

THE ASTHA CHAP KRISHNA POETS

The eight devotionally inspired bhakta poets known as the Astha Chap stand at the heart of the Path of Grace. Four of them, Surdas, Paramanandadas, Kumbhandas and Krishnadas were Shri Vallabhacharya's disciples while the other four, Chaturbhujadas, Nandadas, Chit Svami and Govinda Svami were the followers of Shri Gusainji. Their songs are sung daily in every Pushti home of worship. Their divine lives continue to inspire us all towards the Blessed Path. They all experienced the Blessed Path in their own unique ways.

SURDAS

Surdas was born in 1479 in Sihin near Delhi. He was blind from birth. His father felt burdened by his blind son until one day when Surdas told his father where some missing gold coins were. When his father realized that his blind son had divine vision, he begged Surdas to live at home, but the blind boy became a renunciate and began to live by a nearby lake. He gathered a large following. He impressed people with his powers to see distant things and future events.

One day he awoke to the truth that he had truly attained nothing spiritual and left his home and most of his following to make his way towards Vrindavan. Along the way, he stopped at Go Ghat by the Yamuna river where he met his

guru, Shri Vallabhacharya, who opened his eyes and heart to Shri Krishna's lila. After Surdas' initiation, he immediately sang,

*Now I have no taste for petty emotions,
My longings are in the ocean of Shri Krishna.*

Shri Vallabhacharya appointed Surdas as one of Shri Nathji's temple singers. He sang of Shri Krishna's childhood and amorous lilas. His writings covered all spiritual topics and Surdas became an ocean of devotional poetry. He left everything mundane and reflecting on his past life, he sang, "I've danced enough Gopal."

When Emperor Akbar heard one of Surdas' poems he went to Mathura to find the poet. When he asked the blind poet to sing his glories, Surdas told him,

*There is no vacant place in my mind.
How can any other ever enter this heart?*

The Emperor was impressed with Surdas and told him to ask for anything he wanted. The poet turned to him and said, "I ask that from today onwards you never call on me again."

Later Akbar tried to find Surdas' poems and when someone brought one, Akbar suspected it was a forgery. He then put it in some water along with a real poem by Surdas. The fake poem sank while Surdas' poem floated on the water. Surdas was a true saint.

One day, Shri Gusainji's sons tested the blind poet by bringing him into the temple where they had placed Child Krishna without any clothes and then asked him, "Surdas, tell us what Child Krishna is wearing."

Surdas immediately sang,

Today Child Krishna is totally nude!

Another story found in the accounts of Surdas' life relates how once, his assistant Gopal forgot to put a glass of water next to him and then went to tend his fields. Later, while Surdas was eating, he started to choke and when he could not find his glass of water, he called out to his assistant, "Gopal". Shri Nathji, knowing of Surdas' distress, immediately left His temple on the Govardhan Hill and came to his aid. He brought Surdas His own golden pitcher filled with cool rose-scented water. Later when Surdas realized what had happened he felt terrible that he had caused his beloved Shri Krishna so much trouble.

Then there was a grocer who lived in Surdas' town and told everyone about Shri Nathji's ornamentations and glories, but actually never went to the temple. He lied to create more business. One day Surdas confronted him on his untruths and eventually brought the misguided grocer before Shri Nathji. He gave him teachings in verse ,

*Leave your work and remember Shyam.
For there the essence is found.*

Another time when the poet Paramanandadas and ten other bhaktas came to meet Surdas, the blind poet greeted the group of bhaktas with a song,

*A moment with Shri Krishna's bhaktas
Cannot be surpassed in any way.*

When Surdas had written one hundred thousand poems, he decided that he would leave this world after he wrote a total of one hundred and twenty-five thousand poems. That night Shri Krishna secretly wrote twenty-five thousand additional poems and entered them all into Surdas' poetry

book signing them, "Sur Shyam". The next day the Blessed Lord told him, "Now it is time for you to return to My lila."

Surdas then went to Parasoli by the moon lake and lied down. Some bhaktas came to greet him and he sang for them about his devotion to his guru Shri Vallabhacharya,

*In His sacred feet my faith is firm.
Without the light from Shri Vallabh's toe nails
My world remains in darkness.*

As he was leaving his body he gave the final teaching,

*Shri Krishna's love will stay with you
When you worship in the mood of the Gopis.*

Finally he sang a song about Shri Radha's lovely nectar-filled eyes and then left his body.

Surdas had four names. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya called him Sur for he was a devotional warrior. He faced everything boldly and his devotion increased daily. Shri Gusainji called him Suradas because he had great humility. Suraja means sun and he illuminated the divine forms of Shri Radha and Shri Krishna with his devotional light. The twenty-five thousand poems Shri Krishna wrote were all signed Sur Shyam.

Surdas' life teaches us that there is nothing equal to humility. Everyone adored Surdas and he answered everyone's devotional questions. Out of a billion devotees, it would be difficult to find even one equal to Surdas.

PARAMANANDADAS

Paramanandadas was born into a Brahmin family in Kanouj. After his parents lost all of their wealth, they told him, "Son,

we don't have enough money for your marriage."

Paramanandadas replied, "I do not wish to marry. The real wealth of this life is to feed the bhaktas. Now I will sit and repeat the Lord's names."

After his father went to south India, Paramanandadas spent his time singing Hari's glories and his fame spread from town to town. Once when he was in Prayag for the Maha Makar bath, someone mentioned his name to Shri Vallabhacharya. The master commented, "He is a divine soul with great talent."

Shri Vallabhacharya had a disciple called Kapur who loved music. When Kapur heard about Paramanandadas' kirtan sessions, he decided to go to Prayag and hear him. He had never met the poet and sat at a distance from Paramanandadas while the poet sang,

In Gokul everyone worships Gopal.

Paramanandadas sang for the entire night and Kapur left early that morning after greeting him with "Jai Shri Krishna". When Paramanandadas went to take some rest, he dreamt that Child Krishna was sitting in Kapur's lap. The Blessed Lord said to him, "Today after so long, I have finally heard your kirtan. I came with Kapur to hear you sing."

When he awoke, the beauty of Shri Krishna's form shimmered in his eyes, more beautiful than a million love-gods. The poet then set out across the river for Adel and saw Shri Vallabhacharya performing his morning prayers by the banks of the Yamuna. Shri Vallabhacharya then suddenly appeared to him as Shri Krishna and Paramanandadas was speechless. The master called out to him, "Paramanandadas, sing something of Shri Krishna's lilas." The poet then sang,

*How long has it been since Gopal has gone...
Shri Krishna is the wealth of Paramanandadas' life.*

He sang poems of separation before Shri Vallabhacharya, but after Shri Vallabhacharya initiated him, Paramanandadas began to sing of Shri Krishna's childhood lilas. He was immediately transported into the world of Shri Krishna's union. He became, along with Surdas, an ocean of devotional poetry. One day he sang,

*Shri Krishna's curly locks are like lines of black bees...
Paramanandadas nourishes love for young Gopal.*

He went on to sing many poems in praise of Child Krishna and lived with Shri Vallabhacharya in Adel where he sang in front of Shri Vallabhacharya's Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji. He composed new poems daily and sang them before his guru and God. Shri Vallabhacharya knew Paramanandadas wanted to visit Shri Krishna's land of Braja and took him along with a few disciples towards Vrindavan. When they passed through Paramanandadas' home town, the poet requested Shri Vallabhacharya to stop and visit. There he sang one line,

O Hari, I rememeber Your lila.

Hearing those words, Shri Vallabhacharya became so engrossed in Shri Krishna's lila, that he fell unconscious and remained so for three days. The master spent one entire day on the Govardhan Hill. The second day was spent in Vrindavan and the third day Shri Vallabhacharya was by the Yamuna river. Then he came back to this earth to give the experience of the bliss of lila to other souls. Paramanandadas worried that if his guru became too absorbed in the lila, he might not return, so when he returned to waking

consciousness, he sang only poems of union with Shri Krishna,

*Friend I sing of that auspicious bliss,
Shri Krishna is Gokul's wishing jewel.
Whatever you ask for is received. ...
Friend, let's go and live in Nandagam
Where we will laugh and play
In the cowpen with Vrindavan's moon.
Says Paramanandadas, this love is rare.*

Later when all of Paramanandadas' followers became Shri Vallabhacharya's disciples, the poet reflected, "Before I thought I was a Svami, a spiritual master, and I made a following, but now I know that I am just a *das*, the Lord's follower. Only a foolish person would try to become a Svami."

When they arrived in Gokul Shri Vallabhacharya taught him his Yamunastakam.

*I joyfully bow to you, Shri Yamuna,
You give your bhaktas all divine powers.*

After hearing that, Paramanandadas sang poems in praise of the divine river.

*Shri Yamunaji may I receive this grace
To remain close to you every day,
Singing Ram and Krishna's glories.*

There in Gokul, the poet was blessed with *darshans* of Shri Krishna's child lila. Then he went on to sing of Shri Krishna's intimate glories. He sang about how the Gopis came to Yashoda's house to dispell the anguish of the day. He began to sing in the mood of the Gopis. He became very

attached to Shri Krishna's realm and sang many poems in praise of Vrindavan.

*Let me drink Shri Yamunaji's water
And find the great grace.
Let me sing the glories of Shri Krishna.
Allow me to have constant love for His lotus feet
And to enjoy the gathering of His bhaktas.*

Later when Paramanandadas came before Shri Nathji he sang,

*I have bound my heart to Shri Krishna
I have severed all other ties.*

Shri Vallabhacharya was pleased to hear his songs and one day after drinking some of Shri Nathji's offered milk, the poet broke into verse,

*When Shri Krishna sees Shri Radha's full moon face,
An ocean of bliss swells in His body
And overflows into Braja and Vrindavan.*

His devotional mood was continuous. That evening he again sang,

*What nectar did those Gopis gulp?
Seeing Shri Krishna's beauty
They forgot all shame.*

For the entire night Paramanandadas experienced Shri Krishna's lila and sang. From that day Shri Vallabhacharya awarded him the *seva* of singing before Shri Nathji. One day when a queen came for Shri Nathji's darshan, she decided to remain veiled when she came before Shri Nathji,

but when she entered the temple her veil fell off and
Paramanandadas sang,

*What kind of play is this?
Shri Krishna does not follow anyone's rules.*

One day Surdas, Kumbhandas, Ramdas and other
bhaktas came to meet Paramanandadas. When they arrived
the poet greeted them...

*Come beloveds of Shri Krishna
Wearing sacred tulsi necklaces
And lovely tilaks
You are the splendour of the three worlds.
What pious deed has transpired
That you have all graced my home....
Shri Hari graces those souls
Who have a moment's contact with His bhaktas. ...*

He then explained to the bhaktas that "The Gopis are
the banner of love."

He was also inspired when he heard Shri Gusainji sing
about the auspiciousness of Braja and later composed his
own song,

*To speak Shri Krishna's name is auspicious,
His face is auspicious,
His hands are auspicious. ...
Auspicious has become the intellect of Paramanandadas.*

When it was Shri Krishna's appearance day,
Paramanandadas joined in the festivities and sang,

*Everyone rejoices
Today Shri Krishna is born.*

On that day after singing many poems of celebration, he fell to the ground unconscious. Shri Gusainji raised the poet with his lotus-like hands and love swelled in the poet's heart again. He then sang about Yashodaji swinging Shri Krishna in a cradle. After the celebrations he returned to the Surbi lake where he kept a vow of silence. He lay down reflecting that now it was time for him to leave his body. Shri Gusainji knowing this, took some bhaktas with him to Surbi Lake and the poet prostrated before Shri Gusainji and sang,

*In wealth and disaster Shri Krishna protects.
Through His grace the bhakta lives.*

Then, while meditating upon the divine couple Paramanandadas sang,

*Shri Radha encounters the Holder of the Mountain,
Her union with the master of
Supreme Bliss delights her.*

After singing that praise, Paramanandadas left his material body and entered into Shri Krishna's *lila*. Within his heart wells the unfathomable ambrosia of the Blessed Lord's *lilas*.

KUMBHANDAS

During the day Kumbhandas is Shri Krishna's friend Arjuna, while at night he is the Gopi Vaishaka. He was born in Braja at Yamnavata and tended the fields of his forefathers. He was never interested in worldly life. When Shri Vallabhacharya came to the Govardhan Hill, Kumbhandas came before the great teacher with his wife. His wife requested the master to bless her with children while Kumbhandas desired only that his devotion increase.

He was given the seva of singing before Shri Nathji and was steeped in the mood of love. He sang to his Beloved in the mood of the Gopis.

*You promised last evening you would be true
And now you come here in haste
Wearing her shawl so blue!
You forgot your yellow garments
They are with her!*

Shri Vallabhacharya hearing him sing said, "You have entered the exalted devotional state."

"All through your mercy." Replied Kumbhandas. "Now shower your grace and allow me to feel it even more."

Kumbhandas did not sing about anything other than Shri Radha and Krishna's loving lila.

Once when Muslim invaders attacked the area, Shri Nathji told Kumbhandas, Sadu Pande and some other local bhaktas that He wanted to be taken to a Tond Ghano, a dense thicket a few miles away. He wished to travel on the back of

a water buffalo. When they reached the thicket, Kumbhandas smiled and sang, "I like this berry thicket".

Then his eyes opened to the divine lila. The real reason Shri Nathji wanted to go there was to meet His Beloved. Seeing the intimate lila behind the entire event he sang,

*The Vrindavan Gopi
Meets the prince of enjoyers
Shri Krishna, the Holder of the Mountain.*

His poem delighted Shri Nathji and when the Muslim invaders retreated, Shri Nathji rode the buffalo back to the temple where Kumbhandas again broke into verse,

*He obliterated the pain of the Braja people.
Glories to His most dazzling yellow cloth.
Sings Kumbhandas, I bow and take Your shelter.*

Once Emperor Akbar sent some men to summon Kumbhandas to his court. Kumbhandas told them, "I am a poor resident of Braja, but I am no one's servant except Shri Krishna's."

The guards explained, "If you don't accompany us, the emperor will execute us. Please come."

Kumbhandas considered, "I must go for their sake."

When he reached the palace and came before the emperor he sang the following song,

*Why would a bhakta
Ever want to come to your palace?
While walking here my shoes wore out
And I forgot Hari's name.
Now I must pay homage to a face
Whose very sight pains me,
Says Kumbhandas, without Shri Krishna,
This whole place is false.*

Akbar was at first filled with anger upon hearing this song, but then he reflected, "He is not afraid of me. His interest is only in God." He then said to Kumbhandas, "Ask of me whatever you want."

Kumbhandas replied, "Never call on me again."

As Kumbhandas walked back to his village, he was overwhelmed with the mood of Shri Krishna's separation. He softly sang,

*When will my eyes be filled with Him again...
Since I've seen Shri Krishna
I've forgotten my husband, family and everything....
This crush on Shri Krishna is hard on my heart.*

Shri Nathji heard Kumbhandas' songs and praised him, "You are a blessed one. As you can't live a moment without Me, so without you, everything seems bland."

Once during the hot season Raja Mansingh came to Shri Nathji's temple and noticed that Shri Nathji was wearing light cloth and few ornaments. The temple was sprinkled with rose water. Raja Mansingh had visited many other temples where the worship was not sensitive to the Blessed Lord's true needs and thought, "Shri Krishna truly resides here."

While he stood before Shri Nathji, Kumbhandas sang,

*My eyes don't even blink...
Beholding Shri Krishna
My eyes and heart are both stuck
To His every part.*

The next day Raja Mansingh went to visit Kumbhandas. At that time Shri Nathji was sitting with Kumbhandas and

was about to say something to him but when the Blessed Lord saw the king approaching He got up and ran away.

When Raja Mansingh saw the poet make his tilak mark with the help of the reflection in a pail of water, he offered Kumbhandas a jewel-studded mirror. "King, no thanks. Our house is thatched and made of mud. Someone trying to steal this costly ornament might harm us."

The king then offered Kumbhandas many things, but when the poet would not accept anything, the king finally offered to extend an unlimited line of credit to all of his merchants. Kumbhandas then told him where his merchants live. "See those two trees, they are my only grocers. In the hot season the Karila tree supplies me fruit and tanta berries while during the winter this Modi Bera tree gives me sweet berries. Pay them what you want."

After the king left, his niece came to him, "We don't have a single possession, Why didn't you accept what the king offered?"

Kumbhandas replied, "If Shri Nathji were to hear that, what would He think?"

When Shri Nathji returned to the poet, Kumbhandas overflowed with devotion and sang,

*Shri Krishna, you are the great love of my heart...
Why were You afraid of him?"*

Shri Nathji changed the subject, "Kumbhandas! Today there is a contest between all of My friends to see who can prepare the most delectable meal."

Kumbhandas then sang,

*The Supreme fruits of Braja are these Tanti berries.
From them you can make vegetables and pickles-
And eat them with chickpea and wheat rotis.*

He then made Shri Krishna all of His favorite foods and distributed the *prasada* to all of Shri Krishna's friends. Kumbhandas remained in a state of pure bliss for the entire day. That evening he returned to the temple and sang before Shri Nathji,

*Our eyes met and became four.
To Shri Krishna, Kumbhandas offers his
Body, mind and everything.*

Once the saints of Vrindavan, Shri Hita Harivamsh, Shri Haridas and other bhaktas came to visit Kumbhandas and asked him to sing something about Shri Radha. He sang for them,

*Shri Radha you are the pinnacle of all fortunes.
A billion moons cannot be compared to your face...
My pleasure is to behold you every second.*

The saints were amazed and praised him, "We have composed many poems about Shri Radha, but your descriptions are peerless."

Another time when Shri Gusainji heard that Kumbhandas was very poor he invited him on his pilgrimage to Dwarka. The following afternoon they set out from Shri Nathji's temple and stopped for the night a few miles away at the southern end of the Govardhan Hill. There Kumbhandas became overwhelmed with separation from Shri Nathji. His eyes welled with tears; the hairs on his body all stood on end in ecstatic bliss. Leaning against a tree just outside of Shri Gusainji's tent, Kumbhandas began to softly sing,

*How many days have passed without seeing-
That young lad, the amorous son of Nanda,
Shri Krishna?*

*Mourns Kumbhandas,
Without Him, my life is worthless.*

Having overheard Kumbhandas' poem, Shri Gusainji could not bear the poet's distress and came out of his tent and said, "Your trip is complete. Now go back and see Shri Nathji."

Once when Shri Gusainji asked Kumbhandas how many children he had, the poet replied, "One and a half".

"I thought you had seven sons." said Shri Gusainji.

Of my seven sons, five are worldly. Only Chaturbhujas is a full son. I consider my son Krishnadas, who tends Shri Nathji's cows, as half a son."

Since Chaturbhujadas experienced Shri Krishna's intimate lilas of union and separation, Kumbhandas thought him to be a full son. His son Krishnadas who tended Shri Nathji's cows experienced Shri Krishna's union, but did not have entrance into the intimate Shri Krishna glade, the abode of the Gopis. That is why Kumbhandas considered him half a son. His other children were not bhaktas so he did not even count them as his own.

Once, while Kumbhandas' son Krishnadas was tending Shri Nathji's cows, a tiger attacked and killed him while he was saving a cow. When Kumbhandas heard about his son's death he fell to the ground unconscious. Everyone thought, "He is grieving his son's death."

Shri Gusainji then came and explained, "He is not upset about his son! He is concerned that he will not be able to have Shri Nathji's darshan because one is not allowed to enter a temple during the period of impurity that is observed after the death of a family member."

Shri Gusainji then called out to him, "Kumbhandas, get up. Come tomorrow for Shri Nathji's darshan."

Hearing Shri Gusainji's words, Kumbhandas arose and said, "Only you know my heart."

"I know nothing worldly could ever affect you."

Another time, Shri Gusainji's sons, Shri Gokulnathji and Shri Balakrishnaji thought, "Kumbhandas is totally absorbed in the intimate Gopi Krishna lila. We should try to bring him to Gokul, the site of Shri Krishna's childhood lilas."

Shri Gusainji overheard them and explained, "You may try, but he will not cross the Yamuna river and Gokul is on the other side."

That evening, they took Kumbhandas' hand and started talking to him about Shri Krishna's lilas and began to walk towards Gokul. All night they praised the divine pastimes, but at sunrise, as they reached the banks of the Yamuna river in front of the town of Gokul, Kumbhandas suddenly realized where he was. "I am so far away from my Beloved Shri Nathji."

He turned around and ran back to Shri Nathji's temple shouting, "Now who will sing songs to Shri Nathji?"

On that day, Shri Nathji arranged for the temple to open two hours late for the Blessed Lord would not wake until Kumbhandas returned.

One day, Kumbhandas was playing with Shri Nathji in his fields. When the poet started walking towards the temple, the Blessed Lord asked him, "Why are you going there when I am here in front of you?"

"This is true, but You could run away from me at any time. In your temple You have to stay there."

Once Kumbhandas saw some lovely mangoes, but since he didn't have enough money to buy them, he offered them

mentally to Shri Nathji. Later a Rajaputa man purchased them and enjoyed them with a Brahmin companion. That night they both dreamt of Shri Nathji and the next day they went to Shri Nathji's temple. After having Shri Nathji's darshan, Shri Gusainji told them, "This is all the result of Kumbhandas having offered the mangoes to Shri Nathji before you purchased them." The Rajaputa became a great bhakta.

On Shri Gusainji's birthday everyone offered some money to make some jalabi sweets. On that day, Kumbhandas sang the guru's praises,

Shri Vallabh and Shri Gusainji

Are the essence of all scriptures and spiritual practices.

Kumbhandas sang before Shri Nathji for many years until he became too weak to do so. One day when he was sitting by Sankarshan lake, just below Shri Nathji's temple and singing of Shri Krishna's lila, he left his material body. His true story has no end.

KRISHNADAS

In Shri Krishna's lila, Krishnadas is the Gopi Lalita by night and Shri Krishna's friend Rishabha during the day. Krishnadas was born into a Shudra family in Gujarat. As a child he developed a taste for *satsang* and left his home to pilgrimage to Braja. There he went to Shri Nathji's temple and saw Shri Vallabhacharya waving the arati lights. At that moment Shri Nathji mentioned to Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, "After a long separation, Krishnadas has finally come."

After Krishnadas became Shri Vallabhacharya's disciple, he sang,

*Those who have received His graceful glance,
The Supreme reward, are never born again.*

Shri Vallabhacharya made Krishnadas the manager of Shri Nathji's temple. Many years later, by the advice of the great bhakta Avadhutadas, Krishnadas removed the Bengali priests from Shri Nathji's seva and established Brahmans from Gujarat instead. Under Krishnadas' managership, Shri Gusainji expanded Shri Nathji's seva with opulent offerings and ornamentations. Goldsmiths and other skilled people came to serve in the temple. Shri Gusainji adorned Shri Nathji and left all the other temple responsibilities to Krishnadas. Krishnadas was always accompanied by twenty-five men and became famous.

One day, Shri Nathji told Krishnadas, "After My seva is completed tonight, proceed to Parasoli by the Moon Lake

with the drummer Shyam Kumhar. I will make Rasa Lila there. Later that evening by the moon lake, Krishnadas had the darshan of Shri Krishna and the other Gopis under the full spring moon and he sang many songs about the divine dance.

*Shri Krishna is the moon,
The Gopis are the stars
As they converge in the Rasa Dance.*

One day, Surdas told Krishnadas, "All of your poems are mere copies of my poems."

Krishnadas replied, "Now I will write a poem that does not resemble yours." When Krishnadas sat down to write, however, he was unable to compose a single poem that was not similar to Sur's. After a few hours of struggle, Shri Nathji came and wrote a poem for him.

*Krishna comes from the forest with his cowlads,
His curly locks are covered with the dust
Of the Nachuki cows.*

What is special about this poem is that Shri Krishna's locks are covered with the dust of Nachuki cows. Nachuki cows are cows that have just given birth for the first time. They are especially attentive to their calves and hence never go to the forest. They always stay at home tending to their newborns and for that reason Shri Krishna's hair could never be covered with the forest dust from their hooves. When Surdas heard the poem, he mentioned, "True, I have not sung about Nachuki cows, but Shri Nathji came and wrote that poem!"

Another time Krishnadas was in Agra. He saw a prostitute teaching her beautiful twelve-year-old daughter

how to dance. He got down from his chariot and thought, "She is a divine soul and fit for Shri Nathji."

He gave the prostitute one hundred rupees and took the young girl back with him to Shri Nathji's temple. There he taught her to dance and sing one of his songs, "My heart is stuck upon Shri Krishna's splendor."

He then brought her before Shri Nathji. While she was dancing before the Blessed Lord, she left her body and attained a divine form in Shri Krishna's lila.

Another time, Krishnadas sang to a group of bhaktas,

Say Krishna, Shri Krishna is my refuge.

Day and night, daily, every moment, every hour,

It destroys the wheel of birth and death.

Krishnadas also had affection for the woman bhakta Gangabai and one day while Shri Gusainji was offering Shri Nathji His lunch, Gangabai happened to glance at the offerings. Shri Gusainji was not pleased with Krishnadas and Gangabai. Some days later Krishnadas decided to stop Shri Gusainji from entering Shri Nathji's temple and the bhakti master honored his words and bowed to Shri Nathji's flag on top of His temple. He remembered a lila incident that occurred with Krishnadas and went to the Moon Lake where he stayed for six months. There he spent his days gazing towards Shri Nathji's temple. When Krishnadas saw Shri Nathji by the window looking towards Shri Gusainji, he had the window closed. Shri Gusainji daily wrote a passage for Shri Nathji and put it inside the garland he made for His Blessed Lord. Shri Nathji read Shri Gusainji's letters and replied to him on a betal leaf. He used His chewed betal as ink. After reading it, Shri Gusainji would eat the leaf. Shri Gusainji wrote to Shri Nathji,

*Lord, without your sight,
Your bhakta's lives are without purpose.*

Shri Nathji replied to him,

*It is the nature of a cloud to shower rain
Only when the right time comes.*

Ramdas would daily come to Shri Gusainji and take his garland to Shri Nathji. Six months after Shri Gusainji had moved to the moon lake, King Birbal heard about what happened and sent five hundred soldiers to arrest Krishnadas. He then informed Shri Gusainji that he could now return to Shri Nathji's temple. Shri Gusainji replied, "I will not eat anything until Krishnadas is released."

Later when Krishnadas came before Shri Gusainji he touched his feet and sang.

*The son of Vallabh is very compassionate.
He blesses his own souls by placing
His hand upon their heads...
Krishnadas sings that everything is accomplished
By just knowing him.*

Some days later when Krishnadas went out to inspect a well he was constructing, he slipped and fell into the hole. No one could find his body. After Shri Gusainji appointed a new manager, someone saw Krishnadas as a ghost sitting on top of a tree. When Shri Gusainji heard about Krishnadas' disembodied state, he performed his last rites at Dhruva Ghat in Mathura and only then did Krishnadas drop his ghost form and enter Shri Krishna's lila. Shri Nathji was always pleased with Krishnadas.

CHATURBHUJADAS

Chaturbhujadas was born in Yamnavata and was Kumbhandas' sixth son. Before he was born, Kumbhandas was distressed, "I don't have a single son to whom I can relate."

In his heart he cherished the desire to have a son who could freely talk with him about Shri Nathji. One day, the Blessed Lord said to him, "I am the fruit of all satsang and I chase after you!"

Kumbhandas submitted, "Without satsang it is not possible for a bhakta to truly know You."

Shri Nathji said, "I will grant you an enlightened son."

Meanwhile one day, while Kumbhandas was playing with Shri Nathji, they went to steal some curds and butter from a dairy-maid's house. While the Lord had His hands on a jug, His shawl fell to the ground. Suddenly two other arms appeared from His body which He used to pick up the cloth. Kumbhandas was very impressed with the four-armed form of his Beloved Krishna. Suddenly the dairy-maid came and started to chase after them. Shri Nathji spit a mouthful of milk in her face and everyone managed to slip away.

Some days later, Kumbhandas' wife gave birth to a son and Kumbhandas decided to call him Chaturbhujadas, the servant of the four-armed Lord. Shri Gusainji later blessed the child and told Kumbhandas, "That newborn son of yours is going to give you great happiness."

After he gave Chaturbhujadas initiation, the infant began to experience all of Shri Krishna's lilas and sang,

To see Krishna's lilas fills my heart with joy.

When other people were around the newborn, Chaturbhujadas appeared as a normal infant. As soon as he was alone with his father, even as an infant, he would speak and sing about Shri Nathji.

When Chaturbhujadas was a young boy, Shri Nathji used to take him out in the forest as well as on other outings. He was truly blessed. One night, while Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas were sitting together at home, in the distance they could see lights shimmering in Shri Nathji's temple and Kumbhandas sang,

*Look at the lights shimmering in the windows.
Hari rests in that lofty room filled with love paintings.*

Then Chaturbhujadas added,

*Beloved Krishna makes great efforts
To behold His beloved's face.*

Kumbhandas exclaimed, "So you have also experienced that same lila!"

Kumbhandas then completed the poem,

*The couple join into one essence
The new, lovely and wise Radha
With young Krishna,
The Mountain Holder.*

Chaturbhujadas also sang his poems before Shri Nathji.

*Friend, today, tomorrow and every day,
Behold nectar-filled Krishna...
Sings Chaturbhajadas,
I always drink, live and remain in His shelter.*

Other bhaktas recognized Chaturbhujadas' great devotional gifts. Another day, Shri Gusainji's fourth son, Shri Gokulnathji, took Chaturbhujadas to a performance of young boys enacting the lilas of Shri Krishna and told him to sing something. Chaturbhujadas replied, "I will begin when Shri Krishna truly arrives here."

The moment after Shri Gokulnathji's elder brother, Shri Girdharji, arrived, they all had the sight of Shri Nathji making Rasa Lila and Chaturbhujadas sang,

*The beautiful Shyam is adorned
In an amazing dancer's garb
And now dances the Rasa.*

Another day, Shri Gusainji told Chaturbhujadas to go out and collect some flowers. The poet proceeded to the Apsara lake by the Govardhan Hill and there he beheld Shri Radha and Krishna coming out of a cave on the Govardhan Hill. He immediately sang...

*The Beloved and his Love have spent the night
Deep in a cave on the Govardhan Hill...
Now they are drenched in the color of each other's love.*

Some days later Shri Nathji told Chaturbhujadas to get married. The poet married, but soon after the ceremony his wife died. A few weeks later, Shri Nathji told him again, "Now remarry!"

For a week Shri Nathji kept after Chaturbhujadas to remarry and finally Sadu Pande arranged for his second marriage. Shri Nathji then taunted him, "His wife died and he could not wait more than a few months before he found himself another."

Chaturbhujadas retorted, "You pursue all the women of Braja!"

Shri Gusainji heard about the conversation and reprimanded the poet, "Don't ever talk to the Blessed Lord like that again!"

Once when Shri Girdharji took Shri Nathji to Mathura, Chaturbhujadas felt great separation from the Lord and sang,

*To whom can I tell the story of my attachment?...
Show your lovely face
With sidelong glances and a smile.*

Suddenly he heard the jingling bells of cows and then Chaturbhujadas saw Shri Krishna surrounded by his cows and friends. The Blessed Lord told him, "I will return to my temple tomorrow."

Chaturbhujadas then climbed the hill and while waiting for Shri Nathji's return he sang,

*Since then a moment has passed like an age.
To meet Shri Nathji, these eyes are very frantic.*

After singing that poem, Chaturbhujadas saw Shri Nathji returning in the distance, for Shri Krishna cannot bear the distress of His bhaktas.

Another time Shri Gokulnathji invited Chaturbhujadas to accompany him to Gokul. Beholding Shri Krishna's child form, the poet began to sing,

*Over you, Infant Krishna, I rejoice...
My thirsty eyes find perfect contentment in you.*

When Chaturbhujadas returned to Shri Nathji's temple, his father asked him, "You have fallen from grace to law. You left Shri Nathji to see Child Krishna in Gokul!"

Shri Gusainji then explained to Chaturbhujadas,

"Kumbhandas' heart is only stuck to the young amorous Krishna and he sees all his other activities as bound by law. Actually Shri Krishna's infant and adolescent lilas are one."

Chaturbhujadas never left Shri Nathji again. When Chaturbhujadas heard that Shri Gusainji had entered a cave on the Govardhan Hill with his body, he fell down to the ground and sang,

*Give me your sight in that lila.
In that dress, with the cows and cowlads
Entering the village of Gokul.
Make bhakti appear and teach the people
In this age of struggle.*

Shri Gusainji then appeared to him, "Chaturbhujadas, I am always near you." After that the guru vanished and Chaturbhujadas, saturated with the bliss of his form, sang again,

*Will anyone appear upon the earth
With such charisma again?...
Let his remembrance be the crown of my life.*

Chaturbhujadas was truly a great bhakta.

CHITA SVAMI

Chita Svami was a Chaube Brahmin from Mathura. He was the head of a group of four other Brahmins, all rascals by nature. One day his cohorts considered, "Let's go to Gokul and deceive Shri Gusainji by offering him a counterfeit coin and an empty coconut."

When Chita Svami arrived before Shri Gusainji he suddenly realized the guru's divinity and he hid the bad coconut and counterfeit coin. Shri Gusainji warmly greeted him, "Chita Svami, I have not seen you for a long time. How are you? Have you brought me an offering?"

After Chita Svami placed the coconut and coin before Shri Gusainji, the bhakti master had the coconut opened and to Chita Svami's amazement, it was perfectly ripe. Chita Svami then sang,

*An ocean of grace, the son of Vallabh
Has grabbed my arm and liberated me.*

That afternoon Chita Svami went to Navanita Priyaji's temple and there he saw Shri Gusainji standing next to Child Krishna and when he returned to Shri Gusainji's room, he saw him there as well. He was amazed that the guru could be in two places at the same time. The next day he went to have Shri Nathji's darshan and there he saw Shri Gusainji standing next to Shri Nathji. When he asked someone, "When did Shri Gusainji get here?"

The bhakta replied, "Shri Gusainji is in Gokul."

When he mentioned the divine event to Shri Gusainji, the guru just smiled. Chita Svami then sang,

Glories to Gopal who lived in Gokul.

Now he has returned to live there again...

Sings Chita Swami, Shri Krishna and Shri Gusainji

Are one and the same.

Birbal, an important minister, heard that poem and later mentioned to the poet, "How can you equate Shri Gusainji with Shri Krishna?"

Chita Svami replied, "I would answer you, but your mind is defiled." He then left the minister. Later, when Emperor Akbar heard about the event, he told his minister Birbal "What Chita Svami says about Shri Gusainji is true. Once I gave Shri Gusainji a jewel that yielded two ounces of gold everyday. Shri Gusainji took it and asked me three times, 'Is this a gift?' After I told him it was, Shri Gusainji threw the jewel into the Yamuna river. I was shocked and immediately demanded, 'Return my jewel.'

"Shri Gusainji then sunk his arm into the Yamuna river and pulled out a handful of identical jewels and said, 'If you can recognize your jewel, please take it.' He then threw them all back into the river."

Chita Svami was never concerned about money or other worldly issues. He was totally absorbed in singing his guru's praises. He sang, "By worshipping Shri Gusainji everything is attained."

When Shri Gusainji left this world, Chita Svami fell unconscious to the ground. Shri Nathji then appeared to him and said, "Until now I have appeared to you in two forms; as Shri Krishna and as Shri Gusainji. Now I will let you experience me in Shri Gusainji's seven sons.

The story of Chita Svami has no end.

NANDADAS

Nandadas was the younger brother of the famous Lord Ram poet, Tulsidas. As a young man, Nandadas was very worldly. Tulsidas urged him to settle down and worship Lord Ram. Against his brother's wishes, one day Nandadas set out for Dwarka, but somehow ended up in Punjab where he fell in love with another man's wife and vowed, "From today onwards, I will only eat and drink water after I have seen her face."

He sat by her door waiting for her. Finally the husband and his wife secretly left town and headed to Gokul to visit their guru Shri Gusainji. Nandadas followed them. When they reached the Yamuna river, the husband told the boatman, "I will pay you, but don't take that Brahmin Nandadas to the other side of the river."

When they reached Gokul and payed their respects to Shri Gusainji, the guru arranged for their meal and put an extra plate of prasada out for them and told them, "The extra plate is for Nandadas, He is a divine soul and has come here through your intervention. Now you have nothing to worry about."

Meanwhile, as soon as Nandadas saw the Yamuna river he was transformed and began to sing.

*It was because of love
That I came to you Shri Yamuna
You know the condition of your
Bhakta's mind.*

Shri Gusainji sent a man to get Nandadas and when the poet came before Shri Gusainji he prayed, "I have spent my life in trivial pursuits. Now take me under your shelter." He then praised the bhakti master,

*Glories to Shri Gusainji
The light of Vallabh's lineage
The remover of the world's disturbances...
Hail to the master of the bhaktas
The uplifter of the fallen.*

Later when Nandadas was partaking of Shri Gusainji's prasada, he began to experience Shri Krishna's bliss form and became oblivious to everything else. He just sat there, in a state of perfect joy for the entire night. The following morning, Shri Gusainji came to him, "Arise, it is time for darshan."

After Nandadas had the darshan of Child Krishna in Gokul, he went with Shri Gusainji to have Shri Nathji's darshan and there sang of His lila,

*Sings Nandadas, Great is the fortune
Of those who have seen Hari's face.*

Some days later, Tulsidas sent a letter to his younger brother Nandadas and told him, "It is immoral that you have left your husband Ram."

Nandadas later replied to him, "First I was married to Lord Ram, but Shri Krishna came and stole me away. If Ram was strong enough, he would not have let me go. Lord Ram is only married to Sita. How can he care for a second wife when he was not able to properly look after his first one? Shri Krishna is the Lord of infinite women. His wives are all fearless. At one and the same time, Shri Krishna satisfies them all." Nandadas then wrote the following poem.

*O friend since I have heard Krishna's name
I have gone mad, my eyes well with tears.*

Tulsidas then decided to visit his brother and found him near the Govardhan Hill. When Nandadas brought him before Shri Nathji, he knew that his brother would only bow to his beloved Lord Ram. Nandadas informed Shri Nathji, "Tulsidas lowers his head only to Ram."

Shri Nathji then took on the form of Lord Ram and Tulsidas humbly bowed before the Blessed Lord. Later Tulsidas met Shri Gusainji's fifth son, Shri Raghunathji and his young wife. Tulsidas once again had Sita and Ram's darshan in the young couple. He then sang,

*For the benefit of mankind Ram and Krishna
Have incarnated as men.
Tulsidas depends on Them.
They will take anyone
To the other shore.*

Nandadas later thought, "As my brother Tulsidas has written the story of Ram in the vernacular, I will compose the lilas of Shri Krishna in Braja Bhasa as revealed in the Bhagavata. After he completed writing the lilas of Shri Krishna, several Brahmin pandits from Mathura went to Shri Gusainji and told him, "Now that your disciple Nandadas has written about Shri Krishna's lilas in Braja Bhasa, no one will listen to our discourses."

Shri Gusainji then told the poet, "Keep the five chapters of Shri Krishna's Rasa Lila Dance and throw the rest of your book on Shri Krishna's lilas into the Yamuna river." The poet followed his guru's instructions.

Once Emperor Akbar came to Mathura. At that time the beautiful Rup Manjari, a disciple of Shri Gusainji,

accompanied the great ruler. Nandadas had great affection for her and when he went to see her, the poet found her worshipping Shri Nathji. She offered Nandadas some prasada and told him, "I wish I could remain here in Braja with you forever."

Nandadas explained, "The Lord will arrange that for you."

Meanwhile, the court singer Tansen sang one of Nandadas's poems before the Emperor.

*Krishna's flute calls out Radhe Radhe
While Nandadas sings in close proximity.*

The next day, the Emperor called Nandadas and asked him, "Did you really stand so close to Shri Krishna's lila?"

Nandadas told him, "Ask Rupa Manjari."

When the Emperor asked her about Nandadas, she immediately fell to the ground and left her material body and attained Shri Krishna. Akbar then ran back to Nandadas and to his great astonishment, found the great poet had also died.

Raja Birbal then explained to him, "They kept their dharma. They were not able to tell you about Shri Krishna's lila. This was their only solution."

Nandadas was truly a great bhakta.

GOVINDA SVAMI

Govinda Svami had many disciples and was a great poet and musician. One day another bhakta brought him before Shri Gusainji in Gokul. Shri Gusainji was performing his prayers by the Yamuna river when he arrived. Govinda Svami thought, "He looks like someone who follows the path of Karma. How can he unite anyone to Shri Krishna?"

Shri Gusainji then called out to him, "Govinda Svami, when did you arrive?"

Govinda Svami thought, "How did he know my name?"

"Govinda Svami, know that love for Shri Krishna is the fruit. These Vedic rituals I am doing are a thorn fence that protect the divine fruit of devotion."

After Govinda Svami became his disciple, he began to actually see Shri Krishna. One day Shri Gusainji asked him, "How does Shri Krishna sing?"

"He sings well, but Shri Svaminiji has a more melodious voice. To hear her sing with Shri Krishna is truly an experience."

Once Govinda Svami's disciples came to find Govinda Svami. When they found him by the Yamuna river, they did not recognize him and asked, "Where is Govinda Svami?"

Govinda Svami replied, "Govinda Svami died a while ago."

When they recognized that he was Govinda Svami they said, "But you are Govinda Svami, why did you say Govinda Svami died?"

"If he has not died yet, now he will."

In this way Govinda Svami explained to them that he was no longer a Svami, but a follower. From then on he referred to himself as Govindadas.

Govinda Svami never bathed in the Yamuna river. He rolled in her sands and drank her waters. He saw her as Shri Krishna's beloved consort. Govinda Svami imbibed the teachings of Shri Gusainji deeply into his heart. Shri Nathji used to play with Govinda Svami and he was a full recipient of his guru's grace.

One day when he told Shri Nathji that His turban was crooked, the Blessed Lord told him, "Then fix it."

Govinda Svami then entered the temple and tightened Shri Nathji's turban. Shri Gusainji knew that Lord Krishna liked Govinda Svami's touch and did not mind his interference in the daily worship.

Another time while Govinda Svami was singing before Shri Nathji, the Blessed Lord threw a pebble at the poet. Govinda Svami then threw a pebble back at Him. Upon seeing this Shri Gusainji exclaimed, "What have you done?"

"He threw three stones at me. In play no one is a big shot."

Shri Gusainji remained silent.

Another time while Govinda Svami was singing before Shri Nathji, he suddenly stopped in the middle of his song. Shri Gusainji asked him, "Why don't you finish the song?"

"Krishna just dashed away. How can I complete the song when He is no longer here?"

Shri Gusainji was enthralled to hear the poet's reply and that evening he completed Govinda Svami's poem,

In this way, Shri Krishna plays Holi

With the Braja Bhaktas.

Over Krishna's form, Govinda's people celebrate.

During the winter months, Shri Nathji and Govinda Svami would play in a grove of Kadam trees three miles west of His temple in Shyam Dak. When Shri Nathji heard the afternoon conch calling for Him to return to the temple, He jumped down from the tree He was playing in and one of His garments got torn as He rushed back to the temple.

When Shri Gusainji saw Shri Nathji's torn garment, he later asked Govinda Svami what had happened, "Shri Nathji hurried back to the temple to get there in time for you." He then took Shri Gusainji to Shyam Dak and showed him a piece of Shri Nathji's garment hanging on a tree.

Shri Gusainji then considered, "From now on we will call Shri Nathji back to the temple by sounding the conch three times and then wait a few minutes before entering the temple. This will allow Him enough time to get back."

Govinda Svami liked to play like a horse and Shri Nathji used to mount him. One day, while he was playing as Shri Nathji's horse, the poet passed water as he was walking. Another bhakta saw this and asked him what he was doing. Govinda Svami did not reply. Later when Shri Gusainji heard about the incident, he asked the poet what had happened, "Do horses ever sit and pass water? That person did not see that Shri Nathji was riding on my back!"

Another time, someone complained to Shri Gusainji, "Govinda Svami takes his meals before Shri Nathji's worship is complete."

When Shri Gusainji asked Govinda Svami about it, the poet replied, "Shri Nathji comes to me and invites me to play with him. This is why I eat before everyone else."

Shri Gusainji told the poet to take his meals at the same time as everyone else. The following day, after Shri Nathji's seva was completed, Govinda Svami took his meals with everyone else and then went to Shri Nathji, "What took you so long?" Shri Nathji asked him.

"Shri Gusainji told me to take my meals with everyone else. That is why I am late."

Shri Nathji did not say anything and mounted Govinda Svami and rode out into the forest. Later Shri Nathji told Shri Gusainji, "Today I had to wait for Govindadas. Tell him to take his meals before everyone else."

Later that day Shri Gusainji told him, "Please take your meals as before."

Shri Gusainji's fourth son, Shri Gokulnathji used to go and listen to Govindadas while he sang by the Yamuna river. One day Govinda Svami accompanied Shri Gusainji into a cave on the Govardhan Hill where they both entered Shri Krishna's lila with their bodies. Govinda Svami's story truly has no end.