

SHREE SIDDHANATHA MAHADEVA'S BELOVED DEVOTEE GURUDEV

SHREE BHAKTA RATANDAS

ALIAS

BAVASAHEB ' S

LIFEHISTORY

THIRD EDITION WITH ADDITIONS AND AMENDMENTS

DEDICATED IN REMEMBRANCE TO PARAM PUJYA SHREE GURUDEV

SHREE GANESHAYA NAMAHA

SHREE SADAGURUVE NAMAHA

SHREE SIDHHANATAHA MAHADEVA'S BELOVED DEVOTEE
GURUDEV

SHREE RATANDAS ALIAS SHREE BAVASAHEB'S

LIFE HISTORY

PUBLISHERS:

LATE MORARJI PURUSHOTTAM VARMA
HIMATBHAI MORARJI VARMA
BALDEV MORARJI VARMA
SHREE VEDA DHARMA RAKSHAK CHANDRAVANSI YADAV KULOTAPPAN
SHREE BAVASAHEB THAKOR CHATURBHUIJ
DEVASTHAN THRONE'S DESCENDENT AND WORKING MEMBER

OLPAD (DIST. SURAT)

YEAR 1963

(P.T.R.N. 797 A.SURAT)

DATE : 1.9.68

TRANSLATED : 8.4.94

PREFACE

In the district of Surat, the village of Olpad was blessed with the coming of Shree Siddhanath Mahadeva's param devotee Bhakta Ratandas Maharaj whose fame of miracles has spread and is known in the areas of Bharuch and Surat.

A collection of all these true stories was published in book form by my father in 1939. This book has remained unavailable after the publication for quite a number of years; it was the wish of Shree Gurudev and many devotees to re-publish in new form the life of Gurudev, miracles and history. Having been born in the family of Gurudev, I felt obliged to repay the ancestral debt. But due to financial circumstances this did not materialise, until the first edition...

Dharma Gurudeva's param devotee Shree Parbhubhai Vallabhbhai Chauhan by chance had arrived from Africa, to whom I suggested my wish. Shree Parbhubhai gladly accepted to do the necessary. Not only that, he took upon his head the trouble to undertake and process all the necessary tasks associated with the publication, and has given me the opportunity to repay the ancestral debt. After that, Shree Chhibabhai Patel undertook all the responsibilities of the second edition and those for the publication of this third edition have been borne by Shree Gurudev's devotee Shree Messrs. Patel Somila of Olpad - Kanjibhai Pachanbhai originally of Netra (Kutch).

It thus fills me with great joy to see and know the fulfilment of my ambition of making public devotee Shree Ratandas's miraculous life history.

FOREWORD

In December 1993, I had the occasion to visit Siddhanath Mahadev's temple with my wife and two children. I had heard a lot about the temple, the Yatra that takes place every year there and most of all about Shree Ratandas alias Bava Saheb. Some years ago, a book had been published in Gujarati on the life-story of Bava Saheb, which I had the fortune to read. It had created a deep impression in my mind at my then young age.

Our impression of the temple was that it was quite different from the many other temples we were subsequently to visit in India. It was very simple, no beggars, not "commercialised". In fact somebody had just got married at the temple that day with the people from the wedding party still present. The priests were very welcoming and friendly. I told them we were from the UK and that I had heard a lot about the temple from my parents. I also mentioned the book about Bava Saheb in Gujarati, which I had read, upon which they asked me if I could photocopy and send to them. I consented that if I could locate it I would certainly oblige. I took pictures with my camera of the temple, the Shiv lingam and the water pool at the side of the temple.

Upon return to the UK, from the nine films that I had used to take pictures in India, eight had failed due to improper loading of the films in the camera. Fortunately, the first film contained the photos of the temple!

I found a copy of the Gujarati edition of the life history of Bava Saheb from my sister. I was about to make a photocopy of the book when I had inspiration to translate the book into English for those not familiar with reading/writing Gujarati, especially like our children.

During the process of translation into English, I have obtained a deeper understanding of the life of Bava Saheb and I have felt very close to him. It is said that the advent of such saintly person in one's life comes at the appropriate time. I keep reminding myself of the stories and glories of Bava Saheb which were related to me by both my parents. At times my eyes have filled with tears reading about the devotion of Bava Saheb to the Lord, his utterly unselfish actions and all his deeds dedicated for the good of all. I am very grateful to his grace for giving me the vision, the intellect and the necessary ability/strength to carry out this translation. This small effort will be worthwhile if the English speaking/reading audience receives inspiration from it to enhance their understanding and devotion to such a saintly being, albeit the Lord himself, as at that point there remains no difference between the mortal being and the total divinity.

I am convinced that my very short visit to Siddhanath Mahadev's temple at the end of 1993 was due to Bava Saheb's grace. My father, mother and uncle all used to sing :

" Samaru sandhya pahelo,
baluda rammat melo,
chogada Siddhanath tamane samaru sandhya pahelo"

Such devotional songs, which I heard in the prime of my life and helped me with the spiritual progress, were further enhanced by this translation of Bava Saheb's life-

story. During this work, I have through out felt his sublime presence. His grace was ever showering! My wish is that he guides me through this spiritual path and gracefully lead me to the eventual goal of all life forms. To Bava Saheb, my endless prostrations. Glory to the master Bava Saheb! May he bless all!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wife and children who had the patience while this translation was carried out.

TRUE FAITH

MY MIRACLE EXPERIENCES AND TRUE HAPPENINGS

By having true faith, man certainly experiences success. When a direct divine miracle happens, man acquires great faith in God or a saint. The following is such a direct miracle experience of Olpad's Ratandas Bava Saheb and true happenings. Hope the readers will get appropriate guidance from it.

My mother held great faith in Olpad's Ratandas Bava Saheb. She repeatedly used to relate to me on various occasions the past happenings. On a morning of savant 1990, I was driving a cart full of Juwar, pulled by two very strong bulls. Unfortunately, while climbing the incline of the Kim River, one of the bulls faltered and passed blood. I became very worried when he lost strength to pull the cart. At that time I remembered my mother's sayings and I faithfully chanted Ratandas Bava Saheb's name, joined the bull to the cart and began driving forward. I thought I would release my oxen at my friend's house enroute and join his fresh pair. But due to unforeseen circumstances, his oxen were not at his home. With great despondency, I put all my faith in Ratandas BavaSaheb and chanting his name, I started again with my own oxen. As the cart neared Olpad, the oxen seemed to gain more strength to pull the cart as if nothing had happened to them. I was astonished when we reached Olpad at 10 O'clock. After that event, my faith in Ratandas Saheb was bolstered and I thereafter used to send every year 1 (₹) sher Juwar ponk before consuming any myself. Thereafter, I further took upon myself to send every year 1 (₹) sher cotton and 1 (₹) sher of Juwar. Today, most of the people in village have faith in Ratandas BavaSaheb and about 25 people send gift as per their means and faith to Olpad temple.

On another occasion, my experience was in Samvant 1995. As opposed to my normal rule, due to carelessness and laziness I did not send 1 (₹) sher of ponk of Juwar to the temple for which I experienced the consequences. I had already gathered the ponk from a plot of my farm. The plot was affected by disease and whereas I would get 2 cartloads of Juwar from the plot, I managed to obtain only 1 cartload. I was very disappointed and felt that I should not diverge from this rule. The next year, another plot was suddenly affected by disease. I promptly vowed to Gurudev. The disease stopped immediately at that point with no further damage and the harvest was greater than expected.

My third experience was in Samvant 2022. That concerned an ox I had bought. He had bad habit of sitting down. To stop this affecting the farming, I vowed to get him to kneel to RatanSaheb and not to give him any green Juwar to eat until the vow was completed. The ox gave up his bad habit and I have relieved myself from the vow during this year. These are really my experiences of true events. There is no outward pretence or hypocrisy, my absolute faith in him continues. I hope the readers will take account of the events narrated and will have faith chanting his name whereupon Ratandas BavaSaheb will come to help. With this wish I end this narration of true events.

Author :

HARISINH NATHUSINH SOLANKI

AT. POST PANJROLI
ST. KOSAMBA (R.S.)
TALUKA ANKALESHWAR
DIST. BHARUCH

GRATITUDE AND THANKS

I feel it is only right to express my gratitude to all the ladies and gentlemen who have helped in the publication of this booklet.

Hoping that all great devotees will make use of this booklet and extend the same to others, I take leave.

Yours to serve,

Baldevbhai Morarji Varma

MY FAITH

**MESSRS PATEL SAW MILLS
TIMBER MERCHANTS
PROP. KANJIBHAI PACHANBHAI
AT. NETRA (KUTCH)
PRESENTLY AT OLPAD
NEAR BRIDGE
DIST. SURAT**

I am originally resident of Netra (Kutch). Presently I am residing in Olpad engaged in timber business called Messrs Patel Saw Mills. Initially when I started, my business was very low. Once I attended Maha Shivratri at Bava faria where faith lit in me for Bava Saheb. I decided to donate to charity a certain percentage of all my purchases. Within one year, my business began to expand and became profitable. Within that year I earned excellent revenue due to Bava Saheb. Due to floods thereafter, most of my stocks were washed away. Nevertheless, due to Bava Saheb's grace I found lot of the stock and business again commenced.

On 6.8.1968 due to great floods, my father and a worker were stranded hungry for 70 hours. Bava Saheb saved them. At that time 3 big snakes remained with them as close as 1  feet from them for 30 hours and no harm came to them, after which they disappeared. I have great feeling towards Bava Saheb, he immediately gives sight (darshan) upon worshipping him. He is a divine being, such experience is the first in my life.

MIRACLE DISPLAYED BY SHREE GURUDEV RATANDAS MAHARAJ

During the floods of 6.8.1968, Gurudeva's temple was under 3 feet of water. His bed in the temple is 1 ½ feet high, covered with quilt and bed cover sheet. Books are also kept there. Worship - Puja is done there everyday. 1 ½ feet of water passed over it. Nevertheless, 4 days after the floods when the doors to the temple were re-opened, the bed and all the contents including bed quilt, sheet, books and flowers that had been offered for the puja were not in the least touched by the flood water. Next to the bed on a 3 feet high table, his photograph and books were placed. None of the items were touched by floodwaters. This was an inexplicable event.

After receding of the floodwaters, 5 families from different villages had to take refuge in the temple. Because of the pollution by the floodwaters, the well water was not fit for consumption. During that period, the wells in the temple compound which had been washed over and salted by 7 to 8 feet of water during 1959 floods immediately became fit for consumption. 50 people were consuming this water for a month without difficulty. This can be viewed as Gurudev's miracle.

RATANDAS BHAKTA

It is midnight. The air is still. The waters in the Tapi river are also still. At that time, a young boy of seventeen carrying a yoke across his shoulders is walking away on the unpopulated empty road. He is chanting away " Shiv, Shiv".

By the shore of the Tapi River, at the ghat (platform) of Kurukshetra the boy stops. The cemetery ghat does not frighten him. Someone's cremation's extinguishing coals hold no fright for him. The moon of the dark half has just risen, coming out from behind the trees on the edge of the river; but the boy has no time to view. Not only is his mouth chanting "Shiv, Shiv,", his whole body was filled with Bhagwan Shankar, and was chanting the jap of Bhagwan Shankar.

In the peaceful waters of the river a pitcher drowns. The ripples created by it fade away. After filling the yoke, he chants again "Shiv, Shiv.."and quickly began walking on the empty road. The road is long. The path is fearsome. But his mind does not know fear. The one who is looked after by the almighty, what worry can he have? Who does he fear?

Almost the whole night he walks. Three quarters of the way, dawn breaks. The moon and the stars are shining even brighter. The cool breeze of the early morning is blowing. The youth walks, chanting "Shiv, Shiv...".

At the first rays of the morning sun, he is seen doing abhishek (pouring water) on the head of Siddhanath Mahadev with the pure auspicious water of the Tapi River. He then prays for hours to Shankarji; and then from the desolate location of Siddhanath Mahadev he returns home on foot. All day he is then tied up with the work in the house and the farming plot, but his mind is occupied with the thoughts of Bhagwan Shankar. He has the desire to have sight (darshan) of Bhagwan Shankar. His guru has taught him the path of love devotion, with which he aims to achieve the presence of Sadashiv.

The name of this youth is Shree Ratandas. His guru's name was Madhavdas - Madhavdas of Simdawala he was known by most.

His date of birth is not clearly notated anywhere. But it is firmly known that in A.D. 1709 he came from the village of Suni Mandroi of Ankaleshwar district and set up an ashram a short distance from Olpad. He was born in the moon dynasty of Yadav clan.

At the age of 16 years, the devotee gained love devotion to the Lord from previous samsakars (mind impressions left by previous lives' actions). But to get to the Lord and gain devotion, true knowledge without guru cannot be achieved. When the feelings for gurudiksha (vow / commitment to guru for gaining knowledge) and to gain knowledge ensued, he sought refuge of Guru Madhavdas of Simdawala and prayed for gurudiksha.

Give that good preaching Guru father,
How to recognise the heart's king,
Do the favour with which suffering of life and death be rid,
With natural ease to cross the ocean of pain and pleasure (bhav)..

Give that good preaching Guru father....

Thus by Shree Ratandas's humble prayer Guru was pleased and bequeathed him true knowledge and Gurumantra (chant) : "Devote yourself to Bhagwan Shiv who will fulfil your good wishes, these are my deep heartfelt blessings", with which the devotee came home with firm commitment to follow guru's instructions to devote to Shiv Bhagwan.

Guru is Bhrama, guru is Vishnu, guru is divine Maheshwar
Guru is true witness ultimate Bhrama, to that guru I bow

As narrated before, he filled Tapi River's water every midnight on his yoke and did abhishek to Siddhanath Mahadev. His principle was firm and immovable. The sun may not rise, Ratandas would not go without abhishek to Siddhanath Mahadev - be it cold, hot, heavy rain, the swamps be filled double deep with water, Ratandas would go, and if he could not go, then he went the day hungry without any food to eat. Such was his firm principle! Such was his firm faith! So firm was his love for the Lord !

When the lord is choked with boundless love of the devotee, then he has to show himself to the devotee. But before the Lord gives darshan, he tests the devotee none the less!

To break Ratandas's firm principle, the Lord tested him endlessly. It is said that at midnight when the devotee was walking bare foot chanting "Shiv, Shiv", fearful snakes would be seen; when the devotee is walking calling "Shiv, Shiv" in tumbling rain in the dark night, the space is filled with terrible cry of some creature, the devotee would then see two sparkling eyes of the violent creature! But fearlessly, the devotee would walk forward and within a short distance a tiger would block his way; at other times a python would sit across his path with its mouth gaping.... but what fear to the one who has firm faith in the Lord ? The one who has Bhagwan Shankar's canopy on his head, how can he have fear? The devotee would see different things everyday, but he is not moved in the least! Because he is totally permeated with the name of Bhagwan.

The devotee would see his atma (soul) in all - be it python, tiger, snake; his atma immersed in love devotion saw the Lord in all the elements of the universe! How can he fear them? He would laugh and loudly recite the Lord's prayer and think: " The Lord will certainly give vision of his self now that he has shown himself as tiger, python and snake, that is the sure sign". Thus thinking, singing, with the yoke on his shoulders, the devotee would reach Mahadev's temple, as the dawn breaks, and prays to Bhagwan for long time hands clasped - he sees Bhagwan Shankar within and without!

Due to this firm principle, this unfathomable faith, this unpolluted love, would Bhagwan not be pleased?

At last one midnight the devotee had left early and had departed from the shores of Tapi River and reached Siddhanath Mahadev's temple before the break of the dawn. It was early hours of the morning. In the eastern sky, the Shukra star was shining. The devotee found the temple doors were closed. As the devotee came daily early in the morning and disturbed his sleep, the terrified priest had decided to lock the doors and stay somewhere else. The devotee stood in front of the closed doors and started praying, with a bang the lock on the door broke and the doors opened by themselves. Upon finishing prayers, devotee Ratandas poured the water brought on the yoke and repeatedly requested with great emotion for Shree Shankar to give him his vision (darshan), eventually lay there head

down for long time, when suddenly there was a flash like lightening, the devotee saw his previous 71 generations freed from bondage! Bhagwan Shankar had given darshan to the devotee! The devotee lay his head at the feet of Bhagwan. When Bhagwan asked him for his wish, the devotee asked for no riches, nothing for him, nor for his family. He only requested thus:

" For the good of all people, whatever I say comes true, that is all I ask".

Bhagwan was pleased with the devotee's renounced soul.

"So be it! So be it !" the words echoed, the devotee looked up from the Lord's feet to witness the Lord had departed.

As he came out to walk towards home, dawn had just broken. The sky was filled with early morning colours of the sun. Overcome with extreme joy, the devotee was as if running and singing :

Thakur (Lord) to your refuge I have come,
Gone have the doubts of my mind,
When I received your vision,
Without saying words you knew my problems,
Made me chant your name,
Sufferings all gone, filled with only pleasures,
Only pleasantly mind sings,
Thakur (Lord) to your refuge I have come.

In the Surat district, tales of Ratandas Bhakta's miracles are wide spread; such tales to this day fill one with faith and devotion to him. From those many tales, it will be considered appropriate to denote a few.

★Evening has come. The sun is low down the horizon. The birds are flying to their nests, farmers coming back to the village; herds of cows are walking towards the village. Bhakta Shree is engaged in evening prayers, whereupon a shout is heard from the platform of the house " Is the Bhakta home? "

Upon hearing the shout he came out to find the local police (sepoy).

The sepoy said " Bhakta! Come now with me" Bhakta asked the police chief" Any wrong doing? Any crime?"

In a little while Bhakta entered police chief's office. The chief said" Bhakta, people have made a complaint against you." Bhakta was surprised. Words just came from his mouth "Complaint! Against me?"

Chief: "Your cow daily enters others' farms and causes lots of damage, you will have to pay compensation to the farmers. How long can people endure?" The chief was telling Bhakta thus in anger, when a sepoy came and said " The cow has been gathered and brought here". Bhakta and the Chief both came outside the office.

The Chief again started to tell : " Bhakta, what do you have to say?" Then pointing at the villager whose farm had been caused damage, he said: " Give this man for the damages so...."

As the chief was speaking, Bhakta was looking at the cow very lovingly. Before the Chief could finish, Bhakta reached the cow, and as if instructing in loving voice said : " How could you cause damage to others ? Have you forgotten whose cow you are? You have shamed my name of "Bhakta". Then turning his face he rebuked her, saying " instead of eating other's belonging, why could you not eat dust?" The words were just coming from Bhakta's mouth whereupon to the great surprise of all witnessing, the cow really started eating dust! The Chief, sepoys and farm owner all looked on.

At last the farm owner could not bear it any longer. He turned to Bhakta with both hands clasped: " Bhakta, Bhakta! Please stop mother cow from eating dust. I cannot bear looking..."

The chief also requestfully said to Bhakta " Enough now Bhakta. Please stop the cow eating dust."

One sepoy said " Enough Bhakta! We are satisfied that this is the cow of a saint, and that she will not damage others' property"

The farm owner piteously said: " From now on, even if this mother cow causes damage to my farm, I will not lodge any complaints" Imploring Bhakta he said "Enough Bhakta! Now enough Bhakta!"

At last Bhakta looked with loving eyes at the cow with his hands on her neck and said: "You will not do such wrong again ? We cannot do anything immoral ? " The cow as if repenting, looked down lowering her neck and shook her head.

The farm owner and the police chief said with one voice " We have confidence that this mother cow will from now on never do such a thing again. Bhakta! This time please forgive her."

Bhakta mutely instructed the cow who immediately stopped eating dust, and stood with eyes down.

The police chief and the farm owner both knelt at the feet of Bhakta, received his blessings and bade farewell to him with the cow.

*****One morning Bhakta had just arrived home from Siddhanath Mahadev after abhishek with Tapi river water when sepoys from the court of Peshwa government arrived and commanded him to go to the court. All transport arrangements had been made for him.

Bhakta presented himself in the court next morning. Peshwa was seated on a high lion throne. Around him set his courtiers, dignitaries and ministers. Peshwa respectfully seated Bhakta and after that asked him his well being before coming to the main point of his invitation.

Peswa said : " Bhakta! I have heard a lot about your miracles, whatever you are doing for the good for the people, I am very pleased to hear. I have a wish that you would show me one of your miracles."

Bhakta said with a smile : "Highness, I am just an ordinary devotee, I do not know any wizardry or tricks. I devote myself in the prayer of the Lord and toil the day to feed myself".

Peshwa said : " No-no Bhaktaji! I have specially called you for the purpose. I do not wish to interfere in your devotion or prayers. In this grave Kaliyug, I was merely intending to test a man's high morals...", and before saying anything else, with his permission his servant called for 2 pots to be brought in the court. Both the pots were closed at the top. The servant put both the pots in front of Bhakta, when Peshwa said :

" Bhakta! Tell me what is in the pot. If you will say the truth I will reward you with gold nuggets...."

Bhakta unattachedly replied " I have no need for gold nuggets your highness! My Lord has given me a lot, and I have a firm principle that if I have to beg it will be to the one with countless hands (God). And when he did give, I did not ask for riches, so how could I accept your immense charity?"

Peshwa was taken back by this comment, and said " Be as it may Bhakta! Tell me anyhow, what is in the pots? Until you tell me..."

Bhakta interrupted " Until then you will not let me go, yes your Highness ! Well then, If you insist then..." Saying thus, Bhakta got up, went to the pots and slid his hand over the pots once, looked at Peshwa and said with a smile " Highness, in one pot there is sugar and candy in the other".

The whole court was stilled. Peshwa sat puzzled in astonishment. He said: " You are making a mistake, Bhakta! I have got them filled with earth and dust! Then...."

Bhakta said with a firm voice " Chant the Lord's name and open the pots, The Lord's name is not in vain, Highness!".

Peshwa eyed his servant who opened the pots - and poured the contents in the big plates laid out, one pot poured out sugar candy, the other sugar! The whole assembly was silent - pin drop silence.

After a little while, Peshwa stood up and knelt to the feet of Bhakta. A little while later said" Bhakta, please forgive me... my intellect was misdirected to test a saint!"

Bhakta said " No-no your lordship the fault is not yours. I have done nothing in this, so why kneel to me? I have exchanged the Lord's name. Even stones have floated with the Lord's name... if you have to kneel, then do so to the Lord, the Lord who converted dust to sugar and earth to candy. I am only an ordinary soul. What am I capable of?" After stopping a while, Bhakta said to the servant:

" Distribute the sugar and candy to all in the city and the remainder to all the villages in the kingdom".

And so it was done. Sugar and candy were distributed to every corner of the wide Peshwa kingdom, yet the stock did not diminish! To this day, people offer sacrifice of sugar and

candy to Bhakta.

Bhakta did not accept any gift from the Peshwa government. He said, "What use do I have for gold? The Lord has given me everything".

Peshwa bade farewell to Bhakta with great honour.

One afternoon Bhakta had just arrived from his plot farm and about to begin his lunch when a shout was heard " Har har Mahadev Shambhu". Bhakta immediately came out. He saw an old Sadhu. His head was covered with long interlocked hair, neck covered with rosary of rudhraksha beads, in one hand a pair of tongs, in the other hand a pumpkin vessel. Eyes were red, neck covered with a live hissing serpent.

Bhakta smilingly said: " Can we be of service, Maharaj ?"

Sadhu said: " Bhakta, I have heard you are a great devotee. You give whatever is asked of you. That is why I have come to you."

Bhakta: " Certainly, please say Maharaj! If you are hungry, then food is ready, if you are tired then I will do service, please advise".

Sadhu said: " Will you give what I ask?"

Bhakta: " Yes Maharaj ! Whatever I have, if you ask for it, I will give all of it at your feet. Please, what is your wish?"

Sadhu said with doubt: "No no Bhakta! I do not gather faith in you, only what I ask".

Bhakta: " Yes Maharaj, please ask, whatever you desire, I will give it all".

Sadhu : " No you will not be able to give. I will ask for something which you may not be able to give and then..."

Bhakta:" Do not say so, Maharaj! First ask for it, then say what you have to say -!"

The sadhu's words came out like bullet from a gun to the ears of Bhakta:

" Bhakta! If you want to give then give me your wife --"

Seeing Bhakta momentarily in thought, with a loud laugh the sadhu said: " Did I not tell you will not be able to give? I do not desire anything apart from your wife. What use do I have for a woman? You may well ask. But I have heard the many good qualities of your wife. I am now old, my body is not as well. Today this village, tomorrow another. Sadhu must be on the move.It is my wish that I have somebody to look after me - your wife is better to serve than yourself ! "

As the sadhu was saying, Bhakta 's wife appeared through the door and suddenly said:

" Very well Maharaj ! Is it not my good fortune to be of service to a saint? I will certainly come with you, as soon as my husband gives permission - "

Bhakta said " Yes- yes Maharaj! You are right. Your need for service is greater than mine - You may take my wife."

Bhakta's wife said " Please come in! I have prepared the meal, I will eat for the last time with my husband - you can also please eat with us and rest for a while. Before the sun sets, I will walk away with you."

Sadhu said: " Lady ! You do not know yet, I am a renounced sadhu, one day I am in this village, tomorrow another - walk miles without food and water, it is well if I get to eat and drink otherwise have to go without. Also have to sleep anywhere..."

Bhakta 's wife said: " Please do not worry, Maharaj! Please do not worry about me - now I have to worry about you!"

Bhakta said with ardent feeling: " Please enter. For once we can eat together."

During the latter part of that afternoon the lady walked away with the sadhu - Bhakta went to the end of the village to bid farewell. Bhakta stood there watching until they were out of sight. He then came home again and immersed himself in the Lord's prayer.

The next day, Bhakta came home from after Siddhanath Mahadev's darshan, whereupon a villager came to him and said : " Bhakta! I went to another village yesterday. This morning I saw your wife sitting alone under a tree in the jungle. She was crying. When I asked, she told me about the sadhu and then said she came with the sadhu during the night to the spot whereupon he disappeared." I asked her to come with me to the village, but she said she would wait for the sadhu Maharaj. If she came home, then your promise would be broken."

After listening to the villager, Bhakta went deep into thought. A while later he startled. He asked the villager to go with him and show him the place where he had seen his wife. The villager was a devotee of Bhakta. He consented and they both went together.

Upon reaching the spot where his wife was sitting, Bhakta said " Please come home now, it was no sadhu, it was Siddhanath dada himself. He was testing us. It was our bad luck neither of us were able to recognise him."

At last Bhakta came home with his wife and both immersed in the prayer to the Lord.

*****Once Bhakta visited a village. The village was known as Karaamera. The villagers gathered to see Bhakta and also listen to his preaching. Bhakta was residing at a Rajput's residence. The Rajput's daughter was very beautiful. She was of a marriageable age but had not yet found a husband. Her name was Kushalba. Kushalba brought some drinking water to Bhakta in a cup. She gave the cup to Bhakta and knelt to him. In blessing her, Bhakta said : " May you become a queen."

Rajput smiled and said" Bhakta! I am only a poor man. What king will marry my daughter?"

In reply Bhakta smiled and without saying any more left for another village. At this village, villagers told Bhakta of their problems about the lack of fresh drinking water.

Bhakta showed them a location and asked them to dig a well there and added:"Dig the well

here but do not build it solid. Water will always will be available in it."

And just so it did happen. Villagers dug the well there. Fresh drinking water came out! The village was in Olpad district known as Umrachhi. Villagers had comfort from the drinking water, which is still available to this day.

Mandavi's king had an inspiration in his dream. He was childless. He was advised that if he married at his own expense Karmera's Kushalba, he would obtain a son. Through Kushalba, he had two sons.

★

The kingdom of Peshwa was terrorised by the Pindhara. The Pindhara's leader had heard stories of the miracles of the Bhakta. The leader ordered his riders to fetch Bhakta.

Bhakta heard the horses of the Pindhara while he was serving in the Deva temple from where he came out to see.

One Pindhara said: "Bhakta ! Our leader has called for you this instant. And he has asked us to fetch you in whatever state you are." Bhakta was in Deva Puja and was therefore only dressed in a short dhotee, his chest was all open.

No sooner had Bhakta followed the Pindhara to the door outside of his house, to the amazement of the riders he changed instantly into the clothes of royalty, seated on a divine horse forging ahead!

The leader of the Pindhara was dazzled by the divine form of Bhakta and immediately knelt to him. The riders told their leader about what had ensued at Bhakta 's house, when Bhakta disappeared from their sight. After this miracle, the Pindhara's decided not to terrorise the people in the Peshwa's kingdom from there on and walked away. When Peshwa came to learn of this, he honoured Bhakta; asked for land to be allotted for the building of a temple and a travellers' rest home (dharmashala). He further contributed 40 vingha of land and cash of 62 Rupees (a huge value in those days). Bhakta began to serve people with all this.

★

The sea was stormy. The sky was covered with dark and dreadful clouds. The atmosphere was solemn with cracks of lightning. The mountain like waves were attempting to devour the boats like pythons with mouths wide open. The sailors have precious cargo in the boats. The sailors had lost faith and were concerned about their own safety. Just then, an old sailor remembered, and silently clasped both hands in prayer : "O Bhakta , please deliver our boats and cargo safely, we will deliver 201 rupees to your place. Now be it you let us die or deliver us..."

The boats were delivered safely, and the sailors were safe. The sky became clear. The boats were as if playing in the lap of the vast expanse of the sea.

The old sailor got off the boat and again silently bowed in prayer, getting ready to deliver 201 rupees to Bhakta 's place.

The old sailor went to Bhakta, bowed and presented 100 rupees, telling him about the

calamity and his vow. Bhakta asked him to stay on at his place which he duly did. During the evening, the workers who were digging a lake for Bhakta for the benefit of all people came for their wages.

Bhakta told his attendants : " Pay them half for their labour."

The labourers complained: " Why only half ?"

The old sailor also asked:" Bhakta , why only half ?"

Bhakta smilingly said : " Your boats were saved, and you vowed to deliver 201 Rupees, instead you have given 100 Rupees, so I can only pay half their labour."

The old sailor was surprised. He knelt to Bhakta and said:"Bhakta! How did you know my mind? I thought how will Bhakta know?" - He knelt to Bhakta, asked to be forgiven and gave the remaining amount.

Bhakta paid the full wages to the labourers.

He forgave the old sailor.

The tales of such miracles spread everywhere. To this day, people in the districts of Surat and Bharuch make vows to Bhakta, and fulfill their just desires.

To the present day, sailors still remember Bhakta before setting sail to ensure a safe journey.

Bhakta had a well built in the vicinity of Olpad. The sweetness of the water from this well is unique. The well has never run out of water. In the village of Saras, he made the salty water of a well sweet, which is present to this day. In a dharmashala built by Bhakta there is a stalk of Saag, which is 52 gaj long, and can be viewed even now.

There is also a very well known story of another wondrous miracle.

It was during the days of Diwali. It was time to gather the wheat from the fields. Bhakta was also preparing to gather wheat, when a group of sadhus came to his house. They asked for necessary provisions. Bhakta without any hesitation got the sowing wheat ground and fed the flour to the sadhus.

Bhakta now had no seeds to seed in his field. All the farmers had sown the seeds in their fields. Bhakta sowed the seeds of pumpkin in his field! The villagers were making fun of Bhakta: "Has Bhakta lost his senses!"

At the end of the season, when the farmers gathered the wheat crop from their fields, Bhakta 's field was covered with climbing plants with pumpkins hanging down. Upon Bhakta's order his servants gathered the pumpkins and made a big pile of them in the seed separator. Out of sheer amazement, people gathered around the seed separator to watch.

Bhakta opened one pumpkin, and to the surprise of all seeds of wheat started dropping out. One, five, ten, twenty five, fifty, nay all the pumpkins were torn open to bear a big mound of wheat!

Everyone watching knelt down to Bhakta. From then onwards, his followers remember Ratandas at the time of sowing in their fields. Their harvest has never failed.

★

It's year of drought ! It has created a disaster! Disaster descended upon the family of Lalaji. How can he pay the government tax? The government did not show mercy on farmers not able to pay the taxes. Such farmers were legally prosecuted. He was from the clan of Motala brahmins of great repute. He decided to leave Olpad and find some job elsewhere. He just philosophically accepted it was time for him to leave and prepared his belongings to leave.

Before leaving he went to Bhakta to say goodbye, and said:" Bhakta, the food and water has run out, please bless me so that I may earn my bread wherever I end up" Upon saying this he became very piteous.

Bhakta blessed him with a smile:" Don't worry! Everything will be all right. Not only will you earn a living, you will gain thousands of Rupees and come to Olpad on elephant back."

- And so it did happen. According to the blessings of Bhakta, he went towards Delhi, and in a few years became a minister. At the appropriate age he resigned from the post, and came to Olpad seated on an elephant! - bowed to Bhakta and spent his earnings in one year of drought for the good of all people. In that drought he looked after the rich whereas Bhakta saved the poor. It is said that food never lacked in the stores of Bhakta! Bhakta performed such numerous good deeds!

It was the month of Shravan. It is a drizzling night - the rain is pouring down. It is midnight. Rain drops make dripping sound as they come down from the roof. In the old bazaar of Olpad, a divo lamp is shining in one of the houses. The wind is blowing in from a half open window. A man is writing his accounts in the low light of the lamp. He is from the clan of Vania, his name Lallubhai Pranjivandas. His business - to sell food provisions. Lallubhai is engrossed writing his accounts, when there was a knock on the door. Lallubhai was surprised. "Who could it be at this time of the night?" He became anxious with the thought. Again there was a more forcible knocking on the door - Lallubhai put his pen behind his ear, and standing up he called " Who is it?"

The reply came " It is me Ratandas Bhakta." Leading his way with the lamp Lallubhai opened the door. Upon opening the door he asked " Why Bhakta! This time...at midnight?"

Bhakta forcing his way in and smiling said " Take this sir, as you enquired about the money this evening..."

Lallubhai remembered. That evening he had reminded Bhakta of the debt, which had not been paid for the food provisions. Not only had he reminded him, leaving normal courtesy and respect aside, he had also uttered a few unwarranted words. For a moment he repented, and then with a smile said: " Bhakta, now at this time...."

Bhakta:" But Sir, what is the certainty of tomorrow? I settle my bills as soon as I get the money. You reminded me, and luckily God sent it to me..." and saying thus Bhakta opened

the bag, and piled up the Rupees in front of Lallubhai.

Lallubhai counted the Rupees, and was just about to thank Bhakta. He looked up when to his amazement, he found Bhakta was not there. For a moment he was surprised, but then thought Bhakta must be in a hurry. He credited Bhakta 's account in his books. Closing all the books, Lallubhai closed the window. The rain had just stopped; the moon of the waning half was just looking through from behind the trees!

It was one month past this event. One evening, Lallubhai was weighing some goods at his shop, when Bhakta arrived. Lallubhai respectfully asked with a smile: "What would you like Bhakta?"

Bhakta said:"I have not come to take, I have come to give."

Lallubhai was surprised; he just managed to say : "To give! ...What?"

Bhakta:"That day you were very unhappy with me, you rebuked me for the outstanding debt - it was my fault - but what could I do? As soon as I get the money, I immediately pay out. But presently...."

Lallubhai got up in amazement: " Have you come to give me money?"

Bhakta:" Yes of course, please count this. Please clear my debt."

Lallubhai looked at Bhakta for a while with staring eyes; and then said: " Bhakta ! You came the other day in person...midnight.... You made me open the door in pouring rain and cleared the account, and today again..."

Now Bhakta stared at Lallubhai in amazement, and said:" What are you saying Sir? When ever did I come? Whenever did I pay my debt? I don't know..."

Lallubhai replied:"Yes, yes Bhakta ! You came at midnight, you poured a pile of Rupees in front of me, I started counting, I looked up. You were gone! I..I.."

Bhakta 's countenance became pale - the feelings on his face showed changes, with deep feelings he said:"Sir, Sir It was...It was..my grand Siddhanath !... none else....none else...no one else... going through a lakh and eighty for thousand lives, whose sight is not possible...impossible to me...he...he...in person came to your door" so saying his voice was overcome by great emotions. A little while later he said: "Did you not even recognise the grand father?"

What could the businessman say?

Putting the bag of Rupees in his pocket, Bhakta grumbled come down the steps of the shop: "My Siddhanath had to go to so much trouble? Midnight...rain..."

Lallubhai stood with his hands clasped to the disappearing figure of Bhakta.

★

Bhakta had one daughter. She was married at a well to do family. But her mother-in-law's

manner was very sharp. Once his daughter was not feeling quite well. It was autumn time and the cold was a bit sharp! The daughter-in-law could not get up in time in the morning. The mother-in-law grumbled:

"If you don't do the clearing up, would your father do it?" and she then got engrossed in the daily chores.

The next day in the morning the mother-in law heard somebody clearing up in the cattle pit. The daughter-in-law was still ill, so she had not got up. She wondered who could be clearing up, so she went to investigate. She found Bhakta with basket full of cow dung on top of his head walking across the courtyard!

The lady was taken back. The story spread through the village like wild fire. The father-in-law came running and snatched away the basket of dung and pleadingly started to say something.

Bhakta said with a smile: "If my daughter is ill and as she could not do the housework, then her father should do the necessary work!"

The mother-in-law was ashamed. With the feelings of the talk of the villagers and the words of Bhakta, she wished for the earth to open up and swallow her. Everyone knelt to Bhakta and asked for forgiveness. Bhakta had telepathically heard the harsh words of the mother-in-law and had come to the rescue of his daughter!

The mother-in-law's attitude changed henceforth.

★

It was autumn time, during the month of Maghshar weddings were taking place in the village. One of the men of the village, a devotee of Bhakta, was attending an engagement party and asked his friend: " Let's go and pay a visit to Bhakta for his blessings."

The friend said: "I don't think I am coming. You wouldn't find any ripe mangoes there !" (This is literal translation from Gujarati, meaning one would not find there anything of benefit).

The man persuaded hard his friend who eventually accepted to go. They reached Bhakta 's residence and when they bowed to him to take leave, Bhakta said: " Since you have come, why not take some consecrated offering!" And he asked a volunteer: "Get the basket of the mangoes from the next room!"

The two friends were startled - for a moment they thought, how can you get mangoes at this time of the year - Bhakta is certainly gone mad. But the next moment the room was filled with the sweet fragrance of ripe mangoes - the taste of the lovely mangoes was so extraordinary - they both knelt to Bhakta!

It was Falgun month in the summer. Suryanarayan (the sun) was showering extreme heat. The birds, animals and all lifeforms were engaged in searching all directions for cool resting-places and water. At this time, Bhakta was passing to his destination through the unpopulated jungle by Dharampore in the district of Mandavi. His body was tired with the travel and due to the heat sweat was oozing out. Thirst for drink of water was harassing his

otherwise patient nature. He was searching for water. Under the circumstances, he spotted a cowherd grazing his flock. Bhakta immediately went to the cowherd for water. He asked for a drink of water.

The cowherd replied: " Maharaj, there is no water in this area for two to three Gaos (measure of distance). I have some water but it is in a leather container. Saints and religious people therefore cannot use it. I therefore cannot give you water to drink, I too have to take the cows two to three Gaos for water. I take them only once for drink of water. This is my predicament. So I cannot satisfy you with water."

After learning this Bhakta went deep into thought. After a while he suddenly uttered asking the cowherd:" Is there a cow amongst your herd who does not bear young?" The cowherd replied in affirmative saying there was one. So Bhakta asked him to bring her. The cowherd brought the cow as asked. Bhakta asked the cowherd to bring a vessel and to milk the cow. The cowherd began to think and said : " Maharaj, how will a barren cow give milk!" In so saying the barren cow stood still watched on by the cowherd. Milk started to drip from her teats. Bhakta immediately asked the cowherd to milk the cow. The cowherd began to milk the cow. The vessel got filled with milk. The cowherd looked at Bhakta in amazement. Bhakta said to the cowherd: "Walk away while pouring the milk from this vessel, but don't look back." The cowherd began walking pouring the milk until there was none left. He then looked behind him to find the waters of Ganga flowing. The astonished cowherd knelt to the feet of Bhakta.

The cowherd said to Bhakta that his attractions to the worldly things had evaporated - you are my Lord. Please keep me by you. Bhakta said : " Your wellbeing is in looking after and protecting the cows and devotion to God. Those are my blessings." Henceforth the cowherd became a disciple of Bhakta. He kept to his duties praying to God and became a great devotee. He became famous as devotee "Bhandasji". His throne was established at Mandavi's Dharampore village. From that time onwards to this day, people became happy with the waters of the Ganga. Hail to such devotee.

Bhakta eventually decided to dispose of his mortal form. Away from the village he built a hut, and there he went into living abstract contemplation, commonly known as 'Samadhi'. Mandavi's Queen mother Kushalba came the same day to visit Bhakta. "Where is Bhakta?" Upon asking the devotees replied: " Maharaj has taken samadhi in the hut." Kushalba was disappointed. The devotees could not awaken Bhakta from samadhi - but Bhakta came to know the bewilderment in the mind of Kushalba. He came outside the hut and gave vision to Kushalba. Kushalba got made and consecrated Bhakta 's footprints for worshipping in the temple. After doing puja, Kushalba took blessings from Bhakta and departed.

One morning Bhakta said to the devotees : " Bring two cart loads of wood." He then said to his followers ; " Follow me to the cemetery singing the lord's name."

All were saddened.

Singing the Lord's name with countless people, Bhakta walked to the bay in the cemetery. Two cartloads of wood had already arrived.

Bhakta sat amidst the pile of wood. He then asked all: "Does anybody have anything to say?"

All faces were looking down in sadness.

Bhakta said: "I will always be with you invisible. When you remember me, you ask me for favours, your intended will at once happen." Upon saying thus fire by itself appeared from Bhakta 's body, in no time the pyre was in flames. The singing of the Lord's name by the followers began to echo in the air. Upon extinguishing of the pyre, the villagers went home with saddened faces.

The next day when people visited the cemetery, people saw a mound of flowers at the spot of Bhakta 's cremation! People built a commemoration at the spot, which is still in existence to this day. That day was in the month of Falgun, the eleventh day of the dark half of the lunar month. Every year on this day, people come to the gathering in remembrance of Ratandas alias Bava Saheb in Olpad.

Ratandas Bhakta's mortal body has disappeared. Nevertheless Bhakta still helps his devotees and followers to this day.

Hail to Bhakta Ratandasji!

Hail to the mother of Bhaktaraj!

★

In Navasari district's Umbhrat village lived his devotee Lalbhai Valabhbhai. He had great faith and affection for Ratandas. Lalbhai owned big shops in Africa. His family also lived in Africa. Lalbhai was taken very ill in Africa - all hope was lost to save him, but for his deep faith in Ratandas - he remembered him, pleading for relief from the suffering. The Lord heard his prayer. He was relieved from the suffering. Lalbhai came to Umbhrat from Africa. He got built a fabulous temple to the Lord at the then cost of Rs 2700 at the coast of Ratnagar Sea and dedicated it to Dharmaguru Ratandas. His sons now look after the temple from Africa. The followers of beloved miraculous Bhakta have established his temples at Bhimpore, Danti, Umbhrat...There they commemorate the occasions of Janamashtami and other festivals. In the districts of Surat and Bharuch, there are great numbers of his devotees. Those devotees eliminate the problems/sufferings of the multitudes remembering Bhakta Ratandas Maharaj ... Thus is Bhakta Ratandas Maharaj.