

# *SHRI VITTHALNATHJI* *(SHRI GUSAINJI)*

*(1516-1586)*

When Shri Vallabhacharya was a young man, he visited Vitthalnathji's temple in Pandarpura. It was there that the Blessed Lord told the great Acharya to marry so that He could appear as his son. Shri Vallabhacharya later married and when his second son was born, the master recognized him as the Lord's manifestation and named him Shri Vitthalnathji. He later became known as Shri Gusainji. Shri Vitthalnathji was born in 1516 in Charanat, a village near Varanasi. He was a playful child and had keen interest in the stories of Shri Krishna's childhood. Shri Vitthalnathji was first under his father's guidance, but after Shri Vallabhacharya left this world, he found further instructions and inspiration from his father's main disciple, Damodardas Harsani.

Shri Gusainji became the head of the Pushti lineage after the early demise of his elder brother Shri Gopinathji. His contributions to the Grace-Filled lineage are as important as his father's. Shri Gusainji was a master of the non-dual bhakti tradition and wrote approximately fifty devotional works including commentaries on his father's writings. His teachings provide the necessary keys in order to understand the inner mood of the lineage. His devotional poems in Sanskrit are the only songs that are still sung every day during the seva.

Shri Gusainji lived during the Mughal occupation in north India. Hindu temples were being destroyed and Vedic dharma was under attack. During this dark period, Shri Gusainji was able to promote the Path of Grace and infuse it with new life. Only a man of his divine stature could create a devotional renaissance amidst such times of turmoil.

Shri Gusainji filled the Path of Grace with profound *lila bhava*. He was not only a protector of Dharma but also a poet, musician, artist, as well as an amazing bhakti teacher. He infused Shri Krishna's worship (His divine *seva*) with music, wonderful food offerings, ornamentation and various arts. He taught that only things of the highest quality should be offered to Shri Krishna, the Lord of refined enjoyments. He showed the world how to worship Shri Krishna with opulence and grace. His *seva* teachings became the very heart of the Path of Grace and the modes of *seva* we observe today in temples like Shri Nathji's, as well as in the homes of his followers, have largely been created by his genius. His inspiration flowed into every aspect of the grace-filled worship. He fulfilled the wishes of not only his disciples, but of Shri Krishna as well. His aesthetic sensibilities were rich with devotion and filled the Path of Grace with Shri Krishna's presence. During these times, Shri Krishna spoke and played directly with him and his disciples. Shri Gusainji is the master of devotion.

He was honored by Emperor Akbar. The ruler issued his Shahi Faramans (imperial proclamations) to him as marks of special favour. Courtiers and noblemen including Birbal, Raja Todarmal, Tansen, and Baz Bahadur became devoted to him. Akbar also commissioned special paintings of Shri Nathji, Shri Navnit Priyaji as well as of Shri Vitthalnathji and his seven sons.

Emperor Akbar often came to visit Shri Gusainji and was allowed to see Shri Krishna's *seva*. He gifted Shri Nathji an enormous diamond that rests today on the Blessed Lord's

chin. A well-known story relates how Akbar visited Child Krishna at home in Gokul. He had a vision of Shri Gusainji in the cradle being rocked by Shri Krishna and then saw Shri Gusainji swaying Child Krishna!

As a young boy, Shri Gusainji used to play the vina to awaken Shri Nathji every morning and again to sooth Him when the Blessed Lord retired for the night. When the tips of his fingers hardened from playing the vina, he thought that they might cause Shri Nathji discomfort when he adorned Him. This prompted him to stop playing the instrument. His every thought and action was for Shri Krishna's delight. His own devotional practice became the model for all of his followers to emulate.

He also brought together the celebrated eight Ashtachapa poets and entrusted them with the seva of singing the glories of Shri Krishna's lilas before Shri Nathji. Four of them, Kumbhanadas, Surdas, Paramanandadas and Krishnadas were initiated by his father Shri Vallabhacharya while Govinda Svami, Chita Svami, Chaturbhujadas and Nandadas were his disciples.

Shri Gusainji was fifteen when his father left this world. He married his first wife, Rukminiji, in 1533 and she left her body in 1560. He had six sons and four daughters with Rukminiji. His seventh son was born from his second wife Padmavati, whom he married in 1568. He also adopted an eighth son, Tulsidas, who served as his water boy.

Shri Gusainji travelled extensively and made many disciples. In the accounts of his 252 followers we find the bulk of his life story. His disciples were kings, ministers, the rich and the poor. Pandits, people of all caste, Muslims, sadhus and even a robber all became his great devotees. He uplifted his followers by his mere presence. Shri Vitthalnathji's pilgrimages spanned a forty year period and were largely focused in Gujarat. In 1557 Shri Vitthalnathji decided to move from his home in Adel, by the confluence

of the Yamuna and Ganges rivers, to Gokul on the banks of the Yamuna river. In the stories of his 252 followers, the following account is given...

Once, Emperor Akbar asked Birbal, "How can I find God?"

Birbal went to Vrindavan and gathered many answers to the ruler's question from the saints there, but Akbar remained dissatisfied. In search of the perfect rejoinder, Birbal visited many gurus in Vrindavan and relayed to the Emperor what they said, but Akbar was not pleased with anyone's teaching and rebuked him, "You had better find a good answer to my question, otherwise I will loot your house."

That evening when Birbal returned home full of anxiety, his daughter asked, "What is wrong?"

"I cannot pacify this Emperor."

"Tell me the problem, perhaps I can help."

"The Emperor demands to know how he can meet God. I have conveyed to him the teachings of many Vrindavan pandits and svamis, but he is not pleased with them. Now he threatens me. I am overwhelmed. What should I do?"

Birbal's daughter calmly replied, "Have you been to see Shri Gusainji?"

"No."

"You will not get the correct answer until you see him. Only God understands Godly things. Now go to Gokul and stop worrying."

Birbal reached Gokul in the early afternoon and waited until Shri Gusainji came out of seva. Birbal bowed before the guru and explained, "Emperor Akbar wants to know how he can meet God."

Shri Gusainji replied, "The answer to that question will be revealed when I meet the Emperor. Only then will his doubts be removed. Tell him I have his answer."

Birbal returned to Agra and after he told the Emperor what Shri Gusainji had said, Akbar thought, "I will go there alone."

He set out for Gokul before sunrise on horseback. He was disguised so that no one would recognize him. He reached Gokul as Shri Gusainji was heading to the Yamuna river for his midday prayers and bath. When the Emperor bowed to him by the river, Shri Gusainji recognized him and had everyone step aside, "What do you wish to know?"

"How can I find God?"

"Just as you have found me." Shri Gusainji replied.

In this way he revealed an important teaching by showing that in this world, the Emperor is the most important man. If you want to meet him, you must please many people below him and even then if it is not the Emperor's wish, he will not meet you. If you make many plans, the royal meeting may occur, but only after surmounting numerous difficulties. If he wishes to meet you, however, then you can be before him in a moment, and he will be eager to see you! In a similar way, the soul who desires to find God thinks and ponders for a long time about how to find Him. Still God remains illusive. When the Blessed Lord resolves, "I want to meet this soul." Then there is no delay in the reunion.

The Emperor was extremely pleased to hear Shri Gusainji's words and praised him. "People call you Kanhaiya (Krishna) and you truly are. Now please ask something of me. I am very delighted with you."

Shri Gusainji responded, "I do not desire anything."

The Emperor insisted, "Bless me and allow me the opportunity to serve you in some way."

Akbar was so delighted with this explanation that he prostrated himself before Shri Vitthalnathji and presented the bhakti master with a swift Arabian horse so that he could ride the twenty miles between Gokul, where his child Krishna

resides and Jatipura, where His other beloved Krishna (Shri Nathji) resides.

Other accounts reveal Shri Gusainji's insight. He once told his follower Govinda Svami, "Know that love for Shri Krishna is the fruit. These Vedic rituals I do are a thorn fence that protect the divine fruit of devotion."

He blessed the poet Chaturbhuj with the divine vision of Shri Krishna's lila and brought the Muslim poet Rasakhan before Shri Nathji. Shri Gusainji uplifted a ghost, turned a snake into a god and by making Chitsvami's rotten coconut ripe, he inspired him towards the grace-filled devotion. Shri Gusainji's chewed betal nut transformed the mute Gopaldas into an ocean of verse and with his blessing, the songs of Tansen became devotional. He initiated the Muslims Alikan and his daughter Pirajadi and made their devotion to Shri Krishna so exalted that Pirajadi danced with Shri Krishna while her father played the drum. All that was needed was his blessing. Shri Gusainji knew what each disciple required and the bhakti master was ever intent on connecting divine souls to their blissful source.

The following account demonstrates his love for the bhaktas. One day when Shri Gusainji was in a joyous mood, he mentioned to his wife, Shri Rukminiji, that his bhaktas represented all the various parts of his body. His wife questioned, "What part of your body is your disciple Chachaji?"

Shri Gusainji responded, "Chachaji is the pupil of my eye."

Later, when Chachaji stubbed his toe, Shri Gusainji's eyes hurt. When Rukminiji asked him why his eyes hurt, he replied, "My eyes ache because Chachaji is in pain."

Shri Gusainji's eyes recovered when Chachaji's toe was better.

Shri Gusainji was also a brilliant devotional teacher. His approach to bhakti was refined and unique. He taught one

follower, "If the black bee cannot make it to its beloved water-lotus it remains content. Its love for the lotus enables it to withstand every pleasure and pain. But when the black bee that is full of *bhava* reaches its water-lotus, the infinite bliss it receives at that moment is indescribable."

His followers have also written many poems in his honor. Manika Chanda praised him,

*In the four eras, you protect the words of the Vedas.  
Whenever dharma weakens,  
You take on a divine form.*

*In the Satya age You were the divine boar  
And killed the demon Hiranyaksha.  
In the Treta age You appeared as Rama  
And dispatched Ravana.  
In Dwarpa, You appeared in Braja as Shri Krishna,  
And Indra fell at Your feet.  
You killed Kamsa and removed  
The burden of the world.*

*Now You have appeared as Shri Vallabh's son  
And disproved the Mayavadan philosophy.  
Manika Chanda says, "I gaze upon Shri Krishna,  
Now appearing as Shri Gusainji.*

There was no telling where Shri Gusainji's blessing would fall. When Shri Gusainji first came to his disciple Bhaila's house he initiated everyone in the family. When he was about to give the mute Gopaldas mantra, Shri Gusainji asked Bhaila who he was. At that time Gopaldas was nine. Bhaila said to his guru, "He is the husband of my daughter Gomati."

Shri Gusainji laughed and said, "Gomati is a river, her husband is the ocean. This boy cannot even speak! What

type of match is this?"

Bhaila prayed, "Through your grace he will become an ocean."

Shri Gusainji immediately put Gopaldas on his lap and when the guru put some of his chewed betal nut into his mouth Gopaldas' mind was purified. The young boy bowed to Shri Gusainji and sang,

*I bow to Shri Gusainji  
Who is beautiful like a fresh rain-filled cloud,  
Lovely as a tamal tree.*

Shri Gusainji then said, "Gopaldas, sing of Shri Mahaprabhuji." The boy again bowed to Shri Gusainji and began.

*By simply remembering  
The son of Shri Lakshman,  
Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya,  
All bad karmas are erased.*

Shri Gusainji said, "Gomati's husband has become an ocean." He blessed him again and the young boy composed seven more compositions that became known as the *Vallabhakhyan*.

Shri Gusainji also had great love for *satsang*, the holy dialogue with his followers. Late one night when Shri Gusainji came out into his courtyard, his disciple Chachaji happened to be standing there and Shri Gusainji began a *satsang* with him. Both of them became so absorbed in *bhava* for Shri Krishna that they were unaware of their physical existence. Shri Gusainji even forgot about the heavy pitcher of water that he was holding while Chachaji was unaware that he should have taken the pitcher from his guru's hand. The next day Shri Gusainji remained completely immersed



in the *bhava* of their *satsang* while Chachaji did not return to his body for three days!

Shri Gusainji brought souls to the Path and gave them divine experiences. Often, all that was required was the sight of him. When Muraridas saw Shri Gusainji taking his bath at the Mani Kiran ghat, he was so enchanted with him that he stood perfectly still for twenty minutes just gazing at him. Shri Gusainji knew him as a divine soul and accepted him as a disciple. When Shri Gusainji's disciples realized his true divinity, his lila form, their devotion would flourish.

Most of all, Shri Gusainji loved the bhaktas who had pure devotion. It was more important than practice or even purity. Even the simple-minded found the exalted position. In the accounts of his 252 followers we find this interesting account about the younger Patel brother :

Whenever the younger brother came to Shri Gusainji he called out to him "Uncle" before bowing. When Shri Gusainji saw him, he would say, "He is coming here just to call me 'Uncle'."

One day another bhakta told him, "The man you call 'Uncle' is known as Shri Gusainji. Use his proper name."

The younger brother replied, "I don't believe you. What you have just told me will upset my Uncle."

On the following day, when the younger brother came to see Shri Gusainji, he bowed to him and called out, "Uncle, this bhakta told me that I should not call you "Uncle". I can't remember that other name he told me. It was so long my tongue could not say it so I will just call you "Uncle".

Shri Gusainji replied, "Patel, call me by the name that you can pronounce."

Once, when Shri Vitthalnathji was going to take *sannyasa* and become a renunciate monk, his child Krishna (Shri Navanita Priyaji), knowing of his intentions, informed him that He was also taking *sannyasa* and dyed all of His child

Krishna clothes saffron, the color of a renunciate. At that moment, Shri Vitthalnathji renounced the idea of *sannyasa*. In the Path of Grace, renunciation is developed by loving Shri Krishna and by always facing Him.

Shri Vitthalnathji remained a devotionally inspired Vedic family man and made arrangements for a smooth succession, distributing his wealth amongst his seven sons. He arranged for the daily seva of the Krishna *Svarupas* (Shri Krishna's divine forms) that had been worshipped since Shri Vallabhacharya's time. All his sons had retained the rights to worship Shri Nathji. The other seven *svarupas* however were distributed to his seven sons. They went on to carry forth his teachings into the world.

In 1586 Shri Vitthalnathji gave his eldest son, Shri Girdharji, his shawl with which to perform his last rites. He then walked into a cave on the Govardhan hill with his disciple Govinda Svami and entered into Shri Krishna's eternal lila with his body. His descendants maintain the spiritual glory and dignity of his Path of Grace to this day.