

Chapter 3

An Aficionado of Devotional Hymns

When Jhinabhai was in sixth grade, his class studied the poem, “*Vāge Vrundāvanmā vāsali, ubho ubho vagāde Kān* (The sounds of the flute permeate Vrundavan, played by Krishna standing smartly).” Durgashankar knew the melody of this kirtan, so Jhinabhai said, “Durgashankar, please teach me the melody. I really love to sing.”

This was Jhinabhai’s innate nature. Anything that he felt was good, he would strive to learn. Jhinabhai had a sweet voice, and to hear him sing a poem or kirtan was a treat. When Krishna Bhagwan played his flute, the cowherd boys and girls would be entranced, and even the waters of the Kalindi River seemed to pause to savor the beauty of those notes. Similarly, when Jhinabhai would sing this hymn in his sweet voice, everyone felt an

otherworldly attraction. They would forget themselves, lost in the devotional bliss of God.

While the other students would chitchat with headmaster Naranbhai or gossip amongst themselves, Jhinabhai would sit in a corner engrossed in devotion. Seeing this, Naranbhai would say, “It seems that Jhinabhai will one day become a great devotee.”

Sometimes, the students would joke, “O Sadhu Maharaj! Will you even deign to cast your blessed glance upon us in the future?” The only response they received would be a slight smile playing on Jhinabhai’s lips.

Once, Naranbhai had shared a set of geometry theorems for students to memorize in preparation for their sixth-grade final exams. Jhinabhai was always very conscientious about memorizing his lessons. Many other students were envious of his sharp memory.

When the students sat for the final exam, they discovered a question on the theorems they had been told to memorize. Durgashankar

stealthily signaled for Jhinabhai to show him the answer, but Jhinabhai was too engrossed in taking the exam to notice. Another student sitting next to Jhinabhai, Manishankar Dayashankar, tried to slip a scrap of paper with the theorems to Durgashankar. The exam inspector noticed this attempt at cheating, but before he could grab the evidence, Manishankar put it in his mouth and swallowed it. The teacher began to scold him, and all the students turned to look. When Jhinabhai realized what had happened, he began to chant, “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.”

The deputy exam inspector, Kanjibhai Purushottam, ordered Durgashankar and Manishankar to sit on opposite sides of the room. When Kanjibhai asked Naranbhai about the other students sitting in the area, Naranbhai looked at Jhinabhai and declared, “This boy would never cheat. He excels in his studies, and he is very honest.”

The exam inspector was satisfied and left.

After the exam finished and the students went outside, Durgashankar immediately began taking out his anger on Jhinabhai. Naranbhai saw this incident and shouted, “Who is that harassing Bhagat!” Durgashankar and Manishankar ran off before Naranbhai could catch them. In this way, Naranbhai always looked out for Jhinabhai.