



PEARLS IN THE OCEAN

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Abstract

Saints & Sages have been on our Earth since times immemorial. People have experienced deep bliss & profound peace in their divine presence. Their aura & their godly qualities help people come out of their traumas, their depression & frustration. They are people who show the masses the true way to reach God. They are messengers of God whose chief aim is to make people see the Godhead within themselves & in others. This Paper traces the lives of three apostles of God, who, through their sincere devotion & selfless love towards the Almighty showed people how to reach God.

Key Words: Saints, Sages, Lives, Bliss, Peace, Almighty.

If we look at our history since our evolution, human thought, we notice has focussed only on the subsistence level. We have been solely preoccupied with food, shelter & clothing & other aspects of survival. But there have been people in the past & in the near present- who have moved beyond this life of mundane existence. There have been men & women, who evolved themselves consciously-who became aware of their divine existence & worked hard to realize this divinity within them - who believed in the cosmic unity in all planes of existence. These people were the great saints, seers & spiritual masters, who rose above the duality of creation & perceived the unity of the creator. The world has been a witness to a number of these Saints who, time & again, were born as humans on this Earth, to bestow their blessings & take humankind towards spirituality- instilling inspiration & hope in them.

Saints are those holy beings who incarnate on Earth to help humans achieve their spiritual goal. These are pure, pious spirits in the form of human flesh & blood. They are highly evolved souls who have merged their consciousness with that of the divine creator. Hence, they are away from any kind of avarice & malevolence towards other beings.

Swami Paramhansa Yogananda, in his book "The Autobiography of a Yogi", stated,

The impartiality of saints is rooted in wisdom. They are no longer influenced by the alternating faces of Maya, no longer subject to the likes & dislikes that confuse the judgement of unenlightened men. (Pg.107).

A person, who has truly conquered all his animal instincts & has overcome his lower tendencies, is said to be a saint. Abilities to heal the sick & read "souls", to change hearts & shape human events, are the outer signs of this inner attainment.

William James- a well known Scientist & philosopher & scientist used the scientific method in finding out more about the concept of Saintliness. His research led him to conclude that saints were the embodiments of the best fruits of religion. The condition of Saintliness, he said, has four main features,

- An experience of being part of a cosmic universe that goes beyond or transcends selfish interests.
- A spirit of surrender to the Ideal power, or God.
- Feelings of elation or what is known as "inner bliss" by breaking out of the narrow confines of the body & the ego.
- Unbounded love for all beings.

Saints appear as links between the human & the divine. They are fully awakened souls with a "tendency to God". They can be called superhuman too, as they possess abilities to leave & come back to their bodies at will by going into a state of super consciousness (*Samadhi*). This is due to the fact, that they do not identify themselves with their bodies-but they know that they are a part of the cosmic soul. The Dalai Lama says:

It is important to understand that each of these saints & sages was born an ordinary person. Some of them, he says, achieve enlightenment through the following of certain spiritual practices & disciplines in a given lifetime; others awaken spontaneously "as a result of positive spiritual merit accumulated from previous births."

Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) began his life as a seemingly ordinary man. He was born into a wealthy family & was given to extravagance & a lavish lifestyle. He took part in the war against neighbouring Perugia. Captured & imprisoned for a year, he was on the verge of going to another military campaign when he heard the voice of God calling onto him. "Thus



began a life of obedience to God's will, a life that epitomized 'poverty in spirit' -owning nothing & entrusting all things to God." As a wandering monk, he attracted other friars who flocked onto him & became his disciples. Among the many incidents that diverted Francis's mind towards a monastic life, was the call of Christ- a vision whence he saw Jesus calling onto him "Go Francis, & repair my house, which, as you see, is well nigh in ruins." Thus began a life of renunciation & abject poverty for Francis, where, he said that his sole grace was to be "Our Father who art in heaven." His decisive moment came when he witnessed a "mass" dedicated to apostles & listened to the Gospel according to Matthew (10: 7, 9-11):

And as you go, preach the message. The Kingdom is at hand! Take no Gold, nor silver, nor money in you belts, no bags for your journey, nor two tunics, or sandals, nor a staff;

This then was the moment where he removed his shoes, discarded his staff, put on a rough tunic & began to preach repentance. In 1209, he formulated for his mendicant disciples, a simple rule, "Regula primitiva", Primitive Rule, which was drawn from a passage in the Holy Bible: "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ & to work in his footsteps."

The love of poverty is a characteristic feature & a part of the spirit of Franciscans -members of what is known as the Franciscan Order. They were street preachers with virtually no possessions. St. Francis set to carry out Christ's work in Christ's own way.

St. Francis considered all nature to be a mirror of God Almighty. He called all creatures his brothers & sisters & as legend goes, he preached to birds & persuaded a wolf to stop attacking people. Towards the end of his life, Francis was rewarded for his piety & devotedness to Jesus Christ. He developed the Stigmata (the marks resembling the wounds on the crucified body of Jesus Christ).

Francis's love for all creatures showed when he used expressions as "Brother Sun" & "Sister Moon" & even "Sister Death." His deep sense of brotherhood embraced all, for he thought that *he was no friend of Christ if he did not cherish those for whom Christ died.*

The Vedas of the Hindus also talk about reverence towards all creatures & for all natural phenomena. The pious Hindu understands the praise of St. Francis: "Blessed be my Lord for our sister water, so useful, humble, chaste & precious."

Perhaps the only treasure which humans today have lost is the childlike innocence which they once possessed. We forget that we are children of the ever blissful creator who resides within us & who is ever ready to bring His children back to their child like state. Saints are persona believed to be oblivious of the real material world outside – for they are ever in the blissful communion with their Creator. They are ever in a trance where there is no need to hide one's true self- where one can eternally be in the natural state of child like excitedness – to meet the Divine Father.

Anandmayi Ma, was one such child of God, born in Bengal (now in Bangladesh), in 1896. She inherited the cult of the divine from her parents who were intoxicated with spiritual fervour. Her father, would often rise at three a.m. & start singing devotional hymns. On one occasion, during a storm, the roof blew off the house & he continued singing in the rain.

Anandmayi's mother was also known for her religious trances or "bhava". She would often see visions of sages & statues of deities which would appear & then suddenly disappear. Later, she became a female renunciant.

Ma Anandmayi was very sensitive to all religious rituals & would often go into a deep state of Samadhi or super consciousness when she heard the sounds of religious chanting. She was married at thirteen years of age to Ramani Mohan Chakravarti or Bholanath, but had a difficult time concentrating on household chores. Her occasional ecstatic moods worried her husband, who took her to an exorcist, thinking that she was possessed. One physician suggested that she was not possessed or mad in the conventional sense- but she had yearning for the divine- a divine madness for which there was no secular cure.

Anandmayi Ma would shed tears, then start laughing for hours & talk at great speed in a Sanskrit like language. She would often dance for long periods, fluttering like a leaf in the wind. She sometimes said that her actions are prompted by a Personal God, who she did not name:

I have no sense of pleasure or pain & I stay as I have always been. Sometimes He draws me outside & sometimes He takes me inside & I am completely withdrawn. I am nobody; all of my actions are done by Him & not by me.



Anandmayi Ma was known for her *Siddhis* or Yogic powers where she could read her devotees' thoughts & emotions, expand & shrink her body at will & heal sick people. She was completely free from a sense of body consciousness & remained submerged in the cosmic or divine consciousness. She also sometimes described herself as completely empty with no sense of the "I am" remaining.

Ma Anandmayi was a holy woman with minimal education. She had no formal training in the religious scriptures & was solely guided by the voices which she heard within her. She did not have an outer Guru. She influenced the spirituality of various people who came to see her throughout her long life. She was aptly called "The Blissful Mother"- Anandmayi Ma.

When God accepts people into his Grace, He does not differentiate among them on the basis of religion, caste, color or creed. For Him, each of His children is special & blessed are those who hear His voice & respond to it.

The Sufi Saint **Rabia** is said to have been born in 714 or 717/718 CE (95 and 98 Hijri) in Basra, Iraq. Much of her early life is narrated by Farid ud-Din Attar, a later Sufi Saint and poet, who used earlier sources. Rabia herself did not leave any written works about her life.

She was the fourth daughter of her family and therefore named Rabia, meaning "fourth". Although not born into slavery, her family was poor yet respected in the community.

According to Fariduddin Attar, when Rabia was born, her parents were so poor that there was no oil in house to light a lamp, nor even a cloth to wrap her with. Her mother asked her husband to borrow some oil from a neighbor, but he had resolved in his life never to ask for anything from anyone except God. He pretended to go to the neighbor's door and returned home empty-handed.

At night the Prophet appeared to him in a dream and told him, "Your newly born daughter is a favorite of the Lord, and shall lead many Muslims to the right path. You should approach the Amir of Basra and present him with a letter in which should be written this message: 'You offer Durood (an invocation which Muslims make by saying specific phrases to compliment the Islamic prophet Muhammad) to the Holy Prophet one hundred times every night and four hundred times every Thursday night. However, since you failed to observe the rule last Thursday, as a penalty you must pay the bearer four hundred dinars.' Rabia's father got up and went straight to the Amir with tears of joy rolling down his cheeks. The Amir was delighted on receiving the message, knowing that he was in the eyes of Muhammad. He distributed 1000 dinars to the poor and joyously paid 400 dinars to Rabia's father. The Amir then asked Rabia's father to come to him whenever he required anything, as the Amir would benefit very much by the visit of such a soul dear to the Lord.

After the death of her father a famine overtook Basra and Rabia parted from her sisters. Legend has it, that she was accompanying a caravan, which fell into the hands of robbers. The chief of the robbers took Rabia captive, and sold her in the market as a slave. The new master of Rabia used to take hard service from her.

After she had finished her house jobs, she would pass the whole night in prayer. She spent many of her days observing fast. Once the master of the house got up in the middle of the night, and was attracted by the voice in which Rabia was praying to her Lord. She was entreating in these terms:

Lord! You know well that my keen desire is to carry out your commandments and to serve Thee with all my heart, O light of my eyes. If I were free I would pass the whole day and night praying to You. But what should I do when you have made me a slave of a human being?

At once the master felt that it was sacrilegious to keep such an ardent devotee of God in his service. He decided to serve her instead. In the morning he called her and told her his decision; he would serve her and she should dwell there as the mistress of the house. If she insisted on leaving the house he was willing to free her from bondage. She told him that she was willing to leave the house to carry on her worship in solitude. This the master granted and she left the house.

Rabia went into the desert to pray and became an ascetic. She is often cited as being the queen of saintly women, and was known for her complete devotion in the form of "pure love of God." As an exemplar among others devoted to God, she provided a model of mutual love between God and His creation; her example is one in which the loving devotee on earth becomes one with the Beloved.

She lived a life of pure, selfless love as a supplement to the sometimes strict ascetic practices of her predecessors. This perfect love she sought to promote shifted the existence of the ascetic for her own person, now living for the Beloved in complete reverence to God.



Her murshid was Hasan al-Basri, himself a known saint elevated at the level of the seven sacred souls. Her material possessions consisted only of a broken jug, a rush mat and a brick, which she used as a pillow. She spent all night in prayer and contemplation. As her fame grew she had many disciples. She also had discussions with many of the renowned religious people of her time. Though she had many offers of marriage, and (tradition has it) one even from the Amir of Basra, she refused them as she had no time in her life for anything other than God. She prayed:

O God! If I worship You for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell
and if I worship You in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise.
But if I worship You for Your Own sake,
grudge me not Your everlasting Beauty

Often noted as having been the single most famous and influential Sufi woman of Islamic history, she was renowned for her extreme virtue and piety. She was an outstanding, devoted ascetic; when asked why she performed a thousand ritual prostrations both during the day and at night, she answered:

I desire no reward for it; I do it so that the Messenger of God, may God
bless him and give him peace, will delight in it on the day of Resurrection
and say to the prophets, "Take note of what a woman of my community has
accomplished

In addition, she was intense in her self-denial and devotion to God. As an explanation of her refusal to lift her head toward the heavens [to God] as an act of modesty, she used to say: "Were the world the possession of a single man, it would not make him rich...Because it is passing away."

She was the one who first set forth the doctrine of Divine Love known as *Ishq-e-Haqeeqi* and is widely considered to be the most important of the early Sufi poets. Much of the poetry that is attributed to her is of unknown origin. After a life of hardship, she spontaneously achieved a state of self-realization. When asked by Shaikh Hasan al-Basri how she discovered the secret, she responded by stating, "You know of the how, but I know of the how-less."

She remained celibate and died of old age, an ascetic, her only care from the disciples who followed her. She was the first in a long line of female Sufi mystics.

The Saints were people who acted as a bridge between this world & the other world. They came to Earth for the upliftment of humanity as a whole & to make the world a better place to stay in. Time & again the advanced souls take birth in the form of saints to bless the world with their positive vibrations. They come to Earth for a reason & to teach others the meaning of Life & the purpose of their living. They are like flowers that spread their sweet fragrance to all. It is for all of us to pray that we get to see many more of these pure, divine souls in our lifetime.

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