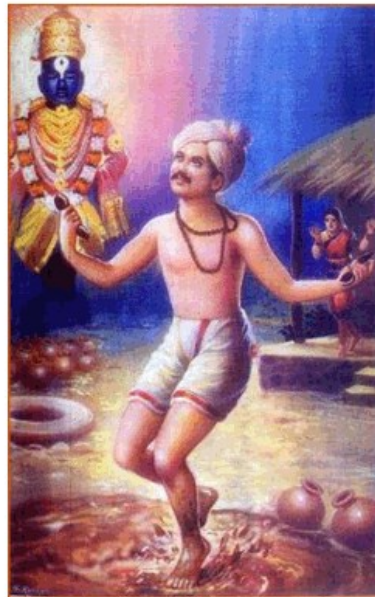




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Gora Kumbhar



Due to our natural apathy towards maintaining the historical records, the authentic birthdate of this great saint is not known. In one book known as "Bhakta Katha Kalpatatva" the year of birth of Goroba (as he was commonly known) is stated as Shaka 1189 (1267 A. D.) This year is not corroborated anywhere else while giving the information of Goroba. However, the time of writing of Dnyaneshwari viz. 1290 A. D. is not disputed by anyone and Goroba is said to be the contemporary of Dnyandeo and Namdeo. Hence looking to the life span of both these saints, the above year may not be far from correct, though it cannot be said that it must be the correct one.

Though the authentic date of birth of Goroba is not known, still he is traditionally known to have lived in a village named Satyapuri alias Ter. In some places this village has also been mentioned as Terdhoki. No detailed history of the parents and the childhood of Goroba is available; but he was known to be a pious and religious minded man. He no doubt attended to his business of manufacturing earthen pots from mud; but even while attending to his work physically his mind would all the time be meditating on his favourite god Vithoba or Pandurang. He would also be chanting the name of God when his hands would be busy in work.

. In course of time Goroba was married. The name of his wife was Santi. Soon after, his wife gave birth to a son and her joy knew no bounds; but the philosophically minded Goroba, who had little interest in worldly life, was not much perturbed by this event. His concentration on god continued as before. In the absence of any elderly person in the house, once when his wife Santi had to go for fetching water, she left the child to the care of Goroba, who was very busy in his usual work. Goroba was working in the ditch. He was pounding and mixing the earth in the ditch with his feet for preparing the mud. The child, that was kept nearby by Santi, crept slowly and fell into the ditch. Goroba, who was as usual busy in chanting the name of god, was almost in a trance and he never noticed the child and trampled it to death under his feet!

On her return Santi started looking about for the child here and there, but when she could not find the child anywhere she peeped into the ditch and finding the mud fully red with blood, understood what had happened and started crying bitterly. In her sad bereavement she started putting all the blame of the loss of her child on Vithoba, in whose 'bhajan' Goroba was spending most of his time. As Goroba had strong faith in god Vithoba, he got angry at the words of his wife and ran at her to thrash her. Seeing the wrath of Goroba Santi got frightened and requested on Vithoba's oath not to touch her.

He accepted the word of his wife regarding the oath and threw away the stick in his hand and again got fully engrossed in the bhajan of Vithoba, forgetting totally the incident about his son. Santi, who was a devoted Hindu wife, got reconciled after some days and one night when Goroba was lying down, she went near him, to rub his legs. On seeing his wife near him, Goroba reminded her about her own oath not to touch her and did not allow her to touch him. Knowing Goroba's faith in God Vithoba fully well, Santi had no argument with her. However remembering the death of her only son, she thought that their family would come to an end, if Goroba would continue to behave in this fashion and refuse to touch her under the pretext of the oath, which she once proclaimed in her sad bereavement.

She suggested to her father that rather than seeing the end of the family in this way, her younger sister Kami may be given to Goroba in marriage so that the family will have a successor. This suggestion was accepted by Santi's father and he accordingly approached his son-in-law and requested him to accept Rami, his second daughter, as his wife. Goroba agreed to the proposal and the marriage took place. After the marriage was over the father-in-law requested to treat both his daughters alike Goroba acceded to his father-in-law's request and started behaving towards his younger wife also in the same way as he was behaving towards the elder one. He interpreted the request in such a way that the second wife should be treated in the same way as the first one was being treated. He therefore avoided both his wives and did not touch either of them. When this was learnt by Santi from Rami, the latter started lamenting her lot and both

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again thought that in spite of all their efforts to come to an end due to want of an offspring- A sort of a despair thus overtook both the sisters.

The sisters then scratched their heads for a long time to find some way out of the difficult situation in which they were thrown by destiny; but ultimately they hit out a plan and carried it out on the same night. When Goroba was asleep that night, they went and slept on either of his sides and kept his hands on their breasts. Goroba very soon woke up and found that the oath of Vithoba has been broken and that his hands are instrumental in doing this.

He was a staunch devotee of Vithoba and was not therefore able to tolerate this disorderly behaviour of his hands. In order therefore to punish his hands he hit them on a sharp instrument and chopped off both his hands. Both the wives of Goroba saw this and felt very sorry to find that their remedy has proved worse than the disease and has recoiled on them. However when both of them started lamenting for what had happened, Goroba consoled them saying that God Pandurang (Vithoba) was their protector and well wisher and that he knew what was good or bad for them. He further told them to wait and chant the name of Pandurang, so that he would do a way with all their calamities.

Goroba was a devotee of Vithoba from the bottom of his heart. He did not advise his wives outwardly. He really meant what he spoke. He was passing his days in that condition in perfect contentment. After a few days came Ashadhi Ekadashi. This is a unique day for all the devotees of Pandurang belonging to the Warkari sect. Hence like a true Warkari, Goroba started for Pandharpur and reached that place on the Ekadashi day. He took with him both his wives. No sooner they reached Pandharpur, they took a bath in the sacred Chandrabhaga river and according to the custom paid a visit to the Pundaleek's temple. Thereafter they came to Vithoba's temple and bowed down to him from the main gate thereof.

While they were thus busy in paying homage to Pandurang they heard a song and at once recognised the voice of Saint Namdeo. Yes. It was the voice of Namdeo. He was doing Keertan at the place known as 'Garudpar' near the temple. When an illustrious saint like Namdeo was doing the Keertan, the audience too was of an equally high rank. Most of the saints of that time inclusive of Dnyanadeo Nivrittinath and others were listening to the Keertan attentively. At certain stage of the Keertan, it is a practise of the Haridas (i. e. the person doing the Keertan) to request the audience to perform bhajan and keep the rhythm by clapping. Similarly while the Keertan was in progress Namdeo requested his audience to sing Bhajan and clap. Goroba, like a true devotee, forgot that his hands were chopped off and moved the stumps of his hands emotionally because of the usual habit and lo! what a surprise ? Both his hands grew as before and he was able to sing the bhajan with the rhythm of clapping his hands. When this miracle was seen by the gathering, they were all overwhelmed with joy and they all gave a loud applause. They all were convinced of the true devotion of Goroba on God Pandurang.

Looking at this miracle, Santi repented for blaming god Pandurang on the former occasion when she was sorrow-stricken. She then prayed Pandurang, begged his pardon and requested him to give her child back to her and what a wonder! The child rushed towards Santi, creeping as usual and laughing gaily. Santi hurried to meet the child, lifted it, embraced it and kissed it with emotion. This union of mother and the child was an occasion of joy for everybody and the whole atmosphere became gay. On this happy occasion, Rukmini the wife of Pandurang, reminded Goroba of the oath of his wife and said that the oath was now over and that he should accept both his wives and live happily with them. After the above incident, Goroba was fully reconciled with his wives. They also understood him in the proper perspective and never interrupted him in his bhajan. On the other hand, they also joined him occasionally in the bhajan.

After some days he decided to call all the saints of his time to his home and hold their congregation. The idea was cherished by his wives and all the saints were called accordingly. Goroba received all the saints, honoured them, worshipped them and stood them a good feast. Among the saints that had gathered for the occasion, Nivrittinath, Dnyanadeo, Sawatamali, Sopandeo, Namdeo, Muktabai, Chokha Mela, Vithoba Khechar etc. were the prominent ones. When they were just chitchating after the feast, Dnyanadeo said, "Goroba you are a potter. Just by a tap you are able to know a baked and unbaked pot. Hence will you please tap the heads of all the saints that have gathered here and let me know your observation?" On this request, Goroba went on tapping the heads of the saints one by one and all of them coolly stood the test. When Goroba came to Namdeo he did not like the idea and said, "What is this queer way of welcoming the guests who have come to your home?" Hearing this query of Namdeo Goroba said, "Yes, here is a pot which is not properly baked."

This remark of Goroba was received by all with great interest, but most of them kept quiet. Muktabai, however could not keep silent. She immediately said, "Goroba, your examination is quite correct." Namdeo, who had the ego that he had achieved a high degree of saintliness, felt hurt at this remark and went to God Vithoba at Pandharpur and complained to him about this remark in spite of his Saintliness. God Vithoba told him that this very feeling of ego was the main defect in him and in order to do away with it he should go to some Guru. The story as told further says that ultimately Namdeo went to Visoba Khechar and bowed down to him. He, in his turn, accepted Namdeo as his disciple and initiated him. After this incident, Namdeo got a very high place in the congregation of the saints of Maharashtra.

The Samadhi of this great sage is at Terdhoki a place which is about fifty miles away from Pandharpur, in the Usmanabad district of Marathwada. There is also a temple near the Samadhi. Unfortunately the exact date of the Samadhi of this sage is not available. There are also no decedents of Goroba now existing in this village. However, the place where he lived and the place, where the incident about trampling of the child took place, are shown even today in the aforesaid village.