left this world in the year 1649 when he was forty-one years old. It is believed that Lord Vishnu sent His own chariot and servants to take Tukaram to His abode.

JNANADEV

The name of Saint Jnaneshwar is on the lips of everyone in Maharashtra. He was a born Siddha. He was a Yogi of high attainments. He had control over the elements. His work **Jnaneshwari** is the crest-jewel of Marathi literature. The simple style, the beautiful illustrations and the apt similes have rendered the book attractive, charming and extremely useful. Jnaneshwari is to Maharashtrians what the Ramayan of Tulsidas is to the Hindi-speaking people. Jnanadev lived for a few years, but he did wonders. He was a genius, a Yogi of deep spiritual experiences and a sage of supreme order. He boldly criticized his predecessors. He was a great social and religious reformer. **He laid the foundation of the great Bhakti movement in Maharashtra.** He was a fine poet to boot.

The life history, origin and other particulars of great saints, prophets and world teachers are all very strange and mysterious. Jnanadev was born of a Sannyasin. Kabir was the son of a weaver. He was found in a lake. Sankara was a poor child of Kaladi.

Jnanadev, or Jnaneshwar (Lord of Jnana or knowledge) as he is sometimes called, was one of the ancient saints of Maharashtra. He, and Mukund Rai who lived about a hundred years earlier to him, are the founders of the Bhakti Panth in Maharashtra.

In the **thirteenth century**, there lived in Apegaon a village accountant called Govindpanth. He had only one son named Vittalpanth. Vittalpanth was the father of Jnanadev. Vittalpanth was pious and dispassionate even from his boyhood. He was fond of pilgrimage to holy places. He was a profound scholar in Sanskrit. His heart yearned for Self-realization. He had a great liking for taking Sannyasa.

Vittalpanth married Rukmabai, daughter of Sridharpanth of Alandi, which is twelve miles from Pune and which contains the Samadhi of Jnanadev.

Vittalpanth was disgusted with worldly life. He went out on a pilgrimage and returned back to Alandi. He wanted to take Sannyasa. His wife and father-in-law were not in favor of his taking Sannyasa.

Vittalpanth went to Varanasi and took Sannyasa from sripad Yati (Ramananda Swami). Rukmabai came to know that her husband had entered the fourth Ashrama of life. This was a great shock to her. She prayed to God fervently for reunion with her husband.

Sripad Yati, the Guru of Vittalpanth, happened to come to Alandi on his way to Rameswaram. Rukmabai approached him and prostrated before him. The Yati blessed her: “You will be the mother of eight sons”. Rukmabai wept bitterly. The Yati said, “O blessed lady! What is the cause of your sorrow?” Then Rukmabai explained everything to the Yati.

The yati thought that the young man who took Sannyasa from him must be the husband of this lady. At once he gave up his idea of going to Rameswaram. He returned to Varanasi, rebuked his disciple and said, “Go back to Grihastha Ashrama and make your wife happy. She wants to serve you. My blessings are with you”.

Then Vittalpanth carried out the orders of his Guru and came back to Alandi and lived with Rukmabai. The orthodox Brahmins of Alandi outcasted him and his wife. They said, “It is against scriptures to take to married life again after taking Sannyasa”. But Vittalpanth thought that he was doing the right thing as he was following the instructions of his Guru.

In course of time, four children were born to Vittalpanth and Rukmabai-Nivritti in 1273 A.D., (three sons and a daughter). Nivritti is regarded as an incarnation of Siva, Jnanadev as an incarnation of Hari, Sopan of brahma and Muktabai of Sarasvati.

On one occasion, Vittalpanth went with his children to Tryambakeshwar, near Nasik, situated in the vicinity of the source of the river Godavari. As they were going round the Brahmagiri Mountain, they met a tiger. Vittalpanth hurried away with his children, but missed Nivrittinath. Nivrittinath entered the cave of Jnaninath. Jnaninath initiated Nivritti into the mysteries of Yoga and gave him all his spiritual wealth. Some day later, Nivritti joined his father and younger brothers.

Nivritti became a disciple of Jnaninath, who himself was a disciple of Gorakhnath. Gorakhnath was a disciple of matsyendranath who received spiritual instructions from lord Siva Himself. Nivritti and Jnanadev studied Vedas under their father. They now made great progress in the study of spiritual books.

Vittalpanth, on his return to Alandi, was treated as an outcaste by the Brahmins. He and his family members were put to a great deal of hardship and humiliation. Other children of the village would not mix with their children in play.

The sons attained boyhood. The parents wanted to perform their holy-thread ceremony. The Brahmins declined to perform it. They said, “A Sannyasin should not lead the married life. The scriptures do not allow the performance of the thread ceremony of a Sannyasin’s children. Sons born of a Sannyasin cannot have the right of wearing the thread. They cannot be considered as Brahmins. You and your wife have violated the sacred laws of the scriptures. There is only one Prayaschitta for you both. You both should give up your lives in the Triveni of Prayag”.

Vittalpanth and Rukmabai left Alandi and sacrificed their lives at the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna at Prayag. They thought that the Brahmins would take pity on their sons at least then and perform the thread ceremony. Nivriddhi was then about ten years, Jnanadev about eight and the youngest about five years.

Jnanadev was very keen on wearing the holy thread in order to fulfill the desire of his parents who had sacrificed their lives even for that purpose. He again approached the Brahmins of Alandi. The Brahmins now were moved to pity when they saw the helpless condition of those boys. They said to them, "Bring a letter of authorization from the learned Brahmins of Paithan. We will then perform the thread ceremony for you" The boys went to Paithan and saw the learned Brahmins. They recited the Vedas. The Brahmins said, "You are not entitled to recite the Vedas. Stop the recitation now. You are the sons of a Sannyasin who came back again to his Grihastha Ashrama". Jnanadev replied, "Anybody may recite the Vedas. Even this buffalo may recite". He placed his hand on the back of the buffalo and immediately the buffalo recited the Vedas for one hour, from the point where Jnanadev had left, with correct rhythm and intonation. The Brahmins were struck with wonder and awe. They said, "These are not ordinary boys. They are the very incarnations of Shankar, Vishnu and Brahma". Really the boys were born Siddhas. Even then the Brahmins refused to perform the thread ceremony, though they admitted the greatness of the boys. The buffalo of Paithan died at Ale in the district of Pune. There is a Samadhi for this buffalo. This Samadhi exists even now.

The boys stayed at Paithan and taught the Gita to the people. Jnanadev performed many miracles. A Brahmin had to perform the anniversary of his father. The Brahmins did not turn up. Jnanadev brought the Pitris themselves to earth from the heaven. He brought to life a dead man. The man's name was Sachidananda Pava.

Jnanadev wrote Jnaneshwari, his wonderful commentary on the Gita, at the age of thirteen. The book was completed in 1212 at Nevasa, a town on the banks of the Pravara river in the district of Ahmednagar. The actual writer was Sachidananda Pava. Jnanadev's commentary on the Gita is considered as one of the best. In a big assembly of Sanskrit Pundits in Varanasi, Jnanadev was elected as the president.

Nivriddhi, Jnanadev, Sopan and Muktabai went on a pilgrimage and visited Pandharpur, Prabhasa, Dwaraka, Ayodhya, Mathura, Hardwar, Varanasi, Kanchi, Ujjain, Tirupathi, Rameswaram, Madurai, Gokaran and other places. Namdev accompanied them.

Jnanadev lived for about six years after he had completed Jnaneshwari Gita.

Jnanadev met Chang Dev. Chang Dev was a famous saint who had managed to defy death by his Yogic powers for a thousand and four hundred years. He used to live at Vateshwar. He was very proud of his attainments in Yoga. He had Bhuta Siddhi or complete control over all living beings. He used to travel on a tiger with a serpent as whip. Chang Dev had a curiosity to see Jnanadev. He started with a large number of disciples, riding on a tiger with a serpent as whip. Jnanadev and his brothers saw Chang

Dev coming in all pomp. Jnanadev asked the wall on which he was seated to move forward to welcome Chang Dev.

Chang Dev witnessed this great miracle performed by Jnanadev. He was humiliated. He quietly got down from the tiger. Made prostrations to Jnanadev and accepted him as his Guru.

Mukta, a mere girl of fourteen, gave instructions to chang Dev, an old man of a thousand and four hundred years. She said, “O Chang Dev! Listen. **If you want to attain salvation, the first step is sincere devotion.** Devotion will bring Vairagya. Vairagya will lead to Jnana. Therefore your aim should be Jnana and your first foot must be on devotion”.

Jnanadev had full control over the elements. When there was no vessel to prepare food, his sister prepared bread on his back. Jnanadev is regarded as an Avatara of Lord Krishna.

Nivriddhi was really the Guru of Jnanadev. Nivriddhi asked Jnanadev to write an independent book embodying all his experiences in Jnana. Jnanadev wrote **Amritanubhava** that contains the highest experiences of Jnanadev in 800 couplets.

Jnanadev made it known to his friends and brothers that it was his desire to enter into Sanjivani Samadhi or Samadhi while alive. This he did at Alandi on the 13th day of the dark half of the Kartik month, about the end of October **1296, in his twenty-second year.** He drew up all the Prana to the Brahmarastra and gave up the physical body. If anybody reads the Gita written by him by the side of his Samadhi, all his doubts will be cleared.

All the other brothers and the sister also left the world within a short space of less than eight months. Sopan entered into Samadhi on the banks of the river Karha at Saswad, which is at the bottom of the hill Purandhar, near Pune. Chang Dev attained Samadhi in a village called punatamba. Muktabai dissolved herself in the five elements at the age of eighteen, when there was a big storm. Nivriddhi entered into Samadhi at Tryambak that is at the source of the Godavari.

Thus passed the four great souls. When a period of twenty-five years, they broke down the bigotry of the Brahmins of the period, raised them from the darkness of ignorance, firmly established the path of Bhakti and Jnana, made people realise that all were equal and it was the actions which counted for the glory and excellence of a man and not the accident of birth or the mere study of the Vedas and Vedanta. Among Jnanadev’s followers were Namdev, a tailor; Namdev’s maid-servant Jani; Narahari, a goldsmith; Chokamela, a Mahar; Sena, a barber; Gora, a potter; Savanta, a gardener; and Bhagu, a Maharin, who were all respected as great devotees of Krishna.

Jnanadev was the founder of an institution called Warkari Sampradaya, which is still alive in all its glory in Maharashtra. It is called “Wari to Pandharpur” All who have

accepted this wari undertake to go to Pandharpur on Ashadh Ekadasi (June-July) and Kartik Ekadasi (October-November) days every year. They must visit Pandharpur at least once annually, if not on both these days. It is considered so very sacred that except in the event of physical illness, they continue to go to pandharpur year after year through the whole life and from generation to generation.

May you all draw inspiration from the life of Jnanadev! May you all soar high in the realms of knowledge by studying carefully Jnaneshwari and Amritanubhava! May the blessings of Jnanadev, a rare Siddha Yogi, be upon you all! May you all visit his place of Samadhi in Alandi during his anniversary day and receive the blessings of the saint who still feeds, in secrecy, his devotees with the nectar of immortality!!

Saints of North India

Chapter 7

The saints included in this chapter are Tulsidas, Kabir, The Saintly King Pi Tulsidas, Kabir, The Saintly King Pipa, Narsi Mehta, Dadu, Akha, Milarepa of Tibet, Gorakhnath and Saint Haridas. I have covered Tulsidas, Kabir and Narsi Mehta.

GOSWAMI TULSIDAS

Tulsidas was born in Rajpur, in the district of Banda in Uttar Pradesh, in Samvat 1589 or 1532 A.D. He was a Sarayuparina Brahmin by birth and is regarded as an incarnation of Valmiki, the author of Ramayana written in Sanskrit. His father's name was Atmaram Shukla Dube and his mother's name Huls. Tulsidas did not cry at the time of his birth. He was born with all the thirty-two teeth intact. In childhood his name was Tulsiram or Ram Bola.

Tulsidas's wife's name was Buddhimati (Ratnavali). Tulsidas's son's name was Tarak. Tulsidas was passionately attached to his wife. He could not bear even a day's separation from her. One day his wife went to her father's house without informing her husband. Tulsidas stealthily went to see her at night at his father-in-law's house. This produced a sense of shame in Buddhimati. She said to Tulsidas, "My body is but a network of flesh and bones. If you would develop for lord Rama even half the love that you have for my filthy body you would certainly cross the ocean of Samsara and attain immortality and eternal bliss". These words pierced the heart of Tulsidas like an arrow. He did not stay there even for a moment. He abandoned home and became an ascetic. He spent fourteen years in visiting the various sacred places of pilgrimage.

While returning from answering the call of nature, Tulsidas used to throw the water that was left in his water-pot at the roots of a tree which a spirit was occupying. The spirit was very much pleased with Tulsidas. The spirit said, "O man! Get a boon from me". Tulsidas replied, "Let me have Darshan of lord Rama". The spirit said, "Go to the Hanuman temple. There Hanuman comes in the guise of a leper to hear the Ramayan as the first hearer and leaves the place last of all. Get hold of him. He will help you".

Accordingly, Tulsidas met Hanuman, and through His grace, had Darshan or vision of Lord Rama.

Tulsidas wrote twelve books. The most famous book is his **Ramayan-Ram_charit-manas-in Hindi**. He wrote this book under the directions of Hanuman. This Ramayan is read and worshipped with great reverence in every Hindu home in Northern India. It is an inspiring book. It contains sweet couplets in beautiful rhyme. Vinaya Patrika is another important book written by Tulsidas.

Some thieves came to Tulsidas's Ashram to take away his goods. They saw a blue-complexioned guard, with bow and arrow in his hands, keeping watch at the gate. Wherever they moved, the guard followed them. They were frightened. In the morning they asked Tulsidas, "O venerable saint! We saw a young guard with bow and arrow in his hands at the gate of your residence. Who is this man". Tulsidas remained silent and wept. He came to know that Lord Rama Himself had been taking the trouble to protect his goods. He at once distributed all his wealth among the poor.

Tulsidas lived in Ayodhya for some time. Then he shifted to Varanasi. One day a murderer came and cried, "For the love of Rama give me alms. I am a murderer". Tulsidas called him to his house gave him sacred food, which had been offered to the lord and declared that the murderer was purified. The Brahmins of Varanasi reproached Tulsidas and said, "How can the sin of a murderer be absolved? How could you eat with him? If the sacred bull of Siva-Nandi-would eat from the hands of the murderer, then only we would accept that he had been purified". Then the murderer was taken to the temple and the bull ate from his hands. The Brahmins were put to shame.

Tulsidas once went to Brindavan. He visited a temple. He saw the image of lord Krishna. He said, "How shall I describe The beauty, O Lord! But Tulsidas will bow his head only when You take up bow and arrow in Your hands". The Lord revealed Himself before Tulsidas in the form of Lord Rama with bow and arrows.

Tulsidas's blessings brought the dead husband of a poor woman back to life. The **Moghul emperor** at Delhi came to know of the great miracle done by Tulsidas. He sent for Tulsidas. Tulsidas came to the emperor's court. **The emperor asked the saint to perform some miracle. Tulsidas replied, "I have no superhuman power. I know only the name of Rama". The emperor put Tulsidas in prison and said, "I will release you only if you show me a miracle".** Tulsidas then prayed to Hanuman. Countless bands of powerful monkeys entered the royal court. The emperor got frightened and said, "O saint, forgive me. I know your greatness now". He at once released Tulsidas from prison.

Tulsidas left his mortal coil and entered the Abode of Immortality and Eternal Bliss in 1623 A.D. at the age of ninety one at Asighat in Varanasi.

KABIR

Kabir was born in 1440 A.D. The probable date of his death is 1519 A.D. as mentioned in Kabir Ka Santi. Kabir died at Maghar near Gorakhpur. He was found lying as a child in the lake called Lahar Talao near Kashi on a leaf of lotus. Here he was found by niru, a childless Mohammedan weaver who was going with his wife Nima to attend a function in a neighboring village. They took compassion on the forsaken baby. They took him to their home and there they brought him up as their own child. A Kazi was called in to give the child a name. The Kazi told Niru that the child was a demon and should be killed immediately. A miracle happened. The knife was plunged into the heart of the child. No drop of blood came out. Kabir uttered a verse, which made them understand that he was not ordinary flesh and blood. Then the name 'Kabir' was given to the child. The word 'Kabir' means 'great' in the Arabic language.

Kabir seems to have been of Hindu parentage, though adopted and brought up as a Mohammedan. It is said that he was born of a Brahmin girl-widow, who, to hide her shame, left the child in the lake. But in a stanza, Kabir denies his own conception in a womb. He says that he was not born nor did he dwell in a womb (vide page 122, Vol. VI, of Macauliff's Sikh Religion). Kabir grew up without food. His adopted parents became very anxious about him. Then he began to drink the milk of a calf that yielded milk daily in a miraculous manner.

The life of Kabir is shrouded in mystery. We know nothing of his early training and career. What has been discovered in the way of his biographical details is very little. Beyond the facts that he was a weaver, born of poverty-stricken parents, that he lived at Kashi during the reign of Sikander Lodi, that he was a disciple of the great religious reformer Ramananda, and that he himself was the Guru of a number of distinguished disciples, we know positively nothing about Kabir.

From his early boyhood, Kabir was very much religiously inclined. He was of a reflective disposition. He had very often his mystic moods. Even in his childhood he engaged himself in discussions about god with Sadhus. He received and served Sadhus and Sannyasins with intense devotion and faith. Though his foster-father got him married, Kabir was not attached to home and family. He used to roam about the holy city of Kashi. He earned his livelihood from the loom.

He was loved by Hindus and Muslims alike. He was not of one religion or of one nation. He was the prophet of universal brotherhood. He did not observe the rules of caste. He recognized the higher harmony of Hinduism and Islam. He realized the truth that religion, spirituality, love, devotion, faith and divine life were the monopoly of no one religion, but were common to all religions. Kabir's religion was a religion of simplicity. His motto was love. His means of salvation was devotion to God and God alone. Kabir's home was the universe, his brother was mankind and his great father was the Father in Heaven. Kabir did not renounce the world in order to devote himself to the practice of severe austerities and meditation. He was a dynamic Yogi. He worked at the loom, and at the same time, his mind was ever fixed on God.

Kabir was an exponent of Nirguna Bhakti. He had supreme love for all. He was exceedingly kind and compassionate. He was fearless. He never asked anybody to follow

him. He roamed about the country singing his songs. He condemned all formalities and ritualism. He made a vehement criticism of conventions. He was a social revolutionary. He also endeavored strenuously for the social, moral and spiritual uplift of the people. That is the reason why he still lives in the heart of all people.

Kabir was a great propagandist in his own way. He tried his level best to bring about concord and harmony among the diversity existing around him. His poetry was full of criticism of the Mullahs and the priests. Kabir not only preached, but lived the life of unity of men and creeds. He used his songs as weapons against the Mullahs and the priests. He did not spare words in the wars he waged against Muslim and Hindu orthodoxy. Kabir was a powerful saint with Self-realization that lent him the authority to live and preach the Truth without fear or restraint.

Kabir, the poet-saint of Kashi, is one of the most interesting personalities in the history of Indian mysticism. He was an illustrious philosopher-poet. He was a skilled musician and a poet as well. He was a prophet. His songs are wonderful. They are the spontaneous expressions of his spiritual experience and his love. Kabir used homely metaphors in his songs. He sang his religion in popular verse. His verses are repeated, even today, in almost every household in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Kabir's doctrines are soul stirring and magnanimous. Some of Kabir's poems are very mystic.

Kabir's works are mostly collections of songs composed in the various meters of old Hindi. There are seventy-two works. The most important and famous works are: the Kabir Bijak, the Suknidhan, Sabdas, Sakhis, Rekhtas, Mangal, Vasant and holi Agams. The Kabir Bijak is the great authority on all religious matters and doctrines of the Kabir-panthis.

Kabir's language is very simple. His style is beautiful. His expression of ideas is very bold. His poetic composition is most natural. Each couplet is pregnant with deep significance. The similes and metaphors are most appropriate. Other characteristic features are depth of feeling and directness of speech. The expressions have emanated straight from Kabir's heart. Kabir's skill in compressing a world of sense in a simple couplet is marvelous and unrivalled. His sayings are unparalleled. His poems are soul-stirring and inspiring. There is depth of thought and penetrative insight.

Saying of Kabir (excerpts)

1. If you have no devotion to God, you will not gain anything by pilgrimage. You may roam over the country and yet your heart will be impure. The man who has gone to Varanasi to see Lord Viswanath, but has not destroyed hypocrisy, lust and greed and has no devotion, will gain nothing.
2. The diamond appraiser only can know the value of the diamond. Kabir says: only he who has developed devotion can attain God.
3. Have no faith in this perishable body. Remember the Lord by all your breaths; that is the only way to salvation.
4. 'Virtue' abides where there is compassion, 'vice' where there is greed; 'death' where there is wrath, and the Lord Himself where there is forgiveness.

5. Have patience; everything comes out in time. The gardener waters the plant daily, but it bears fruit only in season.
6. There is no greater evil than a bad word; it burns everything into ashes. A kind word is, on the contrary, like rain that falls in nectar-like torrents.
7. Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today, nor till the evening what you can do this very moment; for you know not when death may overtake you, upsetting all your plans.
8. He alone is the hero who has all the five senses at his command. He who has no such control never approaches the Lord.
9. Just as sugar toys are made of sugar and sugar exists in all of them, even so, the whole universe exists in Brahman and Brahman in it.

NARSI MEHTA

Narsi Mehta belonged to a vadanagar Nagar-Brahmin family of Junagarh in Kathiawar, Gujarat. He was born of a very poor family. From his very boyhood he had great devotion to Lord Krishna. He lived with his brother. All the time he kept singing songs on Krishna and Gopi Lila and dancing in ecstasy. As he did not care a bit for any of the household matters and as he did not earn anything, his brother's wife taunted and till-treated him. Narsi Mehta never entertained any idea of earning his livelihood. He had the firm conviction that Lord Krishna would provide him with all his wants. This was due to his previous Samskaras. He was of a happy-go-lucky nature. He did Tapasya at Gopinath, situated on the seaside. He had the Darshan of Lord Krishna through the grace of Lord Siva. He came back to his house and got married. He had a son by name Shyamaldass and a daughter by name Kunwarbai.

Narsi Mehta was a contemporary of Mira Bai. He had Sakhya Bhav. He would address Lord Krishna in terms of equality. He was a simple-minded, frank Bhakta. He saw Lord Krishna everywhere and in everything. He had Para Bhakti and cosmic consciousness. He composed a poem 'Hari Mala' it is said that his daughter's marriage was conducted by Lord Krishna Himself with great pomp and eclat. Though Narsi Mehta was very poor, rich marriage-presents given to Kunwarbai's mother-in-law greatly astonished all.

After the death of his wife and son, Narsi became free. He began devoting all his time to worship and singing of Bhajans. He became an Ativarnashrami. He broke down all caste rules and observances. He held Kirtan everywhere, even in the house of sweepers and men of inferior caste. The other Nagar-Brahmins hated Narsi and also outcasted him. They refused to admit him in one of their feasts. Another miracle happened now. A Dom or a man of inferior caste was found by the side of each Brahmin. The haughty Nagar-Brahmins were cowed down. They began to show respect to Narsi. They openly admitted and declared that Narsi Mehta was a great Bhakta.

The world has not produced a Bhakta greater than Narsi in this Yuga. Narsi's devotion was of a unique nature. He has pointed out to the world the true path of devotion. That is the reason why he still lives in our hearts, why his inspiring song

“Vaishnava Janatho Thene Kahiye” that gives a fine description of a true Vaishnava, is sung even today by all the Bhaktas.

Glory to Narsi! Glory to Hari! Glory to His Name!

Saints of South India

Chapter 8

The saints included in this chapter are Thiruvalluvar, Kanak Das, Nilakantha Dikshitar, Purandara Das, Thayumanavar, Yogi Mukund Rai, Paramahansa Tailang Swami, Pattinathu Pillayar, Tyagaraja, Nandanar, Bhadrachalam Ramdas, Vilwamangal, Yogi Vemana, Jaya Deva, Vidayanya, Appayya Dikshitar, Sadasiva Brahman, Appayyacharya, Potana. I have covered Thiruvalluvar, Tyagaraja and Nandanar.

THIRUVALLUVAR

About two thousand years ago there flourished in Mylapore, Madras, a born Siddha and a born poet by name Valluvar or, as he more commonly known, ‘Thiruvalluvar’, which only means, ‘the devotee of the Valluva caste’ Valluvas are Pariahs (now called Harijans) and their vocation was proclaiming the orders of the king by beat of drum. There is a tradition that Thiruvalluvar was the son of one Bhagavan, a Brahmin, and Adi, a Pariah woman he had married.

Thiruvalluvar was born at Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas. He is regarded as an Avatara of Brahma. His wife Vasuki was a chaste and devoted lady, an ideal wife, who never disobeyed the orders of her husband, but always carried them out implicitly. Thiruvalluvar showed people that a person could lead the life of a Grihastha or householder, and at the same time, lead a divine life or a life of purity and sanctity. He showed people that there was no necessity to leave the family and become a Sannyasin to lead a divine life of purity and sanctity. All his wife sayings and teachings are now in book form and known as ‘Thirukkural’ in a couplet form. Here are some of them:

Just as the alphabet ‘A’ is the beginning of all letters, so also, God is the beginning for this universe.

Learn the Shastras completely and then act according to their injunctions.

The Anicha flower will fade by smelling, but guests are more sensitive if the hosts turn their faces a bit.

Death is like sleeping in the burial ground;

Birth is like waking in the morning.

These couplets are 1,330 in number. They contain the essence of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the six Darshanas. **Thirukkural** is regarded as a universal Bible. It is another Gita Koran or Zend Avesta.

Some aspirants repaired to Thiruvalluvar and enquired: “O sage, which Ashrama of life is better-Grihastha or Sannyasa? Thiruvalluvar did not give any answer. He simply kept quiet. He wanted to teach them the glory of Grihastha Ashrama by example.

Thiruvalluvar was taking cold rice in the morning. He said to his wife: “Vasuki, the rice is very hot. Bring a fan to cool it”. Thiruvalluvar’s wife was drawing water from the well when Thiruvalluvar called her. She at once left the rope and ran to him with a fan to cool the rice. She did not say to her husband: “How can the cold rice be hot? Why do you want a fan now?” She simply obeyed his commands. The vessel that contained water was hanging half-way in the well unsupported on account of her Pativrata Dharma Shakti. The aspirants noticed this phenomenon and the noble conduct of Vasuki and were simply struck with amazement.

About midday, on another occasion, Valluvar called his wife and said, “Bring a lamp immediately, O Vasuki! I am stitching the cloth. I cannot see the eye of the needle. I cannot pass the thread properly”. Vasuki did not say to her husband: “It is broad daylight now. Why do you want a lamp? You can see the eye of the needle clearly”. But she implicitly obeyed his word. The aspirants were much inspired by the ideal life of sage Thiruvalluvar and the exalted conduct of Vasuki. They did not speak a word to the saint. They took leave of the saint and quietly left the place with profound satisfaction. They were deeply impressed by the practical and exemplary life led by Thiruvalluvar and Vasuki. They learnt the lesson that of life of an ideal householder was in no way inferior to that of an ideal Sannyasin who was treading the path of Nivritti and austerity in the Himalayan caves and that each was great in its own place, time and circumstances.

Dear readers! Such ladies sit enthroned in the hearts of their husbands. No doubt they are hard to find, because such women never advertise themselves; but there must be many in our land of Rishis and sages; and unless we maintain such a high level of moral purity, we will all be going down in these days of modern civilization and scientific advancement. If the husbands of the present day behave like Thiruvalluvar, the wives will say, "My“husband has become senseless. He wants to fan the rice when it is so cold! He wants a light when there is broad sunlight”. The wives will rebuke their husbands and fight with them.

That house wherein the wife serves the husband with sincere devotion and observes Pativrata Dharma is heaven on earth. The house wherein the wife fights with the husband and disobeys his orders is a veritable hell on earth. Ladies who practice Pativrata Dharma need not go to temples. They need not practice any Vrata or penance. Service to the husband becomes worship. They can realise God through service to their husbands. Husbands also should be ideal persons with noble qualities. Husbands are the Gurus for their wives. The wives need not get any initiation from any Acharya. Glory to such exalted ladies who practice Pativrata Dharma!

TYAGARAJA

Tyagaraja Swami was a South Indian Telugu Brahmin. He was the son of Rama Brahman. Panchapakesan and Ramanathan were his brothers. Tyagaraja had only a daughter, named Seethalakshmi, who had a son Tyagaraja, named after the grandfather.

Tyagaraja Swami was a great musician-saint of South India. He was the father of South Indian music. He was a devotee of Lord Rama. Most of his devotional songs are in praise of Lord Rama. They are highly inspiring and soul elevating.

Tyagaraja Swami is said to have composed twenty-four thousand Kirtans or songs in praise of Lord Rama. Most of his songs are in Telugu and a few are in Sanskrit. Only about five hundred of his songs are sung by the songsters of the present day. When devotional songs are sung with piety and devotion, they at once elevate the soul to magnanimous spiritual heights and melt the mind in the Lord and lead to communion and Bhava Samadhi.

Tyagaraja used to sing in the temple of Ambal at Thiruvaiyaru and worship the Devi before he proceeded for his daily Bhiksha. He adopted the Uncha Vritti profession and lived on Bhiksha, though he was well known throughout South India and many Maharajas were willing to have him as the Durbar singer.

Tyagaraja Swami was a superman. He had direct Darshan of Lord Rama on several occasions. The Vighrams or the idols that he worshipped were thrown into the river. Tyagaraja received directions in the dream from Lord Rama and located the exact spot in the river where the Vighrams lay buried underneath the sand, after one year.

The then Raja of Pudukkottai once tested the merits of the songsters in a strange way. He placed an unlit lamp amongst them. He challenged the experts to light the lamp with a song only without using a match or any other means. Tyagaraja Swami meditated upon Narada for a while, sang the Raga Jyotisvarupini, and the lamp lighted of itself. All were struck with wonder.

Tyagaraja Swami restored to life a person who was accidentally drowned in a temple well while returning from a pilgrimage to Tirupathi. He had the knowledge of the correct day and hour of the passing away of his soul from the physical body. Divine Rishi Narada gave him the book named Swararnavam for propagating high-class music.

Tyagaraja never cared for wealth or position in society. He was humble. He courted poverty. Once, king Saraboji, the Raja of Thanjavur, sent a message to Tyagaraja. The messenger said, "Kindly compose a song or two in praise of the Raja and he will give you ten acres of land and a bag full of gold". Tyagaraja replied, "Why should I use my music for flattering Rajas who lead a vicious life? Fie upon that cursed gold which goads people to indulge in vices and run after sensual enjoyments". He sang a song in Kalyani, "Nidhi Chala Sukhama". The meaning of the song is: "Which gives greater happiness-gold or worship of lord Rama? O soul! Speak the truth. Which is sweeter and more delicious-milk, butter and curd or the essence of the nectar of meditation and Bhajana of Rama? Which is more conducive to health - a dip in the Ganga of serenity of

mind or in the muddy well of corruption? Which of the two is better-praise of a rich man who is puffed up with vanity or a song in praise of the all-merciful, omnipotent Lord?" The messenger did not speak a word. He left the place silently.

The then Maharaja of sent a messenger to fetch Tyagaraja at any cost. The messenger tempted Tyagaraja that the Maharaja would give him much wealth and a good position. Tyagaraja replied, "I regard wealth as an obstacle to man's progress. It does not contribute any happiness to man. On the contrary, it brings all sorts of miseries. Only fools run after money". He then explained to the messenger the meaning of his song "Padavi Ni Sadbhakti" in Sakalabhairavi Raga: "That state of mind which places implicit faith in Rama is the real position in life. There are many who can repeat all the Vedas, Shastras and Upanishads like a parrot, but who do not live in the spirit of their teachings. Can such persons be regarded as having attained the real position? There are many persons who possess a mountain of wealth, a number of wives and children, and who enjoy the friendship of Maharajas. Can they be considered to have attained the real position? Can a person who holds a so-called good status in society, but who leads a life of evil passions and dire ignorance, be regarded as having attained the real position? No, no. Only that man who has implicit faith in Rama, who meditates on the Lord, and who has obtained His grace has attained the real position". The messenger went away quietly.

What a magnanimous soul was Tyagaraja! He spurned riches and position. The wealth of the three worlds is mere straw for a man who enjoys the wealth and bliss of God-realization. The state of such exalted souls is beyond description.

Tyagaraja Swami's Samadhi is at Thiruvaiyaru on the banks of the Cauvery, about seven miles from the town of Thanjavur. All the songsters of South India assemble there and celebrate his anniversary with great joy every year in the month of January. In 1942 January, his 95th anniversary was celebrated.

Glory to Tyagaraja Swami whose songs instill devotion, joy and happiness in the heart of the hearers.

NANDANAR

Nandanar belonged to the depressed class of South India. He was a Pariah saint. He was an embodiment of humility, patience and sincerity. He was a great devotee of Lord Nataraja of Chidabaram. Chidambaram is known as the Southern Kashi. It has a big temple. 'Nataraja' is another name for Lord Siva who is worshipped in this temple. If you remain in Chidambaram for some time, your sins will be destroyed. This is a popular belief.

Nandanar was serving a Brahmin in the cultivation of lands. When Nandanar asked his master for permission to go to Chidambaram for Darshan of lord Siva, the arrogant Brahmin landlord abused him and said, "You low-caste Pariah! You want to worship the Deity of the Brahmins! Go and worship the ghosts, the Bhutas- your family deities". Nandanar was a great devotee of Lord Nataraja. He was always praying with

devotion. On the incessant request of Nandanar, the Brahmin landlord told him: “yes you can go to Chidambaram, if you finish planting paddy in 250 acres of the farm in time”. Nandanar was in great despair. He wanted to attend the yearly festival at Chidambaram. He had to finish the work within two days. He cursed himself and prayed the whole night for Lord Nataraja’s grace and guidance. Lord Nataraja did a miracle to help His Bhakta. The next morning, the entire plot of land of 250 acres was green with paddy plants, with ears just shooting up. The Brahmin was quite astonished. He thought that Nandanar must be a great devotee. He immediately allowed him to go to Chidambaram.

Nandanar was thus able to go to Chidambaram. Here he had to face another trouble. The Brahmin temple priests, the Dikshitaras, would not allow Nandanar to enter the temple as he was of low birth. Lord Nataraja appeared to them in their dream and said, “O priests, perform all the necessary purificatory ceremonies for Nandanar. He is My great devotee. Allow him to worship Me inside the temple”.

The Brahmins performed the ceremonies accordingly and allowed Nandanar to enter the inner shrine. Nandanar went into the inner shrine and worshipped Nataraja and was in the height of divine ecstasy. A dazzling, effulgent light was seen Nandanar disappeared. He was nowhere to be seen. He became one with Lord Nataraja.

God makes no difference between a high-caste Brahmin and a low-caste Pariah. What He wants is sincere devotion. Nandanar was more dear to Him than the Brahmin temple-priests. In the realm of Bhakti, there is no distinction of caste, creed or colour. He who has devotion is dear to the Lord.

Women Saints

Chapter 9

The women saints included in this chapter are Madalasa, Mira Bai, Sakubai, Muktabai, Rabia and Avadayakkal. I have covered Mira Bai, Sakubai and Avadayakkal.

MIRA BAI

Mira is regarded as an incarnation of Radha. She was born in Samvat 1557 or 1499 A.D. in the village Kurkhi, near Merta, a small state in Marwar, Rajasthan. Mira was the daughter of Ratan Singh Ranthor and the granddaughter of Dudaji of Merta. The Ranthors of Merta were great devotees of Vishnu. Mira Bai was brought up amidst Vaishnava influence, which molded her life in the path of devotion towards Lord Krishna. She learnt to worship Sri Krishna from her childhood. When she was four years of age, she manifested religious tendencies. Once there was a marriage procession in front of her residence. The bridegroom was nicely dressed. Mira who was only a child, saw the bridegroom and said to her mother innocently, “Dear mother, who is my bridegroom?” Mira’s mother smiled, and half in jest and half in earnest, pointed towards the image of Sri Krishna and said, “My dear Mira, Lord Krishna-this beautiful image-is your bridegroom”.

Child Mira began to love the idol of Krishna very much. She spent much of her time in bathing and dressing the image. She worshipped the image. She slept with the image. She danced about the image in ecstasy. She sang beautiful songs in front of the image. She used to talk to the idol.

Mira's father arranged for the marriage with Rana Kumbha of Chitore, in Mewar. Mira was a very dutiful wife. She obeyed her husband's commands implicitly. After her household duties were over, she would go to the temple of lord Krishna, worship, sing and dance before the image daily. The little image would get up. Embrace Mira, play on the flute and talk to her. Rana's mother and other ladies of the house did not like the ways of Mira, as they were worldly-minded and jealous. They were all annoyed with her. Mira's mother-in-law forced her to worship Durga and admonished her often. But Mira stood adamant. She said, "I have already given up my life to my beloved Lord Krishna". Mira's sister-in-law Udabai formed a conspiracy and began to defame the innocent Mira. She informed Rana Kumbha that Mira was in secret love with others, that she with her own eyes had witnessed Mira in the temple with her lovers, and that she would show him the persons if he would accompany her one night. She further added that Mira, by her conduct, had brought a great slur on the reputation of the Rana family of Chitore. Rana Kumbha was very much enraged. He straightaway ran with sword in hand towards the inner apartments of Mira. Fortunately, Mira was not in her room. A kind relative of the Rana checked him and said, "Look here Rana! Do not be in haste. You will repent later on. Consider well. Enquire into the matter very carefully. Find out the truth. Mira is a great devotional lady. What you have heard now may be a wild rumor only. Out of sheer jealousy some ladies might have concocted a cock-and-bull story against mira to ruin her. Be cool now". Rana Kumbha agreed to the wise counsel of his relative. The Rana's sister took him to the temple at dead of night. Rana Kumbha broke open the door, rushed inside and found mira alone in her ecstatic mood talking to the idol.

The Rana said to Mira, "Mira, with whom are you talking now? Show me this lover of yours". Mira replied "There sits He-my Lord-the Nanichora who has stolen my heart". She fainted. There was a wild rumor that Mira was mixing very freely with Sadhus. She, no doubt, had great regard for Sadhus and mixed freely with them. Mira never cared a bit for the meaningless scandals. She stood unruffled.

Mira was persecuted in various ways by the Rana and his relatives. She got the same treatment which Prahlad got from his father Hiranyakasipu. Hari shielded Prahlad. Here, Sri Krishna always stood by the side of Mira. Once the Rana sent a cobra in a basket to Mira with the message that it contained a garland of flowers. Mira took her bath and sat for worship. After finishing her meditation, she opened the basket and found inside a lovely idol of Sri Krishna and a garland of flowers. Then the Rana sent her a cup of poison with the message that it was nectar. Mira offered it to Lord Krishna and took it as His Prasad. It was real nectar to her. Then the Rana sent a bed nails for Mira to sleep on. Mira finished her worship and slept on the bed of nails. Lo! The bed of nails was transformed into a bed of roses.

When Mira was thus tortured by her husband's relatives, she sent a letter to Tulsidasji and asked the advice of the saint. She wrote thus: "All my relatives trouble me,

because I move amongst Sadhus. I cannot carry on my devotional practices in the house. I have made Giridhar Gopal my friends from my very childhood. I am strongly attached to Him. I cannot break that attachment now”.

Tulsidasji sent a reply: “Abandon those who do not worship Rama and Sita as if they are your enemies, even though they are your dearest relatives. Prahlad abandoned his father; Vibhishana left his brother Ravana; Bharata deserted his mother; Bali forsook even his guru; the Gopis, the women of Vraja, disowned their husbands in order to attain the Lord. Their lives were all the happier for having done so. The opinion of holy saints is that the relation with God and love of God alone is true and eternal; all other relationships are unreal and temporary”.

Once Akbar and his court musician Tansen came in disguise to Chitore to hear Mira’s devotional and inspiring songs. Both entered the temple and listened to Mira’s soul-stirring songs to their heart’s content. Akbar was really moved before he departed, he touched the holy feet of Mira and placed a necklace of emeralds in front of the idol as a present. Somehow the news reached the Rana that Akbar had entered the temple in disguise, touched the feet of Mira and even presented her a necklace. The Rana became furious. He told Mira, “Drown yourself in the river and never show your face to the world in future. You have brought great disgrace on my family”.

Mira obeyed the words of her husband. She proceeded to the river to drown herself. The names of the Lord “Govind, Giridhari, Gopal” were always on her lips. She sang and danced in ecstasy on her way to the river. When she raised her feet from the ground, a hand from behind grasped her. She turned behind and saw her beloved Krishna. She fainted. After a few minutes she opened her eyes.

Lord Krishna smiled and spoke to her these words: “My dear Mira, your life with this mortal husband is over now. You are absolutely free. Be cheerful. You are Mine. Immediately proceed to the bowers of Vraja and the avenues of Brindavan. Seek Me there, my child Be quick”. He then disappeared.

Mira obeyed the divine call immediately. She walked barefoot on the hot sandy beds of Rajasthan. On her way, she was received by many ladies, children and devotees with great hospitality. She reached Brindavan. She found out her Flute-bearer there. She went about Brindavan begging for her food and worshipped in the Govinda Mandir that has since become famous and is now a place of pilgrimage. Her devotees of Chitore came to Brindavan to see Mira. Rana Kumbha came to Mira in the disguise of a mendicant, revealed himself and repented for his previous wrongs and cruel deeds. Mira at once prostrated before her husband.

Jiva Gosain was the head of the Vaishnavites in Brindavan. Mira wanted to have Darshan of Jiva Gosain. He declined to see her. He sent word to Mira that he would not allow any woman in his presence. Mira Bai retorted: “Everybody in Brindavan is a woman. Only Giridhar Gopal is Purusha. Today only I have come to know that there is another Purusha besides Krishna in Brindavan”. Jiva Gosain was put to shame. He

thought that Mira was a great devotional lady. He at once went to see Mira and paid her due respects.

Mira's fame spread far and wide. So many princesses and queens have come and gone. So many Ranis, Kumaris and Maharahis have appeared on the stage of this world and vanished. How is it that the queen of Chitore alone is still remembered? Is this on account of her beauty? Is this on account of her poetic skill? No. It is on account of her renunciation, one-pointed devotion to Lord Krishna and God-realization. She came face to face with Krishna. She conversed with Krishna. She ate with Krishna-her Beloved. She drank the Krishna-prema-rasa. She has sung from the core of her heart the music of her soul, the music of her Beloved, her unique spiritual experiences. And she has sung songs of surrender and Prem.

Mira had the beautiful cosmic vision. She saw Krishna in the tree, in the stone, in the creeper, in the flower, in the bird, in all beings-in everything. As long as there is the name of Krishna, there will be the name of Mira also.

It is extremely difficult to find a parallel to this wonderful personality-Mira-a saint, a philosopher, a poet and a sage. She was a versatile genius and a magnanimous soul. Her life has a singular charm, with extraordinary beauty and marvel. She was a princess, but she abandoned the pleasures and luxuries incident to her high station, and chose instead, a life of poverty, austerity, Tyaga, Titiksha and Vairagya. Though she was a delicate young lady, she entered the perilous journey on the spiritual path amidst various difficulties. She underwent various ordeals with undaunted courage and intrepidity. She stood adamant in her resolve. She had a gigantic will.

Mira's songs infuse faith, courage, devotion and love of God in the minds of the readers. They inspire the aspirants to take to the path of devotion and they produce in them a marvelous thrill and a melting of the heart.

Mira's earthly life was full of troubles and difficulties. She was persecuted. She was tormented and yet she kept up an undaunted spirit and a balanced mind all through, by the strength of her devotion and the grace of her beloved Krishna. Though she was a princess, she begged alms and lived sometimes on water alone. She led a life of perfect renunciation and self-surrender.

Mira had Raganuga or Ragatmika Bhakti. She never cared for public criticism and the injunctions of the Shastras. She danced in the streets. She did not ritualistic worship. She had spontaneous love for Lord Krishna. She did not practice Sadhana-bhakti. From her very childhood she poured forth her love on Lord Krishna. Krishna was her husband, father, mother, friends, relative and Guru. Krishna was her Prananath. Mira had finished the preliminary modes of worship in her previous birth.

Mira was fearless in her nature, simple in her habits, joyous in her disposition, amiable in her deportment, graceful in her behavior and elegant in her demeanor. She

immersed herself in the love of Giridhar Gopal. The name of Giridhar Gopal was always on her lips. Even in her dreams, she lived and had her being in Sri Krishna.

In her divine intoxication, Mira danced in public places. She had no sex-idea. Her exalted state could not be adequately described in words. She was sunk in the ocean of Prem. She had no consciousness of her body and surroundings. Who could gauge the depth of her devotion? Who could understand her internal Premamaya state of Mahabhava? Who could measure the capacity of her large heart?

Mira wafted the fragrance of devotion far and wide. Those who came in contact with her were affected by her strong current of Prem. Mira was like Lord Gauranga. She was an embodiment of love and innocence. Her heart was the temple of devotion. Her face was the lotus-flower of Pre. There was kindness in her look, love in her talk, joy in her discourses, power in her speech and fervor in her songs. What a marvelous lady! What a wonderful personality! What a charming figure!

Mira's mystic songs act as a soothing balm to the wounded hearts and tired nerves of those who toil in this world with the heavy burden of life. The sweet music of her songs exerts a benign influence on the hearers, removes discord and disharmony, and lulls them to sleep. Mira's language of love is so powerful that even a downright atheist will be moved by her devotional songs.

From Brindavan, Mira proceeded to Dwaraka. There she was absorbed in the image of lord Krishna at the temple of Ranchod.

SUKUBAI

Krar is village on the banks of the Krishna in Maharashtra. There lived in the village a Brahmin with his wife, son and daughter-in-law. The name of the daughter-in-law was Sakubai.

Sakubai was a great devotee of Lord Krishna of Pandharpur. The Name of the Lord was always on her lips. She was obedient, humble, simple, and virtuous Her mother-in-law was cruel, egoistic and stonehearted. The Brahmin and his son were entirely in the hands of that woman. They treated Sakubai very harshly.

Sakubai discharged her household duties well. She worked very hard and yet the mother-in-law abused and kicked her. She never gave Sakubai a full meal. Sakubai had to eat stale things. She bore everything very patiently. She never opened her lips. She could not open her heart to her husband as he was under the control of his mother. Sakubai was always cheerful. She reflected within herself thus: "I am highly grateful to the lord, because if I had been placed in prosperous conditions, I would have forgotten Him".

A woman in the neighboring house one day said to Sakubai, "My dear sister, I pity you. Have you not got your parents? How is it that none of them ever turns up to see you? Sakubai smiled and said, "My parents live in Pandharpur. Lord Krishna is my

father. Rukmini is my mother. They have countless children. So they have forgotten me. But I am sure they will come to one day and remove my difficulties”.

Pandharpur is a sacred place of pilgrimage. A big fair is held there on the eleventh day of the moon in Ashada. People from various places assemble there to get Darshan of Lord Vittala. Devotees of the Lord, with small flags in their hands, proceed to Pandharpur through the village Krar. They chant the Lord’s Name play on their cymbals and guitars and dance.

Sakubai saw a party of devotees. She had a strong desire to visit Pandharpur along with that party. It was not possible for her to get permission from her people, but she joined the party.

A woman of the neighboring house who saw Sakubai joining the party at once reported to her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law asked her son to bring Sakubai back to the house. The son caught hold of Sakubai’s hair and dragged her to the house. He abused her and kicked her several times on the way.

The Brahmin, his wife and his son tied Sakubai to a pillar with a strong rope. Sakubai prayed to the Lord: “O Vittala of Pandharpur, I wanted to tie myself to Thy lotus feet, but I am tied here with a rope. My body is tied up here, but my mind is ever free. My mind is ever fixed at Thy lotus feet. I am afraid neither of death nor of bodily tortures. I wish to have Thy Darshan at any cost. Thou art my Father, Mother, Guru, Protector my All. O Merciful Lord, will You not grant my humble prayer?”

If the prayer comes from the core of the heart, it is heard by the Lord. He responds to the prayer immediately. The prayer of Sakubai pierced the heart of Lord Krishna. He was moved at once. He took the form of a woman, appeared immediately before Sakubai and said, “Beloved sister, I am going to Pandharpur, will you go there?” Sakubai said, “How can I go when I am tied to the pillar? Certainly I have a strong desire to go there”.

The woman said, “Dear sister, I am your friends. I will get myself tied up here in your place. You can go now to Pandharpur”. She removed the rope, let Sakubai free and tied herself up in Sakubai’s place. Sakubai was at Pandharpur in a moment through the grace of the Lord. Her joy knew no bounds. She thought within herself, “I am truly blessed by the Lord. I am freed not only from the bond of the rope, but also from the bonds of life. How happy I am!”

The Lord assumed the form of Sakubai and became a slave of His devotee. The Lord of the three worlds, the chanting of whose Name loosens all the bonds of Maya, was Himself that day in bondage, because of the love of a devotee How merciful He is! The Brahmin, his wife and his son abused the new Sakubai, but the Lord rejoiced.

Fifteen days passed. The new Sakubai was not given even a morsel of food. The husband began to feel a little. He thought within himself: “If she dies, all the people will

abuse me. I cannot get another wife, because all know that my parents are cruel". He took pity on her and repented very much for his cruel action. He untied her and said, "Dear Saku, I have treated you cruelly. My parents too have given you lots of trouble. Now, please forgive us, take bath and take your meals". The new Sakubai (the Lord) put her head down and heard all this like a devoted wife. The Lord thought that if he disappeared earlier, those people would treat the real Sakubai on her return in a worse manner. So He decided to stay and serve the family like Sakubai.

Sakubai took her bath and prepared delicious food. All the three took their meals. Saku took her food in the end. They all admired Saku's great skill in cooking. It was the first time that Saku took the same food as was taken by them Saku massaged the feet of the mother-in-law and discharged the other duties very satisfactorily. Now the Brahmin, his wife and the son were highly pleased with Saku.

The real Sakubai reached Pandharpur, took bath in the Chandrabhaga and had Darshan of Vittala or Lord Krishna. She took the vow of never going away from Pandharpur. She was immersed in divine bliss. She lost all consciousness, dropped down and was dead.

A Brahmin of village Kiwal, which was near to the village Krar, was present in the temple. He recognized Sakubai, took her dead body with help of his friends and cremated it.

Rukmini, the consort of Lord Krishna, was in a great dilemma. Her Lord was at Krar. He was acting the part of Sakubai, who was dead and whose body was already cremated. Rukmini thought within herself: "How can I get my lord back from Krar?" She created a new Sakubai through her Yogic power.

The new Sakubai had a dream. Rukmini said to Sakubai in her dream, "Dear Saku, you took a vow not to leave Pandharpur. Well, the body in which you took the vow has already been cremated. I have given you a new body. Go back to your village. The Lord has blest you".

Sakubai returned to her village. She met her sister on the riverbank and said to her, "Dear sister, I had Darshan of the Lord through your help only. I am grateful to you. How can I repay you for all that you have done for me?"

The Lord handed over the pitcher to Saku, told her to carry water to her house and went away. Saku returned to her house with the pitcher of water and began to do the household work as usual. She was very much astonished to find a great change in the attitude of her mother-in-law, her father-in-law and her husband towards her.

The next day, the Brahmin of Kiwal vilage came to Krar to announce the news of the death of Sakubai. He found that Sakubai was doing her household duties. He was struck with wonder. He said to Sakubai's father-in-law, "Your daughter-in-law died at

Pandharpur. My friends and I cremated her body I think that her ghost is moving about in your house”.

The father-in-law and the husband of Sakubai said, “Saku has been here all the time. She never went to Pandharpur. You might have cremated the body of some other woman”.

The Brahmin of Kiwal village said, “Now call your daughter-in-law and enquire from her whether she had gone to Pandharpur or not”.

The Brahmin said, “O dear Saku, tell me the truth. Do not be afraid. Did you go to Pandharpur? Tell me what all happened”.

Saku replied, “I had a strong desire to go to Pandharpur. When I was tied to the pillar, a woman, who resembled me very much, came to me, untied me, put herself in my place and asked me to go to pandharpur. I did go to Pandharpur. I lost my consciousness before the image of Lord Vittala. In my dream Rukmini said, ‘Your body was cremated. I have given you a new body and a new life. Go to your native place’. I came back and met the woman at the riverside. She gave me the pitcher to carry home and went away. I am quite sure that the woman was Lord Krishna Himself-Lord Panduranga. You people are all blessed, as you had Darshan of the Lord”.

The Brahmin, his wife and their son thought that the woman must have been assuredly the Lord of Pandharpur. They grieved very much for their wrong actions done to the lord. All the three were purified by their contact with the Lord. Their heart was changed. They began to worship the lord with great devotion. They said, “O Lord, forgive us. We had treated brutally Thy devotee Sakubai. We had ill-treated Thee also. O Lord of Compassion! Pardon us. We prostrate at Thy lotus feet. Save us. Protect us”.

They began to worship Sakubai also.

AVADAYAKKAL

The general belief among the devotees of the Lord is that Lord Siva Himself incarnated in this world as Sri Jagadguru Adi Sankaracharya of Kaladi; and that Mother Parvati incarnated Herself as Sri Avadayakkal of Shenkottai, apparently to prove that women, too, could attain Self-realization even in this Kali Yuga.

Avadayakkal was born of a pious Saiva Vadama couple of Shenkottai in South India. Even as a child she showed signs of a high mental state. She would do nothing voluntarily. For everything she had to be prompted. She would eat what was given; she would put on whatever dress was given. She would go where she was asked to go; and do whatever she was told to do. She was married to a Brahmin boy even when she was a girl.

When Adadai came of age, the parents fixed a date for her nuptials. Avadai was dressed nicely for the occasion and led into the bridal chamber by her relatives, who shut the door and came away. Her husband was sitting on the bed and watching her. She would not move from the spot where she was left by her relatives. The boy picked up a garland of flowers that was lying on the bed and smelt it. There was a venomous cobra in the garland and it bit him at once to unconsciousness. Before long, the husband was dead.

The next morning, in accordance with the prevailing custom, the ladies of the house came to the bridal chamber and opened the door. To their astonishment, the girl Avadai stood there rooted to the same spot where she had been left. They asked her why she merely stood there. She replied: "Why! You had asked me to stand here!" They looked at the husband; they grew suspicious. When they went near the bed, they found the husband dead. They attributed this to the girl's evil stars and took the girl and husband's corpse out of the

The obsequies were duly performed and the girl's head was shaven, ornaments removed and white cloth given. But Avadai did not have any feelings at all about the loss of the young husband. The world declared her a widow, an embodiment of inauspiciousness, forbidding her to come out of her room or to attend any festivities. Avadai would get up very early in the morning and go to the river for bath; for she had to return to the house before the other people were up!

One morning Avadai went to the river to take her bath. Before bathing, she picked up a mango leaf from the bed of the river to clean her teeth. The moment she applied that mango leaf to the teeth, she had a strange transcendental experience.

It so happened that just that morning the sage Ayyaval (a Gurubhai of the world-renowned sage Sadasiva Brahman) was there, meditating underneath a Peepul tree. He had cleansed his teeth on the banks of the same river and thrown away the mango leaf used by him on the bed of the river. Avadai had used that leaf; and the moment the sage's Uchhishta or sacred remnant was swallowed by her, the little dirt that covered the Atma Jyoti in her was washed away. She at once realized the atman within. Instinctively she walked to the feet of the sage under the Peepul tree.

Avadai prostrated to Ayyaval. Placing his hand (Hasthadiksha) on her head, the sage pronounced: "Brahma Satyam Avadai's heart was illumined. She entered into Samadhi or that indescribable super conscious state. A little while later Ayyaval gave her a Linga for worship and went away.

That very moment Sarasvati had taken her abode on Avadai's tongue; and Avadai's transcendental experience flowed through her tongue in the shape of divine, inspiring songs. She astounded one and all in the town by her extra-ordinary wisdom. Whatever she said, whatever she sang portrayed her inner illumination. People however considered that Avadai had gone mad and merely confined her to her room!

In the meantime, Avadai's parents died. This gave Avadai a great independence of movement. She at once opened the door of her room and went out into the wide world-her own home! She went alone from place to place-a young woman, singing wisdom, radiating wisdom, and transmitting wisdom to one and all that came near her.

Avadai reached Tiruvananthapuram. As usual she had her bath in a tank and wanted to do Linga Puja. The king, who had heard of her and of her regular worship of the Linga with Bael leaves, had sent her a basketful of golden Bael leaves for her worship. Avadai bathed in the tank and set about on the bank to perform the worship with the golden Bael leaves. As soon as the Puja was over, Avadai collected the Bael leaves and threw them into the tank as nirmalya (offered flowers), as is the custom. The king was astonished to hear this. He understood the great renunciation of Avadai and her Para Vairagya. To Avadai, gold and leaf were the same.

From Tiruvananthapuram Avadai went to a conference of the heads of religious sects. She thrilled the audience with her supreme wisdom and established the unity of all sects. They spoke derisively of her at first, referring to her shaven head and calling her, "You Mottai!". Avadai quickly retorted: "Who is Mottai? Is it my body? Is it my mind? Is it my Prana? Is it my Jiva? Or, is it my Atma? Who am I? How can 'I' be Mottai?" In the end they all eulogized her greatly for her divine wisdom and prostrated to her.

On another occasion, the king of a State called Avadai to his Durbar and offered to marry her: "You, so young and beautiful, should not wander about like this. Become my wife and remain in the palace as my queen with all powers." Avadai feigned to agree to this proposal provided the king answered some questions she would put him. And the questions were so grand and sublime that the king felt ashamed of himself and got initiated into Jnana by her!

Avadai again met her Gurudev, Sri Ayyaval, and joined his group of disciples. She was the only woman member of the group. The other disciples of the sage greatly ill-treated her. She was treated more as a dog to be looked after with the remnants of the Ashram food than as an inmate. Sri Ayyaval wanted to teach them all a lesson.

One day, all the disciples of Sri Ayyaval rowed to a sand-mound in the middle of the river Cauvery. They all meditated there. Ayyaval was on the banks of the river. Suddenly the disciples felt the water-level rising. They quickly perceived the danger and wanted to return. Avadai, however, was deep in Samadhi. They wanted to test her and so left her there and came away. Water was rising at great speed. Soon it looked as though Avadai would be drowned. She had got up from Samadhi and found that the others had gone away. She looked towards her Gurudev. He merely held up his arm to signal to her: "Stand there itself". Avadai obeyed!! And what a great miracle! Avadai stood there three days and the rising flood left just that much of the sand-mound where her feet rested! She returned when the flood went down after three days.

By this and other similar incidents, every one in the Ashram realized the greatness of this lady-saint. Later, Sri Ayyaval too made no secret of her glory. People began to flock to her for her blessings. She sang and sang; and through her songs runs the current of the divine wisdom of the Upanishads.

The Punjabi Sardar / Sikh Gurus

Chapter 10

Please refer to the essay Hinduism and Sikh separate religions, AAH HA! – click mere to know about the ten gurus.

Saints of Recent Times

Chapter 11

The chapter includes Raghavendra Swami, Ramalinga Swami, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Sundaresa Swami, narayan Guru, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Swayamprakasa Brahmendra Saraswati, Swami Rama Tirtha, Sri Ramana Maharshi and Saint Gudidi Baba. I have covered Narayan Guru, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Swayamprakasa Brahmendra Saraswati, Swami Rama Tirtha and Sri Ramana Maharshi.

NARAYANA GURU

Sri Narayana Guru, the famous saint, social reformer and spiritual leader of Kerala, was born in Malabar in 1854. He was a great scholar in Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tamil. He wandered far and wide in his spiritual search for an answer to the problem of life. Very little is known of his early years. Sri Narayana Guru first attracted attention as a wandering Sannyasin some thirty years later near the village of Neyyattankara in South Travancore. The villagers served him with faith and devotion.

Early in youth, the injustice of shutting out Harijans from the Hindu temples aroused in Sri Narayana Guru an intense sympathy for them. He opened a temple for Harijans (Thiyas). This was his first public work. He conquered all opposition through his will force and wisdom. Hundreds of institutions embodying his principles sprang up throughout Kerala. Schools and dispensaries and Ashrams built in his name are flourishing now. In every one of them the message of unity prevails.

Sri Narayana Guru broke through the thick crust of custom, removed the mud of corruption and the veil of ignorance and released the nectar of freedom.

Sri Narayana Guru was serene, kind and humorous. He possessed keen intelligence and an indomitable will. He was the essence of Vedanta personified. Through dedicated action he won the hearts of thousands of outcaste followers of his in Kerala.

Sri Narayana Guru encouraged students and the middle class people to study Sanskrit and the Western sciences. His purpose was to lay the foundations of a cooperative brotherhood, which through spontaneous public service, would truly reflect the unity at the heart of things that is longed for by all men.

In his later years, Sri Narayana Guru became known throughout India. Many famous people paid homage to him and his main centre of activity in Kerala. Sri Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi visited his Ashram. Sri Narayana Guru traveled annually throughout South India and Ceylon.

Sri Narayana Guru's anniversary is celebrated throughout South India and Ceylon, about the beginning of September. The occasion is marked by the pomp and splendor of processions and meetings, attended with fitting reverence. Sri Narayana Guru's life and thought were universal. His teachings and his brilliant example were for all mankind.

Sri Narayana Guru was a mystic, a practical Yogi. He had studied minutely the sacred books of India. He was very dynamic. He showed that the principles of Vedanta could be applied in daily life. His entire life's work was an example of how it could be done.

To Sri Narayana Guru, the embodiment of Advaita, Kerala, India and the whole world owe an immense debt of gratitude that can best be repaid by following his principles and teachings and glorious example.

SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI – go the essay History of Arya Samaj – [click here for more.](#)

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

The nineteenth century saw India face a great crisis. With the British conquest of India came the invasion of Western civilization upon the country. Awed by the material power of the conquering nation, Indians hailed everything Western as a thing to be welcomed. In the meantime, Christianity one of the greatest proselytizing religions of the world-began to work silently for a through cultural conquest of the land.

At this psychological moment appeared Sri Ramakrishna, an embodiment of the spirit of India's culture and religion. He opened the eyes of the Indians to the beauty, grandeur and strength of Hinduism at a time when their faith in them greatly slackened.

Ramakrishna was born on February 18, 1836 in the village of Kamarpukur in the district of Hooghly in Bengal, of a pious Brahmin family. His parents named him Gadadhar. From his very birth, Gadadhar cast a spell not only over his parents and relatives, but also over his neighbors. He began to show wonderful intelligence and memory even at the early age of five. The precocious boy learnt by heart the names of his ancestors, hymns to various gods and goddesses, and tales from the great national epics. His father sent him to the village school where he made fair progress and directed all his attention to the study of the life and character of spiritual heroes. A constant

study of these subjects often made him forgetful of the world and threw him into deep meditation. As Gadadhar grew older, he began to have trances whenever his religious feelings were roused. On account of family circumstances, he came to Calcutta where he was entrusted with the duties of a priest. At that time there was living in Calcutta a rich widow of great piety named Rani Rasmani. She built a Kali temple at Dakshineswar where Gadadhar felt quite at home and found greater opportunities to pursue his spiritual practices. Gadadhar was married at a young age to a girl-wife, Sarada Devi, who later became known as the 'Holy Mother' to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna had a catholic spirit from the very beginning. He made no distinction between one form of God and another. The realization of one aspect of the Reality inspired him to take up another and to follow it with unflinching devotion till that aspect of Truth revealed itself. Referring to this period of his life Sri Ramakrishna often said afterwards, "No sooner was one state transcended than another took its place. Before that whirlwind, the sacred thread was blown away, and even the wearing cloth hardly remained The idea of caste lost all meaning for me"

Ramakrishna entered into Mahasamadhi and departed from the world on August 16th, 1886. Some sayings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

1. God is formless and God is with form too, and He is That which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone can say what else He is.
2. It is ignorance and folly to attempt to circumscribe god. He is both attribute less and with attributes at one and the same time. He is also beyond both. Take the instance of ice, water and vapor.
3. God with form is visible, nay we can touch Him, as one does his dearest friend.
4. As long as the sound of a bell is audible, it exists in the region of form; but when it is no longer heard, it is form less. Similarly, God is both formless and with form.
5. The sunlights up the earth, but a small cloud hides it from our view. Similarly, the insignificant and all-witnessing Satchidananda.
6. When shall I be free? When 'I' vanishes. 'I' and 'Mine' is ignorance; 'Thou' and 'Thine' is knowledge.
7. By acquiring the conviction that all is done by the will of God, one becomes only a tool in His hands. Then one is free, even in this life.
8. If you want in right earnest to be good and pure, God will send you the right teacher. Earnestness is the one thing necessary.
9. As a boy holding a post whirls about it with headlong speed without fear of falling, so perform your worldly duties, fixing your hold firmly upon God, and you shall be free from danger.

10. A person living in society, especially as a householder, should make a show of the spirit of resisting will for purposes of self-defence, but at the same time, try to avoid paying back evil for evil.
11. He born to no purpose who, having the rare privilege of being born a man, is unable to realize God in this life.
12. You cannot get butter by crying yourself hoarse, “there is butter in the milk”. If you wish to make butter, you must turn the milk into curds, and churn it well. Then alone you can get butter. So if you long to see God, practise spiritual exercises.
13. You will see God if your love for Him is as strong as that of the attachment of the worldly-minded person for things of the world.
14. The darkness of centuries is dispersed as soon as a single light is brought into the room. The accumulated ignorance and misdoings of innumerable births vanish at one glance of the gracious eyes of God.
15. Pray to Him in any way you will. He is sure to hear you, for He hears even the footfall of an ant.

SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH

Birth and parentage

On Thursday, the 15th August, 1871, at about 5 a.m., Sri Aurobindo was born of Sri Krishnadhan and Swarnalata, at Calcutta, in Bengal, in a reputed Ghosh family of Konnagar. Sri Krishnadhan went to England and returned an M.D., full of honors.

Raj Narayan Bose, an acknowledged leader in Bengali literature, a writer in the “Modern Review” and the grandfather of Indian nationalism was Sri Aurobindo’s maternal grandfather. Aurobindo owes not only his rich spiritual nature but even his very superior literary capacity, to his mother’s line.

An accomplished scholar

Aurobindo was sent to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling when he was four years old. As a boy, Aurobindo received his early education in a public school in England. The old headmaster of the school observed, “Of all the boys who passed through my hands during the last 25 or 30 years, Aurobindo was by far the most richly endowed with intellectual capacity”.

From school Aurobindo went to King’s College, Cambridge, where he distinguished himself as a student of European classics. He passed the Indian Civil Service Examination with great credit in 1890. Failing, however, to stand the required

test in horsemanship, he was not allowed to enter the Covenantal Service of the Indian Government. But returning to India, he became the Vice-principal of the State college in Baroda. He was held in great respect by the Maharaja of Baroda.

Aurobindo's scholarship soon attracted the notice of all. He was loved by the educated classes in Baroda State. He was exceedingly popular with the general public. Sri K.M. Munshi was one of his students. Munshi admired and loved Aurobindo. To the younger generation, Aurobindo became a veritable god and by them he was called as "Aru Da", meaning "elder brother Aurobindo". Aurobindo married Mrinalini Devi.

Aurobindo was an accomplished scholar in Greek. He got high distinction in Latin. He learnt French very well and picked up a little of German and Italian to study Goethe and Dante in the original. He was steeped in the lore of our ancient Vedic scriptures.

Sri Aurobindo was a genius in history and poetry, a scholar in English and Latin. He was in England for fourteen years. When he was only seven years of age, Dr. K.D. Ghosh sent him to England to be steeped in Western education. That early age was chosen deliberately in order that Aurobindo might forget the native touch and learn to adopt the Western forms instead.

Apostle of Indian nationalism

It was in 1893 that Aurobindo came back to India. He drew a salary of Rs.750/- in the Baroda Educational Service. From 1893 to 1906 he drank deep from the fountains of Sanskrit and Bengali literature, philosophy and political science. He then resigned his job and joined the Bengal National College on a salary of Rs.150/- He plunged head long time into the revolutionary movement. He was a great figure in the nationalist movements of the time.

Aurobindo edited the English dally Bande Mataram and wrote fearless and pointed editorials. During the next few months, he started the English weekly Dharma. He spread his message: "Our ideal of Swaraj is absolute autonomy, absolute self-rule, free from foreign control". In those days, Aurobindo openly advocated the boycott of British goods, British courts and everything British. He always asked the people to prepare themselves for passive resistance.

Sri Aurobindo, the prophet of Indian nationalism, was one of the pioneers of political awakening in India. He was the leader of the revolutionary movement. He played a great part in the country's national struggle from 1908. He was in the forefront of the national struggle during the days of the partition of Bengal.

Awakened to the Divine Mission

The famous Alipore Bomb Case was the turning point in Sri Aurobindo's life. For a year Aurobindo was an undertrial prisoner in solitary confinement in the Alipore

Central Jail. It was in a dingy cell of the Alipore Jail that he dreamt the dream of his future life, the divine mission ordained for him by God.

Aurobindo bore the rigours of the imprisonment, the bad food, the inadequate clothes, the lack of light and free air, the strain of boredom and the creeping solitariness of the gloomy cell. He utilized this period of incarceration for an intense study and practice of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. Chittaranjan Das defended Sri Aurobindo, who was acquitted after a memorable trial.

His practice of Yoga

Sri Aurobindo began his Yoga in 1904. He had no helper or Guru in Yoga till he met Lele, a Maharashtrian Yogi in Baroda; and that was only for a short time. Meditating only for three days with Lele, Aurobindo followed the Yogi's instructions for silencing the mind and freeing it from the constant pressure of thought.

Sri Aurobindo himself once wrote in a letter about his practice of Yoga: "I began my Yoga in 1904 without a Guru. In 1908 I received important help from a Mahratti Yogi and discovered the foundations of my Sadhana" He started Yoga by himself, getting the rule from a friend, a disciple of Brahmananda of Ganga Mutt. It was confined at first to assiduous practice of Pranayama, for six or more hours a day. Aurobindo practiced and meditated on the teachings of the Gita and the Upanishads.

Ashram at Pondicherry

Sri Aurobindo migrated from Calcutta to Chandranagar and later reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910. At Pondicherry, he stayed at a friend's place. At first, he lived there with four or five companions. Gradually the number of members increased. An Ashram grew up around him. Now there are hundreds of inmates in the Ashram accommodated in more than a hundred houses. The Ashramites are engaged in various activities connected with the Ashram-some in the dairy, some in the vegetable garden, yet others in the laundry and the small bakery. Most of the young girls work in the Ashram's own printing press. To the Ashram inmates, all activities form a part of their Sadhana. Here life is an undivided whole, not consisting of watertight compartments.

The Ashram has a school of its own. Here stress is laid on physical culture. Vocational education is imparted to pupils between the ages of 14 to 18.

In 1920, Mira, a French lady-wife of one Paul Richard-who was imbued with the same ideal, joined the Sri Aurobindo circle. She became the Mother and presided over the Ashram. Every morning she gave Darshan to the eager devotees from the balcony adjoining her room. She supervised every little of the organization of the Ashram.

The Ashramites in Sri Aurobindo Ashram are not Sannyasins. Aurobindo himself was not a Sannyasin, but a Rishi. The Ashram is a cosmopolitan one. There are Christians, Zoroastrians, Muslims and members of other creeds. Aurobindo gave Darshan to his

devotees on four days a year. All the activities of the Ashram are managed by the Sadhaks.

The Ashram started the “Arya”, an English spiritual journal under the management of the Mother and Paul Richard. The most significant works of Aurobindo appeared serially in the magazine. The Arya stopped publication after six and a half years.

Sri Rabindranath Tagore once visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and said to Aurobindo: “You have the word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world”.

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy is in a sense practical. It is based on facts, experience and personal realizations and on having the vision of a seer or Rishi. Aurobindo’s spirituality is inseparably united with reason.

The goal aimed at by Sri Aurobindo is not merely the liberation of the individual from the chain that fetters him, but “to work out the will of the Divine in the world, to effect a spiritual transformation and to bring down the divine nature and a divine life into the mental, vital and physical nature and life of humanity”.

“A fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a Supreme Grace that answers from above are two powers which in their conjunction can effect this. If the transformation is to be integral, integral should be the rejection of all that withstands it” says the Master Sri Aurobindo.

“The call upon us” says Sri Aurobindo, “is to grow into the image of God, to dwell in Him and with Him and be a channel of His joy and might and an instrument of His works. Purified from all that is Asubha (Evil), we have to act in the world as dynamos of that Divine Electricity and send it thrilling and radiating through mankind, so that wherever one of us stands, hundreds around may become full of His light and force, full of God and full of Ananda. Churches, theologies, philosophies have failed to save mankind because they have busied themselves with intellectual creeds and institutions... as if these could save mankind, and have neglected the one thing needful, the power and purification of the soul”.

Aurobindo’s Life Divine is, and will always remain, a force guiding the thoughts of men all over the world. His other publications are Essays on Gita, Ideal and Progress, IsaUpanishad, The Superman, Evolution, Heraclitus, The Ideal of the Karmayogin, The Brain of India, the Renaissance in India, Bases of Yoga, Kalidasa, Vikramorvasi or The Hero and the Nymph, Poems, The Riddle of This Worlds, etc.

The sage’s Mahasamadhi

Sri Aurobindo passed away at 1.30 a.m. on 5th December, 1950 at Pondicherry. He was 78 years old. He was suffering from kidney trouble for a fortnight and was attended upon by Dr. Prabhakar Sen.

One more glorious child. Of Mother India thus laid himself to rest in Her bosom. One more lamp that had shed its light of divine wisdom throughout the world thus disappeared in its own luster, even as camphor dissolves into the fire. Sri Aurobindo thus attained union with Sri Aravind-the lotus-eyed Lord of the Universe.

Sri Aurobindo was a poet, politician and philosopher. His writings-philosophic and poetic-are Indian in spirit and Western in rhythm and color. He was the greatest intellectual of our age and a major force for the life of the spirit. India will not forget his services to politics and philosophy. The world will remember with gratitude his invaluable works in the realms of philosophy and religion.

Aurobindo was one of the greatest of world figures. He was an inspiration to the nationalists of India. Looked at as a religious teacher, his writings will live as long as the world survives.

The crest jewel of renascent India. The bravest among the patriots, the sharpest among the intellectuals, and the subtlest among the seers, Sri Aurobindo fulfilled the glorious purpose of demonstrating to the world that real India, the India of the Vedic seers, could survive and absorb into herself all alien cultures, and that at the hands of one who knew the proper synthesis, Eastern and Western cultures could find their happy blend, without necessarily having to antagonize one another. Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine-the divine life that he lived and preached-will live for ever, inspiring mankind. Posterity will hail him as a member of the galaxy of Vedic seers. May his Light ever shine.

SWAMI AWAYAMPRAKASA BRAHMENDRA SARASWATI

Krishnamoorthy was the previous name of Swami Swayamprakasa Brahmendraji. He was born of Ramaswami Sastrigal, a pious Vedic scholar and a poor but respectable Brahmin, and Janaki, a woman of high-souled purity, in the village of Kalpattu in the district of South Arcot, Tamil Nadu, on Tuesday, the 28th of November 1871.

Swami brahmendraji was educated in three places: Thiruvaidaimardur, Kumbakonam and Thiruvananthapuram. He passed the Matriculation Examination and took to the study of Sanskrit in right earnest. He studied under Bala Saraswati Bhatta Sri Narayana Sastrigal, an erudite scholar. Afterwards he studied Tamil poetry. Swamiji had a wonderful retentive memory. He quoted long passages with proper contexts and comments with perfect ease.

Krishnamoorthy worked as a School Master in a neighbouring village for some time. Thereupon he joined the Settlement Department as a clerk on a monthly salary of Rs. 50/-.

Krishnamoorthy was urged by his brother to marry, but he refused with determination. He gave up his job and turned his steps towards the North in search of a Guru. At Kashi he met Swami Dakshinamoorthy and stayed with him as his disciple for three years. He studied Vedanta thoroughly under the Swami. He served a silent Muni in Kashi for six months.

There from Krishnamoorthy went to a cave above the Bana Tirtha near Papanasam, Tirunelveli District, where he saw a radiant Sannyasin, the Avadhuta Sadguru Brahmendra Saraswati, commonly known as the Judge Swamigal.

In order to test Krishnamoorthy, the Avadhuta Swami threw stones at him. Krishnamoorthy bore everything with patience. He even supplied stones to the Swamigal for throwing. The Swami found out that Krishnamoorthy was quite ripe for initiation.

According to the directions of the Swami, Krishnamoorthy went to his own house at Kanappettai, on the Full Moon Day in the month of June 1891. He stayed with his mother for three hours. His clothes fell down of their own accord. He took Avadhutashram at once.

Swami Swayamprakasa Brahmendra Saraswati roamed about here and there. He ate what he could get when he was hungry and took rest when he was tired. He visited Nerur in the district of Tiruchirapalli, where there is the Samadhi of Sadasiva Brahman. He wandered through the various villages in the district of Thanjavur. He remained in a cave at Tiruvannamalai for some months. He made a tour all over India. He went to Badrinath also.

As Swami Brahmendra was nude, the police people locked him up, but he was released by Krishnaswami, a prominent advocate.

Swami Brahmendra was poisoned. His hair and beard were burnt. He was tempted by women of ill repute brought by wicked men. He was dragged along the streets in the hot sun, with a rope tied around his waist. Finally, the Swami proceeded to the village of Sendamangalam in Salem District and wandered in the Kolli hills. He chose a small hillock in Sendamangalam for his abode and performance of penance. Sri K. Sundaram Chettiar, a retired High Court Judge, served the Swami with faith and devotion.

Swami Brahmendra was a living example of spiritual eminence. He practised the severe austerities of the Avadhuta Ashrama. Many were his physical sufferings on account of his nudity and phenomenal was his patience at the gibes and sneers of worldly-minded, ignorant youth. Early in life he abandoned the pleasures and comforts of the world. He braved the razor path of Nivritti Marga with a burning desire for Self-realization. He pursued the course under the blessings of his Sadguru with unabated vigor. He was a spiritual guide to a large number of disciples. Men, women and children have been the recipients of his benediction.

In order to infuse devotion and piety into the hearts of people, the Swamiji wanted to install an idol of Sri Dattatreya in his Ashram. While the Swamiji was living, his devoted disciple Swami Sankarananda, in his excessive love and reverence for the Swamiji, took immense pains to build a temple over the hillock, in the Ashram, for installing the idol of Dattatreya and also the marble statue of the Swamiji.

The marble statue of the Swamigal and the idol of lord Dattatreya in that two-storeyed temple reveal the marvelous ingenuity of the artist who made them. This attractive temple on the hillock, with its calm and inspiring surroundings, and the improved Ashram owe their existence and present charming appearance to the strenuous, indefatigable efforts and remarkable patience and ability of Swami Sankarananda.

The Guhalaya there is built on the Sannyasikaradu or Sannyasikundu. The hillock is called as Dattagiri now. The Dattatreya temple and the Guhalaya of Sendamangalam will flourish as lasting monuments, reminding the people of the glory and greatness of the holy sage who entered into Mahasamadhi in the month of December 1948.

SWAMI RAMA TIRTHA

Swami Rama Tirtha, a direct descendant of Gosain Tulsi Das, the immortal author of the widely read Hindi Ramayan, was born in 1873, at Muraliwala, in the district of Gujranwala, Punjab.

Rama Tirtha was a very bright student, a genius possessing unusual intelligence, contemplative nature and an intrinsic love of mathematics and solitude. He topped the list in B.A. and took his M.A. degree in Mathematics, a subject in which he was exceptionally bright.

For two years, Rama Tirtha was a Professor of Mathematics in the Lahore Foreman Christian College, and he acted as a Reader for a short time in the Lahore Oriental College.

In the year 1900, Rama Tirtha went to the forest and soon became a Sannyasin. He went to America and Japan and thrilled the Americans and the Japanese with his inspiring and soul-elevating speeches. In Egypt he was accorded a hearty welcome by the Mohammedans, to whom he delivered a lecture in Persian in their mosque. Rama Tirtha was ever cheerful and brilliant with eyes beaming with divine lustre and joy. He was perfectly at home in Persian, English, Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit literature.

Rama Tirtha was a great ascetic and an enlightened mystic. He practised Yoga on the banks of the river Ravi. Later he lived in the forests of Brahmapuri, on the banks of the river Ganges, five miles away from Rishikesh and attained Self-realization.

Today Rama Tirtha is not present amongst us in his mortal coil, but he is truly ever alive, eternal and imperishable, ever shining as a beacon-star in the spiritual

firmament of the world. He had the highest realization of the Satchidananda as the all-inclusive Bliss-supreme. The ancient sages and modern saints have proved this ineffable nature of the Supreme, not by logical proofs of perception and knowledge, but by actual experience of it which cannot be communicated to others for want of means. And Swami Rama Tirtha was one among such Experiencers of the Ultimate Bliss.

Under the holy guidance of Sri R.S. Narayana Swami, a direct disciple of Swami Rama Tirtha, the Ramatirtha Publication League was established at Lucknow. Every lover and admirer of Sri Rama Tirtha's soul-inspiring teachings owes a deep debt of gratitude to Sri Narayana Swamiji and the League for taking immense pains in making Rama Tirtha's works available to the world.

Sri Swami Rama Tirtha is one of the brightest jewels of India's genius. Rama belongs to that prophetic group of inspired seers who rang up the curtain of Indian Renaissance and ushered in the era of a strongly positive, aggressive and all-conquering spirituality. His advent into Bharatavarsha was potent with a great significance to man in modern times.

From Rama India has inherited the dual gems of Vedantic boldness and spiritual patriotism. The spiritual patriotism of Rama is something unique and grand. Every son of India should absorb it and make it his own. Swami Rama emphatically declared that if you must have intense and real patriotism, then you must deify the Motherland, behold Bharatavarsha as the living Goddess. "If you must realize unity with God, realize your unity with the Whole Nation. Let this intense feeling of identity with every creature within this land be throbbing in every fiber of your frame" said Rama, "Let every son of India stand for the Whole, seeing that the Whole of India is embodied in every son. When streams, stones and trees are personified and sacrificed to in India, why not sanctify, deify the great Mother that cradles you and nourishes you? Through Prana-pratishtha you vitalize an idol of stone or an effigy of clay. How much more worthwhile would it be to call forth the inherent glory and evoke fire and life in the Deity that is Mother India?". Thus, to Rama, the national Dharma of love to the motherland was a spiritual Dharma of Virat Prem. Let every Indian today fervently take this legacy into his heart. By this act show your real appreciation of the great seer; show your gratitude to the great seer. Thus can you glorify his life and his teachings.

The highest realization of patriotism, Rama believed, lay in fully identifying yourself with the land of your birth. Remember his words: "Tune yourself in love with your country and people". Be a spiritual soldier. Lay down your life in the interest of your land abnegating the little ego, and having thus loved the country, feel anything and the country follow. This, indeed, is practical Vedanta.

Rama Tirtha infused in the minds of people a new joy, a happy conviction that it was not for nothing that we lived in a miserable earth, and that we did not, after long struggle in the sea of life, reach a waterless desert where our sorrows would be repeated. He lived practical philosophy, and through that showed to the world that it was possible

to rejoice in the bliss of the Self even in this very life, and that everyone could partake of this bliss if one sincerely strived for it.

Swami Rama was an exemplary figure in the field of Vedantic life. He was a practical, bold Vedantin. He lived a dynamic life in the spirit of the Self. Very high were his ideals, sublime were his views, and perennial and spontaneous was his love. He was Divinity personified and love-incarnate. He is ever alive as a dynamic soul-force, ever shedding the spiritual effulgence in the heart of every seeker after Truth. His teachings are inspiring, elevating and illuminating—a fountain of his intuitive experiences.

The teachings of Rama Tirtha are peculiarly direct and forceful. They are unique. Rama Tirtha did not teach any particular Yoga or Sadhana or propound any abstract philosophical theory. He taught the actual living of Vedanta of yoga and Sadhana. This he taught by his own personal example. In himself he embodied an exposition of illumined living. Thus Rama Tirth's very personality itself preached and taught as much as any of the innumerable discourses and lectures he delivered to crowded audiences from platforms that ranged from Tokyo to Toronto.

To the West, Swami Rama appeared not merely as a wise man of the East but as the Wisdom of the East come in tangible form. Rama Tirtha was a blissful being inebriated with the ecstasy of Spiritual Consciousness. And his bliss was infectious. His glance flashed forth Vedanta. His smile radiated the joy of the Spirit. Vedanta streamed forth in his inspired utterance and in his whole life; every action, gesture and movement vibrated with the thrill of Vedantic Consciousness.

Rama Tirtha demonstrated how Vedanta might be lived. His life was an expression of the supreme art of living life in all its richness of vision and fullness of joy. Rama Tirtha presented Vedanta not so much as a knowing and a realising, as a becoming and a being. It was Swami Rama Tirtha's unique distinction that he expounded Vedanta as a supreme yet simple art of living. He did not try to take people to Vedanta, but he took Vedanta to the common man. Swami Rama Tirtha took Vedanta into the quiet homes, into the busy offices, into the crowded streets and into the noisy markets of the western world.

Both to the East and to the West, there fore, Swami Rama's life has been a boon and a blessing. For India, he vivified Vedanta with the vitality of his own inspired life and shining example. He shook India out of fantasy, superstition and misconception; he shocked America to wakefulness and an awareness of the intrinsic worth of the practicality of Atmic living. He revealed how the central secret of all lofty activity lay in attunement with the Divine Law of oneness, harmony and bliss.

To rise above the petty self and act impersonally this was the key to divine living. His call to his countrymen was: 'May you wake up to your oneness with Life, Light and Love (Sat-Chit-Ananda) and immediately the Central Bliss will commence springing forth from you in the shape of happy heroic work and both wisdom and virtue. This is inspired life, this is your birthright'.

To the Americans Rama taught the way of perfect morality and total abstinence. Keeping the body in active struggle and the mind in rest and loving abstinence means salvation from sin and sorrow, right here in his very life. Active realization of at-onement with the All allows us a life of balanced recklessness. This sums up Rama's message to the land of the Dollar.

In short, Swami Rama's thrilling life is a flashing example of rare Prem and a divine spontaneity. Listen! Here Rama's voice whispers: "You have simply to shine as the Soul of All, as Source of Light, as the Spring of Delight, O Blessed One! And energy, life activity will naturally begin to radiate from joy. The flower blooms, and lo! Fragrance begins to emanate of itself". Awake India! Respond to this call of Rama. Realise the Bliss that is Yourself. Come now, live the life in the Atman. From this moment let Rama enter into your heart and animate your actions and inspire your actions and inspire your very life! May his Divine Spirit vivify and raise India to her pristine glory and Vedantic grandeur! Live in Om!

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Sri Ramana Maharshi was born on 30th December, 1879. He was known as Venkataraman. Born in a pious middle class Brahmin family, he went to a mission school and learnt a little English.

Flight from home

On the 29th of August 1896, Venkataraman left his home in the district of Madurai in search of his Father, Lord Arunachala, to whom he reported himself on the 1st of September 1896, thus:

O Lord, obedient to Thy call
Here have I come, deserting all,
No boon I ask, no loss bemoan,
Take me in and make me Thine own.

From that day till end of his earthly sojourn, Venkataraman made Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai) his abode, transmitting through Mouna, the golden language of his egoless state, the Message of Eternal Truth, to the four corners of the globe.

Venkataraman left a note behind to his rebuking brother: "I have, in search of my Father, according to His command, started from this place. On a virtuous enterprise, indeed, I have this day embarked. Therefore, for this action none need grieve or trace this one. No money need be spent for searching me".

The Great Enlightenment

"It was about six weeks before I left Madurai for good, in the middle of the year 1896, that the great change in my life took place" said Sri Ramana Maharshi, when asked

by devotees as to now he was transformed, “It was so sudden. One day I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle's house. I was in my usual good health. But a sudden and unmistakable fear of death seized me. I left I was going to die and at once set about thinking as to what I should do. I did not care to consult anyone, he a doctor, elder or friends. I left I had to solve the problem myself then and there. The shock of the fear of death made me at once introspective or ‘introverted’. I said to myself mentally, ‘Now that deathis come, what does it mean? Who is it that is dying? This body dies’ I at once dramatized the situation. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though rigor mortis had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together, so that no sound could escape. ‘Well then’ I said to myself, ‘this body is dead. It will be carried to the crematory and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of my body, am I dead? Is the body I? This body is silent and inert. But I am still aware of the full force of my personality and even of the sound of I within myself as apart from the body. The material body dies, but the Spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless Spirit’. All this was not a feat of intellectual gymnastics, but came as a flash before me vividly as living Truth, which I perceived immediately, without any argument almost. I was something very real; the only real thing in that state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centered on that. The I or myself was holding the focus of attention with a powerful fascination. Fear of death vanished at once and for ever. The absorption in the Self has continued from that moment right up to now”.

Tapas of Maharshi

Ramana practiced Tapas in the thousand-pillared Mandapam, near the Patala Linga, in Subrahmanya’s shrine, in the Mango garden, the Sadguru Swami cave and Cora hills. From 1909 to he lived in the Virupakshi Cave.

During his days of Tapas, mischievous boys pelted him with stones and hurled tiles at him; and yet Ramana was ever peaceful and calm through the strength of meditation and penance.

Ramana Maharshi was known as Brahmana Swami in Tiruvannamalai. Kavya Kanta Ganapathy Sastri, the great Sanskrit scholar, came to ramana’s Ashram in 1908 and stayed with Maharshi and wrote the Ramana Gita. The life of the Maharshi was one continued meditation, Ananda Anubhavam. Maharshi established peace within. He lived in the Light of the Lord of the Lord within. He encouraged others to do the same thing. To him the world was one. Maharshi seldom talked, and whenever he did speak, he did so only because it was absolutely necessary.

His divine message

Ramana was a living example of the teaching of the Upanishads. His life was at once the message and the philosophy of his teachings. He spoke to the hearts of them.

The great Maharshi found Himself within himself and then gave out to the world the grand but simple message of his great life, “Know Thyself”.

“Know Thyself. All else will be known to these of its own accord. Discriminate between the undying, unchanging, all pervading, infinite Atma and the ever-changing, phenomenal and perishable universe and body. Enquire, ‘Who am I?’. Make the mind calm. Free yourself from all thoughts other than the simple thought of the Self or Atma. Dive deep into the chambers of your heart. Find out the real, infinite ‘I’. Rest there peacefully for ever and become identical with the Supreme Self.” This is the gist of the philosophy and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Sri Ramana says, “The world is so unhappy because it is ignorant of the true Self. Man’s real nature is happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true Self. Man’s search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true Self. The true Self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness that does not come to an end.

“In the interior cavity of the heart, the One Supreme Being is ever glowing with the Self-conscious emanation I...I.... To realize Him, enter into the heart with an one-pointed mind-by quest within or diving deep or control of breath and abide with the Self of self”.

Sri Ramana’s Who am I? Upadesa Saram and Ullathu Narpathu are pearls of direct wisdom, expressed in a aphoristic terseness.

Sri B.V. Narasimha Swami, the late President of the All India Sai Samaj, has published a thrilling life of Ramana entitled, “Self-realization”. Yogi Suddhananda Bharati has written the life of Sri Ramana in Tamil.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi has set at naught the prattle of materialists that Self-realization and Samadhi are things of the remote past, and that in the present age, they are impossible of achievement to man. He has shown by his lifelong Samadhi that it is still possible to realize the Supreme and live in that realization.

Beloved aspirant! Take heart. Gird up your loins Apply yourself intensely to Yoga Sadhana. You will soon attain Videha Kaivalya and shine forever as an illumined sage.

The Light shines brighter than ever

Lieut-Col. P.V. Karamchandani, I.M.S., D.M.O., North Arcot District, attended on Sri Ramana when the latter suffered from a kind of malignant tumor in his upper left arm above the elbow. The Maharshi was operated four times.

A meteor hit the sky at 8-47 p.m. on the 14th April, 1950, when Sri Ramana Maharshi left his mortal coil and entered Mahasamadhi.

The all-pervading Light which shone through the embodiment of that Light in Maharshi Ramana had once again resolved itself into its original state. A lifelong proof of the Upanishads was what we called Maharshi Ramana. That proof will forever exist, reassuring us of the Ultimate Reality.

The saint is no more in his mortal frame. But the Light of his soul is now merged in every receptive individual soul. Maharshi Ramana lives in our heart. His passing away should not be grieved for. For he had fulfilled the mission of his life. He had achieved the highest goal, Self-realization. So there is nothing to grieve for. The death of only those that are not able to achieve the goal of life or do their duty has any reason to be mourned. The Light of the Maharshi's soul shines today brighter than ever.

In the heart of humanity the saint shall live forever, guiding, encouraging, goading and inspiring, so that millions and millions might seek and find the Great Truth that Ramana realized.

Too well did Sri Ramana expound the Vedanta philosophy, not through bookish knowledge, but by practical experience? His teachings imparted through all-absorbing 'Silence' embodied the highest ideals and the ultimate reaches in divine realization. To ever assert one's latent divinity, to ever strive to live in the consciousness of the immortal Self and to remain as an unaffected witness of the transitory phases of life immersed in that Supreme Silence-was the clarion call of the Maharshi. Dogmas and religious prejudices he cared not for! For he was far above those mundane limitations. With him lived orthodox Brahmin priests, Moslems Christians and the so-called Indian untouchables. They were all alike to him.

As an architect-supreme of Truth-transcendental, Ramana Maharshi led, and now leads on, the weary travelers on earth towards the Goal through his unfathomable Silence.

To pay the most befitting homage to that saintly personality is to follow his teachings and to grow up in that ideal model.

May peace be unto all!

Oh Bhagwan I hope to have done justice to these great men of Bharat. Long live Kshatriya Dharam.

August 22, 2001

