

# Saint Eknath

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## *About the Book and the Author*

*Saints are our only testimony to the existence of God. What about scriptures? One might ask. The confirmation of what is stated in the scriptures comes through the lives of the saints. Saints are the living commentaries of scriptures. Books cannot impart the living touch; they cannot transmit spirituality.*

*In the case of a true saint, he need not preach religion. His very presence is enough. Kabir says you cannot be near an 'attar' vendor for nothing. A little of the perfume will come on you.*

*Even Plato, one of the foremost philosophers the world has ever seen, says that a philosopher can hope to give no more than the beginning of wisdom. Expressing some doubt about the validity or importance of any written exposition of a philosophy, he says in one of his letters: ... "The subject does not admit, as the sciences in general do, of exposition. It is only after long association in the great business itself and a shared life that a light breaks out in the soul, kindled, so to say, by a leaping flame, and thereafter feeds itself."*

*A German scholar, who spent a lifetime in reading, exclaimed in the evening of his life: "A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion."*

*In this issue, **Tattvāloka** readers are invited to join in the company of a great saint, Eknath, whose devotional compositions, 'abhangs,' even to this day are on the lips of thousands.*

*Life was no bed of roses for a saint like him in the orthodox milieu of sixteenth century Maharashtra. But he disregarded irrational caste rules whenever the needs of humanity demanded, and every time God stood by him. Eknath's life is full of such instances.*

*He intuitively knew that the way to redeem the poor and the downtrodden was to nurture in them the love of God whose love knows no barriers and in whose eyes there is no high or low. Eknath saw much ahead of his times!*

*As in the case of Madhusudana Sarasvati, Bhakti and Janana are synonymous for Eknath. Saguna Brahman leads to Nirguna Brahman. Eknath proclaims this in his God-vision. However, living the relative world, a saint delights himself in Bhakti.*

*Eknath's story is presented by Savitribai Khanolkar who passed away a few years ago. Born on July 20, 1913, as the daughter of a Russian mother and a Hungarian father, she was drawn to India. After her marriage to the late Major-General Vikram R. Khanolkar, she acquired Indian citizenship and made India her home. She found her guru in Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Her identification with India was total.*

*She had a special attraction for the saints of Maharashtra whose lives she wrote as a book which has been published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. She knew Marathi well and freely mixed with the village folk when she lived for long in Wai, a centre of culture and learning in Maharashtra, after her husband's untimely death in 1952.*

*The source book of her condensation of Eknath's life is Mahipati's (1715 –1790) "Bhaktalilamrita." Motilal Banarsidass has published "The life of Eknath," an English translation of Mahipati's work by Justin E. Abbot (1853-1932), an American philanthropist who developed great love and veneration for the saints of India. Till his end, he was engaged in bringing to the notice of the world the extraordinary devotional fervor of the saints of India.*

*Readers can savour his "Stories of Indian Saints" written in collaboration with Pandit Godbole and published by Motilal Banarsidass. Here again, the original work is by Mahipati.*

*At the end of Eknath's story, we have given the highlights of his teachings culled from Prof. R. D. Ranade's work on Maharashtra Mysticism, published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan as well as Motilal Banarsidass. The Drawing of Eknath appears on the cover page of Justin Abbot's "The Life of Eknath," which is reproduced in the text.*

**K. Subbarayan**

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# SAINT EKNATH

SAVITRIBAI KHANOLKAR

This is the story of a householder saint of Maharashtra, Eknath. He was born probably in 1533 A.D., in Paithana, the ancient city of Pratishthana.

He was the great-grandson of the renowned Saint Bhanudas. Bhanudas' son was Chakrapani and his son Suryanarayan was the father of Eknath. Eknath's mother was the pious Rukminibai.

However, as Eknath's parents died early, it was the grandparents who brought him up. As he was the sole descendant of the family line Chakrapani called him Eknath. In childhood they also gave him the pet name Ekya. Eknath's grandparents performed his *upanayana*, sacred thread ceremony, at the age of six and taught him all the duties and practices of brahmins, including the disciplines. He contemplated, observed fasts and learnt the *Vedas*.

An old *pundit* who used to live in their house, taught him all the stories of the *Puranas* and found him to be an intelligent boy who believed strongly in rectitude. At 12, he finished reading the *Bhagavata* of which he became extremely fond.

Then Eknath began to thirst for a guru. No spiritual progress is possible without a spiritual teacher who himself has realized the Self. Now where was he to find him? And what disciplines should he follow?

Thinking thus he sat dejectedly in a lonely Siva temple where he had come to pray. In answer to his prayer a voice seemed to reach him from the interior of the temple. "If you go to the fort in Devagad (Devagiri, today's Daulatabad), you will find Janardana Pant, a

realized soul; he will teach you." What a dream!

## In Search of Guru

Later he spoke about his dream to the old pundit. Then, without anyone's knowledge, he left for Devagad, taking Vithal's name all the way, and reached the fort on the third day.

Janardana Swami was in charge of the fortress; a capable, independent, shrewd and intellectual wizard who had mastered yoga and was a devoted follower of the Dattatreya-sampradaya. It is said that he was in constant contact with the human form of the deity, Dattatreya, in a place, far away from the bustle of the fort, where he entered into *samadhi* daily.

When Eknath arrived, the Swami was in the worship room. Eknath went straight in and fell at his feet in *sashtanga pranam*, holding his feet in his hands.

Janardana Swami raised him affectionately. He was pleased with the auspicious looks of the youth, his determination, diligence, patience and purity of heart which were writ large on his face. He patted his back paternally and then embraced him. Eknath felt great peace.

Janardana Swami accepted him and took him into his house. He wondered how so much renunciation had come to him at such a young age.

Eknath who looked upon his guru as God incarnate, served him faithfully, exerting his energies with zealous devotion. He prepared his bath, gathered flowers for worship and stood by during the *puja*, served his meals and

pressed his feet at night before the guru went to sleep. He was immersed in service and for six years never remembered his home.

Every Thursday, Janardana Swami fasted and meditated in a secluded place. The Muslim ruler of his time declared Thursdays to be holidays at the fort, out of respect for the Swami.

### A Brave Deed

But it was a Thursday when the enemy suddenly stormed the gates of the fort. Janardana Swami was in *samadhi* while Eknath guarded the door. Seeing that pandemonium reigned, Eknath quickly made up his mind. He rushed to the room where his guru kept his weapons and coat of mail, put on the armour, and rode out on the guru's horse, reassuring the people. He dashed out of the fort and into the fray and routed the enemy without disturbing his guru.

Having re-established peace and order, he returned the arms and clothes and took back his post at Janardana Swami's door.

The Swami found out all that had happened without Eknath's countenance betraying the slightest sign of excitement of the past hours and he felt well pleased with the presence of mind and initiative of his disciple, his courage and humility.

At another time, Janardana Swami put him to work out his accounts. Eknath spent a whole night poring over the accounts in search of a slight mistake of one pie. When he finally discovered it, he danced with joy. The guru on hearing the cause of his jubilation, smiled and pointed out to Eknath that with similar concentration he might find out what is wrong with *samsar* and realize the ultimate Truth.

### Dattatreya's Blessing

Dattatreya once gave him *darshan*. The Lord blessed him and embraced him and told Janardana Swami that he was fortunate in getting such an outstanding disciple who would, in time, save thousands of people.

Obeying his guru's orders, Eknath spent a long time doing *tapacharya* on a lonely hill, meditating on Sri Krishna. A cowherd boy who felt impressed by his uninterrupted meditation, provided him daily with a measure of milk.

Once, as the boy arrived earlier than usual, he saw Eknath deep in *samadhi*. A cobra had coiled around his neck, spreading its hood like an umbrella over his head. The cowherd boy screamed in terror and Eknath rose from his *samadhi*. To the boy's great relief, the cobra quietly slithered away, hurting none. The guru sensed all this and recalled Eknath.

He told him: "You have learn all that there is to learn in spiritual life. Now is the time for you to join me on a pilgrimage."

On the banks of the Godavari, they met a scholar, Chandrabodha, who invited them to his house. He recited the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavata* in original Sanskrit with so much feeling that tears came to their eyes.

"This," said Janardana Swami to Eknath, "is what I want you to translate into Marathi verses so that ordinary people may enjoy and understand it as we do."

Eknath translated it on the spot and in such beautiful words which left the old Brahmin speechless with admiration.

Taking the Brahmin along, they visited Nasik, Panchavati and Tryambakeshwar. Janardana Swami left Eknath to complete his pilgrimage and returned to Devagad with the Brahmin.

Meanwhile, at Paithana, Ekanath's old grandparents had been crying their eyes out at the loss of their beloved Ekya. The old pundit had also left and returned after many years. Seeing the sad state of the old couple, he resolved to go in search of Eknath. Remembering the boy's dream as he had related it to him, he reached Devagad and met Janardana Swami. From him he obtained a letter for the old ones saying that Eknath would soon be back in their midst.

Eknath visited all the sacred rivers and shrines in Bharata, up to Badarinath and finally reached Paithan where he stayed in a small temple.

He was inclined to renounce that world but chose to leave the decision to his guru. He waited at that little wayside temple so that God would show him the way. This did not take long in coming, for the old grandparents soon heard the news of his living in the town. They came to see him and embraced him.

### **The Reunion**

And the grandfather showed Eknath his guru's letter to them. Eknath understood the guru's wish and placed the letter on his head and in that same place built a hut for himself to live in. Later on, it was replaced by a little house.

Then Eknath decided to celebrate Gokulashtami - the birthday of Sri Krishn - with a wonderful *namasamkirtana* at which devotees merrily sang together the beloved names of the Lord.

Janardana Swami came over from Devagad and found to his delight that Sri Dattatreya was there, keeping a watch on the place.

They both got in, and Eknath hearing of the arrival of his Guru came running to greet

him. He put the dust of the Guru's feet on his head and prostrated. During the *Harikatha*, Janardana Swami was extremely pleased to hear his disciple's beautiful and touching description of Sri Krishna's birth.

After the celebration and as he was about to leave, the old couple embraced his feet and begged: "Lord, you have shown him the path, now we pray and beg you, please see that the dynasty of Bhanudas doesn't die away. He is our only heir. Kindly persuade him so that he takes a wife."

### **A New Life**

Janardana Swami agreed and told Eknath: "Settle down as a house holder, my son. If you lead a life of moderation, you will see the Lord in all things, and thereby you will be able to dedicate your life to Sri Krishna."

A bride was found in Vijaypur, who was to prove to be one of the best assets of Eknath's life. Her selfless devotion, perfect understanding and her sharing his hardships with a happy heart marked her as a rare spouse, truly fit for a saint.

Girijabai was indeed like a goddess bestowed on him by his guru. She never gave him the slightest anxiety, but always anticipated his every wish and need, as a worthy partner would.

They lived thus for 40 to 42 years in Paithana. In due course, the old couple passed away. Eknath who was a yogi par excellence, did not grieve but choose, instead, to celebrate the sixth day of the dark fortnight in Phalgun which was his guru's birthday as well as the day he gave him the *darshan* of Datta.

The festival spread out on the ghats by the river Godavari. *Kirtanas* never seemed to end as the enthusiastic clamor of the singing rose like the rumbling waves of an ocean of

joy, carrying the sacred name of the Lord from all banks and into the night, filling the universe.

### God Clears Debt

There was serving of meals in the afternoon, and exposition of *Kathas* and *Kirtanas* at night.

Uddava, Ekanth's servant, had borrowed a sum from a landlord in his master's name to conduct the *utsava*. Next day, the landlord pressed Uddhava for repayment and was put off by him.

He got suspicious and feeling he would never see his money back, he went straight to Eknath and threatened him: "In Panduranga's name, you shouldn't be allowed to eat until you repay your debt!"

Without feeling in the least put out, both Girijabai and Eknath kept fasting and didn't touch a morsel of food. Uddhava also didn't eat.

Legend has it Panduranga (Krishna) taking form of Uddhava went to the landlord. It was midnight and he was naturally much annoyed at being aroused from his sleep.

"What have you come here for, so late?"

"To return the money."

"Can't that wait till tomorrow?"

"But what about my master and his wife fasting?"

So, the grumpy landlord, much against his will, got up and went out to open his shop, accepted the money and gave a receipt canceling the debt.

The next day, the landlord feeling guilty of having caused trouble to a great saint like

Eknath, went to him and embraced his feet. "Forgive me!" he said.

But Eknath humbly replied that he was himself at fault and would resume eating as soon as he had repaid his debt in full.

Hearing this, the landlord turned to Uddhava and exclaimed: "What! Didn't you come last night to wake me up at midnight, with the money?"

"Certainly not!" replied the nonplussed Uddhava. Eknath went and opened his account book and there, neatly kept between the pages, was the receipt of the landlord.

Eknath knew that it was all the doings of Panduranga and tears came to his eyes. Seeing this, the *savkar* (money-lender) again fell at the feet of Eknath begging for forgiveness and would not relent until Eknath gave him reassurance and peace of mind.

Nothing ever ruffled Eknath who was always even-minded and full of compassion.

### God's Leela

Ramu, the *mahar* (an untouchable), attended Eknath's *Kirtans* and *Kathas* daily. His great desire was that Eknath should one day come and have meals in his house. So, after a *Kirtana*, he humbly requested him to grace his house and partake of meals prepared by him.

Eknath answered that he would. The *mahar* exulted with joy, and all the town was agog at the news. People followed Eknath everywhere, anxious to see whether he would honor his promise and what would the consequences be. The stronghold of orthodoxy buzzed with excitement.

The next day, they saw Eknath enter Ramu's house where the *mahar* and his wife placed their heads submissively on his feet and

invited him with great love and affection to accept a seat. Eknath obliged lovingly and ate with delight the preparations they served on a plaintain leaf. Everyone else stood watching from the outside.

The pundits of a common accord decided to ex-communicate him then and there and so went over to his house to await his return, but their eyes widened in wonder and stupefaction as an impossible sight met them. In the house, there was Eknath himself, teaching a chapter of the *Bhagavata* to his listeners!

The troupe made a round about turn and ran back to Ramu's house where Eknath as before, was enjoying Ramu's hospitality! How could he be in two places at the same time! By which magic did he possess two bodies and which of the two was the real Eknath?

The pundits were utterly confused and retreated in shame. But Eknath understood Panduranga's action to protect his devotee and interpreted it thus: 'God had indeed taken my form and taught *Bhagavata* so that none could cast aspersions on me.'

The people of the town were wonderstruck at the power of such *bhakti* which demands nothing from God but the sight of his hallowed feet.

### **Servant of Servant**

God loved his devotee so much that he even took the form of a servant and served Eknath for 12 years. He was called Sri Khandya and did all kinds of jobs for Eknath and Girijibai.

A brahmin who keenly prayed for a *darshan* of Sri Krishna was told by Rukmini Devi, Sri Krishna's con-sort, in a dream, that Sri Krishna was working under the name of Sri Khandya in the house of Eknath who lived in

Paithana, and that if he wanted to see him, that was where he should go.

The first person he met on arrival at Paithana was a servant going to fetch water from the river and he asked him the whereabouts of Eknath's house. The man who was none other than Sri Khandya, pointed the house to him.

Eknath received him with great joy and asked him who he was, from where he came and what he wanted.

"I come from Dwaraka and have come here to have a *darshan* of God."

"God is everywhere, omnipresent. He lives through all creatures, wherever you turn and look, there is but God."

"Please, do not take offense, my Lord," said the brahmin, "but I know all this *Vedantic* stuff by heart, back-wards and forwards. I am fed up with it and what I want is to see the Lord in his *saguna* or form-aspect; that is why I came from so far."

"But how do you expect to see him here?"

"Haven't you got one Sri Khandya on the premises? Please send for him!"

"Oh, yes, Sri Khandya just left to fetch water."

The brahmin recollected that he was the very one he had met and who had showed him the house. Then he turned to Eknath, a significant look in his eyes. "God is here as Sri Khandya!" Eknath called and called but no one came.

Uddhava said: "He was here just a moment ago."

Girija commented: "After placing the water vessels, he went into the *puja* room."

But there was no trace of the man anywhere.

Eknath understood and took the brahmin into the worship room and prayed intensely to Panduranga. The room gradually lit with glowing effulgence and the form of Sri Krishna, resplendent with love and compassion, appeared before them.

Eknath and the brahmin shed tears of joy and the Lord having blessed them, returned to his form-less state. The brahmin thanked Eknath profusely and then left for Dwaraka.

"There is no bar on caste, colour, sex or age," Eknath would say "when it comes to the worship of Hari." "God exists in all souls and one should behave alike with all."

### **Sraddha Feeding**

Once Eknath was to feed brahmins on the occasion of the *Sraddha* of his father. Girija bathed early and with Uddhava's and Sri Khandya's help, started cooking.

One among the *mahars* passing by in the street outside said: "Hmm! smells good, some nice food is be-ing cooked." And another added: "Such food is not for the like of us, so pass on!"

Eknath having heard their re-marks asked Girijabai: "Some *mahars* passing by have a desire to eat as they smelt the aroma of cooking; shall we offer them this food and can you then cook again for the others?"

"There is no difficulty at all," replied the good wife. "Have I ever refused you anything? Whatever comes to your mind is right."

### **A Feast**

Eknath sent Uddhava to invite all the *mahars* of the town to the feast. They filled the place to capacity and took their meals on

plantain leaves neatly spread on the freshly washed floor, decorated with colourful *rangolis* (coloured powder designs). Eknath seeing the Lord in his guests, served them lovingly.

When they left, Girija got the floor washed a new and made fresh *rangoli* designs. After a bath, as was the custom, she started cooking all over again. But not a single brahmin made an appearance. Wherever Uddhava went to remind them of the feast, he met with curses: "Is this Bhanudas' great-grandson whose life seems to serve no other purpose than that of destroying dharma!"

Eknath went to request them in person: "The first food was cooked for you but as the *mahars* desired it, I gave it to them. We bathed, washed and purified the place and cooked anew. Please come now and enjoy the food of the *Sraddha*".

"You who are so well learned," they replied scornfully, "go and feed your ancestors. We won't have any of such food served us after the *mahars* having sat first. So go now, and let your ancestors eat and enjoy it!"

Then Sri Khandya stepped for-ward and told the Brahmins: "Yes indeed, they will certainly come and enjoy the food!"

Then he took Eknath by the hand and led him indoors and there, Eknath's face lit up with joy at the wonderful sight:

On the seats neatly placed on the polished floor, sat his ancestors, his guests! Eknath closed his eyes and prayed to Panduranga and bowing to them he began to serve them all.

The obdurate brahmins, observ-ing this from the door, went home silently reflecting on Eknath's prin-ciples which had utterly escaped their limited understanding.



## Bhagavata Episode

As Eknath, after the manner of Saint Jnaneshwar, was expounding the *Bhagavata* in Marathi, one of his disciples took it all down and left for Kashi with four completed *adhyayas* (chapters) of the book. There he sat on the Manikarnika Ghat and began to read from it, attracting large crowds. The sound was so sweet that even though only a few knew Marathi language, they stayed on to listen as he went on translating for them in the northern Prakrit.

Some disciples of a great *Mahant* reported this to their guru who sent for Eknath's disciple and abused him for vulgarizing the holy scriptures and threatened to fix his guru as well.

"My Lord," said the disciple who feared them, "I haven't got the brains nor such talent. This is the work of my guru who lives in Paithana. He is a saintly man, a re-alized soul, who writes the scrip-tures in Marathi so that ordinary people may understand them."

The Sadhu said he wanted to see him and sent a letter to Eknath through two of his disciples, sum-moning him to appear before him.

Meanwhile, Eknath had com-pleted his fifth *adhyaya* fulfilling his guru's desire. Eknath left for Kashi, taking the last *adhyaya* with him.

At the sight of his noble and peaceful countenance, the people of Kashi felt elated. But the *Mahant*, to show his contempt, treated him like an outcaste refusing to cast his eyes on him lest they become polluted, and spoke to him through a curtain.

In answer to Eknath's question as to why, having sent for him, he re-fused to see him, the *Mahant* replied: "Whoever writes and propogates the scriptures in Prakrit is a

*pakhandi* (an uncivilised heretic or outlaw) to my mind. I don't wish to look at such a one. You have insulted the language of the Gods!"

At that the assembly shouted in unison: "True! True!"

Then there followed a silence as Eknath stated his defence: "My Lord, with due respect to your status and wisdom, I don't think I have done so. Such a beautiful work as the sa-cred *Bhagavata* is indeed wasted on ordinary people who don't under-stand Sanskrit. It was in order to con-vey to them its import and beauty, that I translated it in Marathi."

"Pray forgive me, my Lord, but how come the Gods created Sanskrit and thieves made Prakrit? Kindly lis-ten to my prayer. If you find in this work any faulty translation or any mistake and confusion of meaning, I shall forthwith drown this whole work in Ganga. But please listen to it and apply the test carefully."

"Very well, read on, then," the *Mahant* said.

## Work Recognised

In that great assembly of the wise, before several heads of sects and *maths* and pundits from all parts of the country, Eknath began his reading in a steady, soft and deep voice.

The sweet flow of rhythm, the chastity of words and the richness of ideas entranced his listeners. Tears came to their eyes. The audi-ence was uplifted into the realm of pure devotion and relished every word with deep contentment and peace.

The *Mahant* tore away his ridicu-lous curtain and embraced Eknath.

The whole of Kashi was there cheering the humble saint and the various *Mahants* requested him not to leave but stay with them

and complete the readings of the *Bhagavata*. He accepted and resided in Kashi for one year.

The *Mahant* was extremely pleased and wanted to honour Eknath by taking him on an elephant ride at the head of a great procession through the town. Eknath, self-effacing and humble, declined the offer and suggested instead that they take his book in procession.

"I cannot bear that I should ride an elephant while you follow on foot; it isn't right," he said.

Such humility, love and thoughtfulness endeared him all the more to them and according to his wishes, they had a magnificent procession led by his *Bhagavata* book, followed and preceded by music, cheers and vermilion powder blown over by bystanders. Eknath remarked that it was his guru's guru, Sri Dattatreya, who blessed him and inspired him while writing the work.

### **An Act of Mercy**

Before leaving Kashi, Eknath filled a pot of Ganga water so that he might later offer it to Rameshwara in the deep South, as is the custom.

On the way to the Godavari banks, the heat was killing, the sand burning. There was neither shade nor trees and nothing but an expanse of heat in front of them. The party panted and perspired profusely. Then they heard the miserable braying of a donkey that had ventured in the hot sands in search of water, but could not proceed.

The river was yet far away and the stretch of sand was intractable. Eknath, moved to pity by its distress, without pausing to reflect for a moment, poured all his Ganga water into the mouth of the donkey.

His followers were greatly astonished for that water had been brought with great care and much trouble.

Uddhava asked; "What shall we bring now to the Lord of Rameshwaram? "

Pointing at the donkey, Eknath replied simply: "This is my Rameshwara."

### **Vision of Jnaneshwara**

Some years later, without any apparent reason, Eknath's throat began to swell and an undiagnosed pain made him very uncomfortable. He then saw in a dream the young saint Jnaneshwar who had voluntarily taken *Mahasamadhi* 300 years earlier at Alandi in a cave which was later sealed over him, telling him that the root of *ananjana* tree nearby was choking him and asking him to come and remove it.

Eknath immediately summoned Uddhava to make preparations to leave for Alandi. The party left Paithana to the beat of mridangas and cymbals, singing *kirtanas* all the way.

Some parts of Alandi, particularly near the Siddheswar Temple, were over-run by jungle and it took a long time for Eknath to single out the particular tree under which saint Jnaneshwar was in Samadhi. He prised open a massive stone slab and slipped into the opening. He found there the subtle form of Sri Jnaneshwar, illumined by its own effulgence while a sweet aroma pervaded the cave.

Eknath saluted the saint and removed the root. Jnaneshwar spoke to him affectionately: "Dear one, the root was only an excuse to call you here. In these last 300 years, my *Jnaneshwari* (a famous commentary on *Gita* in Marathi) has become corrupted. All I desire is that you salvage the original and present it the way I had intended it to be."

They stayed together for three days conversing and discussing and so Eknath who had been greatly blessed in his company, gently placed his head on Jnaneshwar's feet and extricating himself out of the *samadhi* cave returned to his followers who were still singing *kirtanas* to their heart's content.

It took a full year for Eknath to sort out the *Jnaneshwari*, clearing it of unwelcome additions or wrong readings, in short, of all the corruptions centuries of mouth-to-mouth repetitions had added to this magnificent work. *The Jnaneshwari* which is available to us today, is the one critically edited by Eknath.

Eknath and party also visited Pandharpur where the citizens came out in a body to carry him in procession to the sacred temple of Vithal, the temple sacred to the memory of all Maharashtrian saints for over seven centuries.

### **A Wish Granted**

A certain brahmin named Krishnadas approached Eknath one day and humbly beseeched him to complete the *Ramayana* he was writing because an astrologer who had never been known to have made a mistake in his predictions, had told him that his time to leave this world had arrived.

The old man was in tears as he thought his life's work could remain incomplete.

He looked at Eknath with pleading anxiety and said: "Maharaj, kindly complete it, for me!" Eknath read the manuscript and liked it and so asked him: "How long do you need to complete it yourself?"

"Eleven days," replied the brahmin.

"Good," said Eknath, "you can stay here and complete it in peace. Death will not come to you for these 11 days."

Thus Krishnadas stayed at Eknath's place and went on writing. After 11 days, the *Ramayana* was duly completed and he expired peacefully, his soul at rest.

### **Stone Bull Eats Grass**

In Paithana, there was a sannyasin whose habit it was to prostrate before everybody. He was a slightly eccentric devotee of God who liked to salute God in the form of whoever he met on the road. They called him Dandavat Baba.

As he passed one day by the carcass of a donkey, some children asked him: "Dandavat Baba, why don't you also prostrate to the dead donkey?"

Obliging them, the Baba did so and to everyone's amazement, the animal came back to life, got up and romped away. The news of it reached Eknath who felt concern for the *sannyasin*.

He went and asked the old Baba why he had revived the donkey.

"I don't know," said the Baba helplessly, "I didn't do anything."

"Do you realize," said Eknath, "how people are going to exploit you and trouble you to revive their dead? What are you going to do about it?"

"I wish I knew," he answered and looked up to Eknath, spreading his hands and asked: "Please tell me what you think is best."

Eknath then spoke about the ideal of *sannyasins* who have no ties in this world and for whom life and death are the same since they are identified with the soul which lives in its infinite state and suggested he give up his own body, by taking *Mahasamadhi*. This suited the Dandavat Baba well and he accepted his idea with great relief.

As could be expected however, it needed but just such a spark to ventilate the fire of envy and jealousy of the learned pundits of Paithana,

Ekknath was forthwith branded as the killer of a brahmin. No matter how he tried to clear himself, they wouldn't listen. They held a meeting in front of a Siva temple and Ekknath repeated what he had said so many times and over before: "I did not force him and God is witness that I am not guilty."

"Right," cried their spokesman, "If God is witness to your innocence, let us see you feed fodder to this *Nandi* bull (Siva's vehicle). If God causes the bull to eat the grass, you will be exonerated, not otherwise!"

How foolish, thought Ekknath, but if this were the wish of his beloved Panduranga, well then let Panduranga deal with this in his own way. He took the fodder from the pundit's hands and walked up to the bull. The pundits laughed. They had seen many miracles in Ekknath's time and life, but this was something outside the pale of any.

Ekknath humbly bowed to the stone *Nandi*, patted him gently on the head and offered him the fodder, and yes, he opened his mouth, licked and ate the fodder, got up and trotted away, and finally disappeared into the Godavari.

### **Pride Humbled**

Ekknath's son Hari Pandit was well read but willful and proud. He objected to his father popularizing the scriptures through Marathi. As he loved his father, he didn't want to criticize him openly. So he got ready with his wife and children to leave quietly for Kashi.

He told Ekknath that he had no intention of returning. "I cannot bear to hear you

vulgarizing the scriptures and by my leaving, we shall both be happy."

After four years, Ekknath went to Kashi and pleaded with his son to return to Paithana. But Hari Pandit was adamant.

So Ekknath, much against his will promised not to read the *Puranas* in Marathi and to leave him the job of doing so in Sanskrit. Therefore, Hari Pandit came back and held discourses on the scriptures in Sanskrit to gradually thinning audiences until none came to listen to him. Undeterred, he still continued while people began to request Ekknath to resume his own discourses.

At last there came an old woman who approached Ekknath with a request. She had always had a great desire to feed one thousand brahmins; but from wealth she had come into poverty and could not afford the feast. So would Sri Ekknath whom she considered equal to a thousand brahmins, come to her house and accept an invitation to a meal?

Ekknath told her of his promise to his son not to go anywhere for food but all the same said he would come. Hari Pandit who was consulted, felt pity for the old woman and asked her if it would be all right if he himself cooked the food at her place. This would save Ekknath from breaking his vow. She said she wouldn't mind.

The next day, Hari Pandit cooked in the widow's little kitchen and then the old lady served both Ekknath and Hari Pandit who sat side by side. Hari Pandit however noticed that the old one had surreptitiously placed a small vessel of a preparation she had made, on Ekknath's plantain leaf. He resented it but kept his peace.

When they both got up to wash their hands, Ekknath, pointing to the leftover leaves,

told his son: "Let us spare the old lady the trouble of re-moving them, so please do it your-self."

Hari Pandit obligingly bent down to remove his father's leaf when he found a second below the first; he thought two leaves had been placed there by mistake so he removed both. But a third one appeared and then a fourth and so forth.

### **Truth Dawns**

Hari felt weary and counted a thousand when the fresh appearance of leaves stopped.

With vivid clarity the truth dawned on his mind. It was not the letter of the scriptures that mattered, but faith in their meaning and the Self.

His father who accepted food from outcastes, spoke in the language of the people, Marathi, and made the people understand the beauty of the Sanskrit works, was truly worth a thousand learned brahmins whereas he, Hari Pandit, with his pedantic view of values based on narrow knowledge, had reached nowhere!

His pride was all gone as if a strong wind of realization had swept it off completely. He fell humbly at his father's feet.

Eknath blessed him and said; "Get up, Hari, rise my son. Though you have learnt all the Sastras, you haven't learnt a thing about humility. That is why you lacked that understanding while interpreting them. You are intelligent and now you will realize that Bhakti is something else in itself."

Hari Pandit understood and said: "O my father, forgive me! From now on please resume the reading of the *Puranas* and the *Sastras* in your own way and eat from whosoever and wherever you please."

### **Goddess of Godavari**

Eknath's *Kathas* began again to attract large audiences and people started to notice a particular young woman whose beauty was striking. She came daily at the start of the discourse and left only at the end but her whereabouts and name were unknown. She had a dignified and calm appearance and spoke in a clear and sweet voice. However, one night a group of people followed her without her knowledge and as she went down the ghats, she suddenly disappeared in the darkness where the river Godavari and night met as one.

The next evening, Eknath asked her: "Why Bai (lady), did someone give you any trouble yesterday? Shall I send you an escort tonight?" She smiled and answered in her melodious voice: "Please do not trouble yourself, with your grace always upon me, I have escort enough."

Later, people understood that she was none other than the Goddess Godavari who from then on, seen or unseen, attended all *Kathas*. Since then a seat is always reserved for her wherever a *Kirtan* or *Katha* takes place.

### **Cot for Firewood**

On a stormy night, an old brahmin was directed by the town's people to Eknath's house. He was an unknown traveller caught up in heavy rains and Eknath at once ordered a fire to be lit to cook food and dry his clothes. But Girijabai's store of wood was soaking wet in the rain and she could not start a fire though she tried very hard.

Eknath, without any hesitation, gave his own cot to Uddhava, as material for kitchen fuel.

Eknath time and again showed that the needs of a guest always came first. He was

fully gratified to see the brahmin fed, clothed and rested.

Freed from any selfish motive, Eknath's compassion and kind heart worked wonders with others. He proved also to be a resourceful psy-chologist who not only treated his son's obdurate pride, but also the children of many a distraught mother.

He would fast with a widow's little son and eat the same diet or medicine as prescribed to the child, thus creating confidence in the child so that it followed the physician's instructions.

He also gave *puran polls* (a sweet) for the son of another widow who could not provide for her lad's ex-travagant taste. Not only was the child cured of his habit but Eknath blessed him so that the boy, Gavaba, who became his disciple, was asked by Eknath to complete the writing of the *Ramayana* the reading of which he continued even after the passing away of his master.

### **Three Thieves**

While Eknath was busy one night conducting a *Kirtana* in his house, three thieves slipped in and hid in the premises. After the *Kirtana* was over and the inmates of the house fell asleep, they quietly crept into the inside rooms and collected whatever pots and articles they could lay their hands on. They piled them near the door and went in for more. Then calamity struck.

One after the other the thieves became blind. Groping around for the way out, they stumbled upon the heap of pots and the noise woke up Eknath who came to see what the trouble was about.

Hearing his footsteps the thieves who had realized that they had com-mitted a crime

by robbing the house of a saint for which they had become afflicted with blindness, cowered and huddled together.

Eknath called them and asked the reason of their fear and all three fell at his feet and told him of their woe.

### **Sight Restored**

He immediately passed his hands over their eyes and they regained their sight.

He called Girijabai and asked her and Uddhava to feed them and then sent them away with all the pots they had stolen. The thieves, over-whelmed by his goodness and gen-erosity, fell again at his feet and swore that they would never steal again.

Seeing their change of heart, Eknath blessed them and explained: "God has come into my house in your forms, so go now, take these pots and start life a new, adhering to the honest path."

Eknath's sense of justice and compassion were constant through-out his life in spite of the jealousies and attempts at destroying him by a section of the orthodox.

### **Harijan Child**

Late in age, he picked up the child of a Harijan woman who had been to the river to fetch water and had forgotten the infant playing in the sands.

The cries of the child attracted Eknath and out of pity, he lifted it gently and carried it home to its mother.

The small episode had the effect of enraging the local pundits who cried: "Horror! The sacred lineage of Bhanudas has been made impure by this descendant of his!"

This time they wanted to make sure of Eknath taking steps for a full purification.

Ekknath went wearily down the ghats to the river to start a penance in order to please them, when a brahmin suffering from leprosy sud-denly dashed forward causing much consternation as he made his way towards Ekknath and prostrated him-self full length before him.

"It is 12 years since I suffer from this terrible disease," he told Ekknath and the crowd that had collected around them.

"I did penance at Tryambak-eshwar where I was told in a dream that if Paithana's saint Ekknath was willing to part with the merit he ob-tained in restoring a Harijan child to its mother, I would be cured."

Ekknath, modest and humble as ever, answered: "I know neither sin nor merit. But if you think it will help you, by all means, receive in your hands whatever merit I might have earned this way."

He placed his hand over that of the brahmin and lo! the stricken one rose a cured man.

All the other tempestuous brahmins turned about shame-facedly and without a word retired to their homes.

Ekknath's whole life was a living example of the intrinsic goodness of the soul as exemplified through his actions and sayings.

His altruism, his universal love, his ingrained humility and his integ-rity that brooked no compromise with his ideal, all marked him as a man far above the ordinary.

His enchanting poetry reaches such heights of emotion that one wonders how one, so self-disciplined and self-controlled, at the same time remained at heart a devotee, over-flowing with the love of God. But such was Ekknath, a unique blend of the sincere devotee and the *jnani*.

Ekknath attained *Mahasamadhi* in 1606.

*(Ekknath's Teachings in Next Issue)*

## **Golden words of Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal**

### **Significance of God**

- God is ever with you to help you.
- Everything will right itself in due course.
- Do not say you do not have time for god. The busiest of men will have the most leisure and the laziest will always be short of time, for the former utilizes time and the latter only wastes it. If you really want God, you will find time for him.