



# GODMOTHER



SHRI DATTASHRAM, JALNA

2022

*Godmother*: a biographical work on the life of Her Holiness Sri Sau. Tai Maharaj of Jalna.

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## INTRODUCTION

“*Her radiance defies the magnificence of a thousand rising suns*”, extolls the ancient *rsi* Markandeya.<sup>i</sup> Adi Shankaracharya, the great preceptor of modern times, saw Her standing at the forefront of every aeon, proclaiming her as *kalp-antara-sthayeenim*.<sup>ii</sup> Those who have known the Divine Mother declare that She is eternal and infinite, the ancient yet ever-lasting spring of love that transcends the space-time continuum of the universe.

Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati, the nineteenth century saint and incarnation of Lord Dattatreya, witnessed that the Mother held the power to alter destinies of men in her manifestation as *Sri Laxmi*, her writ was command for the Creator.<sup>iii</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, whose sublime life was an offering at the sacred feet of Goddess *Sri Kali* as also Her blessing to the devoted, relates a brilliant vision he had at Dakshineswar:

“The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness-all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss - the Bliss of *Satchidananda*. ”<sup>iv</sup>

The Primeval Energy, *Adishakti*, of thousand names and forms, is infinite, universal and all-powerful. What is beyond our comprehension can scarcely be defined in metaphysical terms. By Her grace, one may know her work, her *leelas* and manifestations on the plane that is familiar to humans, this world as we know it.

With the above caveat, we present the divine lives of H.H. Sri Tai Maharaj, our beloved Godmother, and her sainted father, H.H. Sri Kajalkar Maharaj. The work is divided into four segments. The first segment (Segment I) begins the work with the biographical account of Sri Kajalkar Maharaj, a twentieth century saint of Marathwada. Sri Kajalkar Maharaj was a perfect Master who attained enlightenment through arduous practice of spiritual austerities under the guidance of his Master, his *guru*, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar of Deulgaonraja, a revered saint and spiritual authority. The second segment comprises the experiences of Sri Kajalkar Maharaj’s devotees, tales of marvellous grace and munificence of the loving saint. The blessed life of Godmother that bestrides two centuries forms the bulk of the third segment. Insights into the devotional path and her message are subsumed in this segment, which forms the core of the work. The fourth segment comprises an assortment of experiences of her devotees and is followed by the epilogue.

The present work is biographical in nature. Far from being dogmatic or pedantic, it prefers to draw on human experience. Care has been taken to present the true record of the life-histories, pure and unalloyed, and preserve for posterity the vivid episodes of benevolence that may inspire generations of seekers.

This is a derivative work based on the writings, correspondence and personal notes maintained by devotees and seekers dedicated to the lotus feet of Godmother, chief amongst them being Shashikant Nagle. We owe heartfelt gratitude to Madhuri Panshikar, the esteemed editor of *Alhadini*, a publication of *Sri Dattashram*, which contains real-life experiences of devotees, meticulously recorded. We thank the devotees for sharing their inspiring stories.

*We pray for the well-being of all. May Godmother shower her choicest blessings on the readers and devotees.*

*Her Devotees - Children*



# SRI KAJALKAR MAHARAJ

## I. Life

Imagine a mighty, free-flowing river, of immaculate purity, bountiful in its gifts, fresh and yet eternal. Such is the life of His Holiness Sri Kajalkar Maharaj, the quintessential saint.

Sri Maharaj was born Dattareya Ravji Kulkarni, in 1904, in a village called Kajla. At the time, this hamlet fell in the Aurangabad division in Marathwada region in Maharashtra under the dominion of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Maharaj's family name "*Kajalkar*", is derived from this village<sup>v</sup>. Presently, the village is situated in Badnapur, at a distance of nearly fifteen kilometres from Jalna. His family was Deshastha Shukla Yajurvedi Brahmin, of the Madhyandina branch. Sri Maharaj was a householder, his wife, Bhagirathi, was a virtuous soul.<sup>vi</sup>

Sri Maharaj resided in his ancestral house at Kajla from his birth till 1945, when he shifted to Jalna. There is a scenic lake in Kajla, called as '*Shravan-tale*'.<sup>vii</sup> Legend has it that King Dashratha accidentally caused the death of the child devotee, Shravan, at the lakeshore. Sri Maharaj is said to have performed austerities at this hallowed place.

The precise details of his birth, family, childhood and general life story have been lost in time. The absence of mundane statistics does not detain this biographical account. After all, can lives of enlightened masters who transcend the limiting *gunas* be defined by data fit for census? Vignettes from their lives, even brief episodes, are sufficient to invoke their grace and inspire humanity.

The short stories that follow have been etched in the memories of his disciples, his devotees and their families. The sources for this account include his daughter, Her Holiness Sri Tai Maharaj, herself a prominent spiritual authority; his son-in-law, Madhukarrao Chatuphale; his devotees, Appasaheb Waghmare, Anna Patil of Shivangaon and Ram Gade.

Sri Maharaj was blessed with a kind, handsome face. His brilliant, smiling eyes, were windows to his gentle and caring heart. At little over six and half feet, Sri Maharaj stood extraordinarily tall. He had a lean, sinewy frame which matched his strong constitution.

His typical dress was a neat white *dhoti* and *sadra*, flawlessly ironed, along with a turban<sup>viii</sup> of yellow, white or orange. Maharaj was fluent in Marathi, Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu. Fondly called *Anna*, a native term meaning elder brother, Sri Maharaj was always the perfect gentleman, virtuous and honest in his dealings in society.

Sri Maharaj's temperament was pure and naturally full of goodness. Authoritative texts such as the *Sri Bhagvad Gita* classifies such temperament as *sattvic*.<sup>ix</sup> His moral authority had an effortless quality to it, one that did not stop him from being warm and friendly, even jovial at times. He was a man in harmony with his environment - blending seamlessly with the milieu, the typical Indian countryside.

Vocationally, Sri Maharaj was engaged at the hereditary office of *Kulkarni* in Kajla during the early years of life. The office fell under the Government of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The principal duties of the *Kulkarni* included maintaining public records of land, its ownership and cultivation, transfer and succession and other relevant matters critical for assessment and recovery of land revenue. In modern administration, the *Talathi* is entrusted with these functions.

The position of *Kulkarni*, at the time, was one of prestige and social standing, by virtue of the land grants called *watans* that accompanied it. The *Kulkarnis* were integral to the justice dispensation system in the village. It was common practice to seek their views and concurrence in the decision-making process.

Within a few years at office, Sri Maharaj abruptly left and joined the local police department. The reason for the career shift is not known.

Sri Maharaj did not find much joy in the police force either. Policing in a rural setting was a job that demanded considerable severity, even harshness. The job profile proved to be against the grain for Maharaj. His kind and gentle nature overtook and he ultimately quit the force. Thereafter, he took on the post of a teacher at the local school in the village.

From the materialistic standpoint, Sri Maharaj's position may have declined as a result of these changes. This distancing from temporal power naturally meant withdrawal from the public gaze and the attendant limelight. An assessment of his life's work leads irresistibly to the conclusion that there was a divine design in all of this. It is this phase that saw the unravelling of his spiritual destiny.

Sri Maharaj was initiated into spiritual life by Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar of Deulgaonraja<sup>x</sup>, a revered saint and renowned authority on vedic scriptures, vedanta and complex texts like *dharmashastra*.

Deulgaonraja is a pilgrimage center that hosts a beautiful temple dedicated to *Sri Balaji*. The idol is said to have self-incarnated and its worship, its *darshan*, is equivalent to that of the Lord at Tirupati. Near *Sri Balaji* temple at Deulgaonraja is the ancestral home of Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, which has been in the family since the time of his saintly father, Sri Vakratunda Maharaj.

Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj belonged to the great spiritual lineage of Lord Dattatreya, the incarnation of the holy trinity in the benevolent form of the *guru*, the preceptor, of the universe. Among the prominent incarnations of the Lord in the present *yug* are Sri Sripad Srivallabh, Sri Nrusinh Saraswati and the more recent being, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati. Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj was blessed by Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati himself.

With the grace and blessings of this exalted master, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj completed the monumental *sadhana*, spiritual practice, of *naam japa* of Lord Ram, i.e. chanting of the holy name '*Sri Ram Samarth*' 13 crore times, within a short span. He committed a part of the *naam japa* to writing, filling a cupboard full of books with the holy name in the process.<sup>xi</sup> Sri Maharaj was blessed with the direct vision of the living God, Lord Ram, at the culmination of his *sadhana*.

Devotees who recognized his spiritual prowess called him '*Dnyandeo*', for he was blessed with spiritual knowledge by virtue of the vision of Lord Ram. Later, when Sri Maharaj would go near the well adjacent to his house in Kajla and chant, "Jai Shri Ram", the well would rejoin, "Jai Shri Ram". These words were not an echo. The sound emanated from the well after a certain lapse of time and the response was given in a voice different from Sri Maharaj's.

Sri Maharaj's dominion extended over the elements. Once, right before the onset of monsoon, Sri Maharaj was chitchatting with his friend, Anna Patil, at the latter's farm in Shivangaon, when the Patil casually inquired, "Is it possible for the *Godavari* river to reach our farm?" Actually, the river bank was at a great distance from the farm and at a significantly lower plane as well. Sri Maharaj retorted, "Why would it be impossible? If there is a flood, the water can certainly reach this spot. It can even travel beyond. Why? Do you wish to see it happen?" Patil lightheartedly replied, "Let us see if the river does it this monsoon". Sri Maharaj simply retorted, "Alright". This happened in 1968-69. The monsoon that year proved to be a colossal one and the month of *Ashadh*, corresponding to June-July in the Gregorian calendar, saw a huge flood in the region. The water had traversed far beyond the designated mark in Patil's farm.

The blessed vision of Lord Ram was a milestone in Sri Maharaj's spiritual journey. Sri Maharaj performed several systematic readings, called *parayanas*, of *Sri Guru Charitra*, a sacred work on the life of Lord Dattatreya and his incarnations, Sri Sripad Srivallabh and Sri Nrusinh Saraswati. The readings pleased Lord Dattatreya, who bestowed his direct vision and blessings on Sri Maharaj. Sri Maharaj read *Sri Durga Saptashati* as a part of his spiritual practices. Besides *Sanatan Dharma*, Maharaj studied other religions such as Islam. Sri Maharaj guided his Muslim devotees on the basis of his knowledge of the Holy *Quran*, the authoritative sacred text.

The intense spiritual practices earned him the blessing and praise of his master, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, who announced: "*Dattatreya, now you have truly become Dattaprabhu*"<sup>xii</sup>". These definitive

**Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar**



**Sri Kajalkar Maharaj**





words bear testimony to the spiritual stature to which Sri Maharaj had attained. Indeed, the direct vision of the two living deities in a short span of time is a rare feat, a phenomenal achievement in spiritual life.

Sri Maharaj had attained the supreme state of enlightenment. He was a fully realized soul, a veritable king of yoga, a *yogiraj*. Mystic powers, *riddhis* and *siddhis*, the knowledge of the past, present and future, were naturally at his command. There was no difference between Sri Maharaj and Lord Dattatreya, his chosen ideal. His own master had affirmed so. Sri Maharaj, the perfect master, was capable of transmitting his spirituality to others and initiating the devotees into the spiritual realm.

The kind soul that Maharaj was, he did not rest after enlightenment, nor retire into oblivion. Instead, Sri Maharaj dedicated his spiritual life for the cause of humanity. With special love for the poor and destitute, he performed selfless service, travelling the length and breadth of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra.<sup>xiii</sup>

As part of his mission and life's work, Sri Maharaj would help the village folk get rid of their worldly problems. His philanthropy was unparalleled. Invariably, he prescribed simple remedies like *naam japa* and other devotional practices, besides, of course, good conduct. He would make the path of devotion, *bhakti* tradition, simple and straightforward for lay people and succeeded in instilling the love of God in countless devotees.

In several cases, realizing the limitations of the devotees, he would volunteer to perform the more demanding rituals for their benefit, without expecting anything in return. He would go to these devotees' homes and perform *parayans* of the holy texts for their upliftment. Some devotees would voluntarily give a small token of appreciation to Sri Maharaj, as an offering, to the best of their limited abilities.

Such was Sri Maharaj's grace and spiritual authority that the devotee's troubles would vanish in no time. The remedy had a pleasant side-effect - the devotee would get established in the path of devotion and attain to a permanent state of well-being.

Curiosity is ubiquitous. Sri Maharaj's devotees could not but wonder how he had the right solution everytime. They would quiz Sri Maharaj on the secret behind his problem-solving abilities. Sri Maharaj's work among these simple, rustic folk meant that his spiritual prowess had to remain a secret. His mission demanded he work quietly, so that the villagers could relate to him on personal level and not be overawed by his stature.

When questioned about the basis of his knowledge of the future and remedial solutions, Sri Maharaj would simply tell the inquirers that he performed these feats using his expertise in the occult art of spiritual divination, *Ramal-vidya*<sup>xiv</sup>, that he learnt in Arabia! When questioned further, Sri Maharaj would spin a hilarious tale, something to the effect that he became a parrot once and flew to Arabia, where he learnt the Holy *Quran* and the great *Ramal-vidya* before flying back home. The truth was that, having attained oneness with the Supreme, Sri Maharaj had no use of occult.

Such was his benevolence that Sri Maharaj approached many troubled souls of his own accord, foreseeing their difficulties. His respectful and gentle nature led the distressed and the destitute to repose trust in him instantly.

Sri Maharaj was unassuming by nature and managed to successfully avert publicity of his spiritual accomplishments. He consciously kept his divinity hidden from the masses, his simple, affable personality serving as an immaculate veil. Sri Maharaj would develop genuine bonds of amity and friendship with his devotees, each had sincere affection for the other.

He was not one to put himself on a pedestal. Indeed, his disciples did not treat him with formality, as one would treat a great preceptor as per tradition. Sri Maharaj himself chose to treat these simple folk as his dear friends. He would love to chat and cut jokes with them, even enjoy tea and street food together.

Such was his amiable nature that, at times, a penniless villager would ask Maharaj, “Anna, I am in dire need of money...I have too many expenses to meet. What number should I bet on?” Maharaj would tell him, “Bet on the number ‘7’”, and the poor man would win the lottery! Later, these devotees would tell their friends, “Our Anna is an expert in *Ramal-vidya*...ask him anything and he knows!” How tremendously fortunate these villagers were, to have lived with the Divine, to have loved and been loved by Sri Maharaj!

Everyone saw Sri Maharaj as one of their own, their beloved *Anna*. They were utterly unmindful of his divinity.

Sri Maharaj was fond of his daughter, Sri Tai Maharaj, who is referred fondly as ‘Godmother’ in this work, and her family, the Chatuphales, comprising Sri Tai Maharaj’s husband, Madhukarrao, and their four lovely sons. Sri Maharaj could not find the time to be with them, as he was constantly travelling for the sake of his devotees. On the off chance that he did visit them, he did not stay for more than one day. Sri Maharaj would never send word of his arrival in advance. He would usually arrive in the quiet of night, softly knock at the gate when the family would be fast asleep. After staying over for a day or two, he would be off to a new mission.

In January 1973, when Sri Tai Maharaj and her family were residing in Nanded. Sri Maharaj visited them. To everyone’s surprise, he announced, “*Shesha*<sup>xv</sup>! I am going to stay with all of you, right here, from today!” Sri Tai Maharaj was obviously delighted at this unique announcement, she replied, “That is great! We are so fortunate!”

Sri Maharaj’s nature was always modest and unassuming. He did not let anyone wait on him. One morning, Maharaj’s son-in-law, Madhukarrao, had cleaned the cot meant for Sri Maharaj and kept it outside in the sun, so that it would be dry and warm by evening for Sri Maharaj. In the evening, when Madhukarrao returned home as usual, he saw Sri Maharaj carrying the folded cot on his shoulders into the house. Madhukarrao pleaded with Sri Maharaj, “Please Maharaj! Let us be of some service to you.” Sri Maharaj smilingly said to his dear son-in-law, “Madhukarrao, you will serve me for twelve years in old town Jalna!”<sup>xvi</sup>

One evening, Sri Maharaj casually mentioned to his son-in-law in the course of conversation, “Just as in case of *Sri Saibaba* of Shirdi, *Sri Gajanan Maharaj* of Shegaon, there will be a grand *Dattashram* of ‘Sri Dattatreya Kajalkar Maharaj’ in Jalna. After my passing, my daughter *Shesha*, will look after all this. There will be several vehicles lined up in front of the *Ashram*. Countless hungry souls will be fed, there will be a lot of *annadaan*, food distribution, many *homas*, *havanas*, *yagnas* and *mahayagnas*, various vedic rituals, here! There will be a *jayaghosha* of the holy name of Lord Ram and week-long, *saptaha*, festivals dedicated to the holy name in this sacred place!”

Sri Maharaj spent nearly two and half months with Sri Tai Maharaj’s family. Always the doting grandfather, he loved to play with his grandsons, chat with them, took them out to the market, bought them sweets and blessed them wholeheartedly.

It was a few days after *Holi Poornima* in the month of *Phalgun* that year, in March 1973. Sri Maharaj seemed a tad tired. Sometime that week, the last week of *Phalgun*, Maharaj confided in his son-in-law that he had been experiencing chest-pains at times. Madhukarrao was quite concerned and decided that Maharaj should see the local cardiologist, Dr. Bharaswadkar, the following day. Although Sri Maharaj was initially reluctant, he relented to the loving son-in-law.

The following day, at around 9 o’clock in the morning, the pair of them went to the Dr. Bharaswadkar’s clinic. They handed the chit containing Sri Maharaj’s name at the reception and sat in the waiting room, with the other patients. The doctor did not come to see the patients at the appointed time. The patients were informed that he was engaged in an emergency operation.

Two hours passed thus. Ultimately, at 11 o’clock, Sri Maharaj got tired of waiting and got a little agitated. He said to his son-in-law, “Lets go, Madhukarrao! Let’s go home. This doctor seems to be

too busy to meet his patients.” Madhukarrao reasoned with him, “Anna, we have waited for this long. Let us wait for some more time. Let us get you checked now that we are here.”

But Maharaj seemed in a great hurry to head home and rose from the chair. Madhukarrao rushed to the reception and inquired about the doctor’s plans. He was informed that the emergency operation was nearly over and the doctor should come there any moment, within ten to fifteen minutes.

By this time, Sri Maharaj had already walked out of the gate. Madhukarrao ran behind Maharaj, and reiterated his request to wait, but Maharaj was unyielding, “Let it be, Madhukarrao! Why do you worry? Dr. Bharaswadkar will himself come to see us tomorrow at our doorstep, at seven thirty in the morning. Let us go now. It is already too late.” They left.

When the doctor returned to his cabin after the operation, he began seeing patients in order of their chit numbers. In course of time, the doctor saw Sri Maharaj’s name on the chit. The doctor must have had some idea of Sri Maharaj’s stature because he sent his attendant to call Sri Maharaj in urgently. When he learnt from the boy that Sri Maharaj had left a while back, he felt bad. The doctor had heard Maharaj’s name from his mother, a devotee of the saint.

Later that evening, the doctor he returned home and narrated the entire incident to his mother. His mother was upset about the fact that Sri Maharaj left without check-up. That night, the doctor saw an odd dream: a monk was giving him a sharp dressing down. The monk must have ordered the good doctor to pay a visit to Sri Maharaj, because, the following morning, the doctor was at Sri Maharaj’s doorstep, at seven thirty, just as Sri Maharaj had predicted!

The doctor bowed down to Sri Maharaj and said, “I am terribly sorry, Maharaj! Please forgive me. I was in an emergency operation yesterday, which is why I could not find the time to examine you. Please come with me to the clinic now.” Madhukarrao interjected, “But, doctor, why are you taking Maharaj to the clinic this early? I will take him to your clinic at the usual opening time, 9 o’clock.”

Before the doctor could respond, Sri Maharaj was ready to leave, “Come, doctor! Let us go!” Madhukarrao accompanied Sri Maharaj. As soon as the trio reached the clinic, the doctor asked Sri Maharaj to lie on the examination table. He then took out the electrocardiogram equipment and began the test. The ECG paper started rolling. The doctor was shocked to see the report. He checked his machine to see if the buttons were in order – if everything was as it should be.

But the result remained constant - the ECG was showing absolutely no wave. There was no pulse, no electrical activity! The doctor put his stethoscope on and examined Sri Maharaj’s heart. No heartbeat either! The doctor blanked out.

Maharaj looked at the baffled doctor and inquired, “What happened, doctor? Isn’t the report normal?” The doctor stared at Sri Maharaj, “You are dead!” Then he looked at the saint again, closely this time, and said, “Sir, your pulse is absent. You have no heartbeat and here you are, in front of me! How are you even alive? How are you standing?”

Sri Maharaj smiled, a tad playfully, and said, “*“Ubha kasa? Bas! Fakt Ram-naamavar mi ubha ahey!”*”<sup>xvii</sup>

The good doctor fell at Sri Maharaj’s feet and said, “Maharaj, what medicine can I give you?” The blessed son-in-law, Madhukarrao, witnessed the scene, wonder-struck.

Sri Maharaj had to break the silence in the room. He casually said to his son-in-law, “What to do now? Let us go home! What else?”

After his return from the clinic that day, Sri Maharaj rested, lying on his bed for a couple of days. On the new moon day in *phalgun* month, he was heard talking to an invisible entity, “Have you come to take me away? But today is a new moon day<sup>xviii</sup>! What will everyone say? He was a Maharaj and he died on a new moon day?”

The next day was *Gudipadwa*, an extremely auspicious day and the beginning of the *Marathi* new year. Sri Maharaj again said to his imperceptible guest, “Today is *chaitra padwa*! The day when my

devotees relish *shrikhand-puri*<sup>xix</sup>,! No, I will not come today. How can I have these loving devotees of mine shed tears on *padwa*? I will not have them feel sad on *Gudipadwa* every year.”

The following day, on the *tithi* of *chaitra shuddha dwitiya*, Sri Tai Maharaj was setting out for the river at four thirty in the morning, for her ritual bath in *Godavari* and *sadhana*, spiritual practices. Sri Maharaj was awake. He asked, “*Shesha*, are you leaving for a dip in river *Ganga*<sup>xx</sup>?” Sri Tai Maharaj replied, “Yes”. He rejoined, “Then tell me, *Shesha*, when will you take *me* for a dip?” Sri Tai Maharaj replied, “Anna! I will, very soon. First, you must get better. Then we will go to the river for a dip.” Sri Maharaj simply replied, “*Shesha*, shut the door on your way out.”

That night, at nine thirty, Sri Maharaj transcended the earthly existence and merged into the Absolute forever. He was 69 years old.<sup>xxi</sup>

It was pitch dark when his devotees started pouring in to pay their last respects and offer worship at the lotus feet of the saint. Mysteriously, the room where Sri Maharaj’s body was kept, was flooded with a golden light.

It was an ordinary room, twelve feet by ten feet in area. After the transcension, Sri Maharaj’s body grew taller, to about ten feet in height! The height had augmented to such an extent that devotees could not circumambulate him.

Once a devotee-friend living in Jalna, Raja Kuleshwar, had said to Sri Maharaj, in jest, “Anna! You don’t attend anybody’s funeral service. Who will come to take your body to the crematorium then?” Pat came the reply from the Master, “You need not worry about that. Firstly, I am not going to die here in Jalna. Secondly, your hands will not even reach my body.” How accurate his words proved to be!

Sri Kajalkar Maharaj’s perennial love, his elegant and ever-flowing grace rank second to none. The deep bonds of friendship he shared with devotees bring to fore a refreshingly unique aspect of the spiritual life. The dexterity with which Sri Maharaj concealed his towering stature, his divinity, from the world is reminiscent of the ever-bewitching *Maya* which enfolds the Absolute.

Sri Maharaj lives on, showers his blessings on devotees. Lord Dattatreya, the supreme *guru*, took on Sri Maharaj’s august form, by his own sweet will – to reaffirm our faith in God, to lead the society by example through goodness and selflessness, to serve as a paradigm for *siddhas*. Sri Kajalkar Maharaj’s life, his mission has been a phenomenally successful one and continues to be so.



## II. Grace

### ( 1 )

The first episode dates back to 1945. Sri Maharaj had recently shifted to Jalna. He was put up in Renghe manor.<sup>xxii</sup> One day, a student, Vishwas, came to meet him. The boy was appearing for the bachelor of sciences, B.Sc., examination and was somewhat worried about the result. Vishwas anxiously inquired, “Maharaj! I am appearing for B.Sc. this time. Will I pass?”

Sensing the boy’s state, Sri Maharaj hurriedly took out his *Ramal-vidya* kit. Rolling the dices vigorously with both hands, he threw them on the board.

Sri Maharaj announced with great enthusiasm, “Vishwas, you will pass the examination! I will tell you how!” Saying this, Maharaj took a paper and pen and wrote down the precise marks Vishwas was going to receive in each subject in the examination. He handed over the this ‘mark-list’ to Vishwas as a memento.

When the results were announced, Maharaj’s hand-drawn ‘mark-list’ proved accurate to a tee. The cross-examination of Sri Maharaj on his foretelling skills yielded the usual hilarious, ‘Arabian nights’ tale. One cannot say for sure if the pure-hearted inquirers believed the tale. But, the parrot’s tale seemed to have the desired effect, namely the deferment of Maharaj’s inquisition!

### ( 2 )

Sri Maharaj was in his room in the Renghe manor, conversing with his devotees. His devotee and dear friend, Anna Patil of Shivangaon, paid him a visit. The Patil’s finances had dried up.

Seeing him from afar, Sri Maharaj announced, “Anna Patil has come! But he is totally penniless! No pocket money even...isn’t it true, Anna?” The Patil admitted, “I don’t have a single penny in my pocket”. Sri Maharaj replied, “O... Patil, why are you staring at my face? Take one of my handwritten *naam-japa* books lying here, close your eyes and open any page!”

Several books filled with the holy name of Sri Ram in Sri Maharaj’s handwriting were stacked there. Patil picked one of these books, bowed to Sri Maharaj’s feet, closed his eyes, took out a page at random and opened his eyes. There was a green hundred-rupee note on the page! Anna Patil and the other devotees were simply stunned.

Sri Maharaj ordered the Patil, “Take that note and open another page!” Patil opened another page at random. What wonder! There was a fifty-rupee note on the page! Sri Maharaj calmly asked Patil, “Do we want to open more pages?”

Patil replied, “No Maharaj! This much is enough.”

### ( 3 )

It was a fine afternoon and Sri Maharaj was in conversation with his devotees. The party had just finished lunch. They were seated on the carpet, facing the Master. Maharaj was rendering a discourse on spirituality. In midstream, the saint felt like chewing on a *paan*, betel leaf. So he started searching for the box. The devotees noticed the master looking for something. Before they could inquire, the Master had spotted the container lying at a distance of ten feet away, in a corner of the room.

The Master did not want to inconvenience the devotees engaged in the discourse. So, he nonchalantly extended his hand about ten feet to reach the box! All this transpired in the blink of an eye. The devotees did not miss it. The Master continued the discourse as if nothing happened.

### ( 4 )

Saints experience a feeling of universal love. Be it a personal God or the impersonal Absolute, the substance is universal, it is the same everywhere. Even animals and birds treat enlightened souls as their very own.

A cobra lived in Sri Maharaj's ancestral house at Kajla. Sri Maharaj would often rest on his bed and summon this venomous creature, as he would a member of the family, "O Champya...come here! Come here!"

Champya would immediately rush to Maharaj and coil down on his lap. Maharaj would then fondle him with great affection. The serpent would rest its hood on the Master's wrist and nod off happily! Maharaj fed him milk before bidding him adieu. The elated cobra would return to a hole somewhere in the house, delighted with the saint's affection.

## ( 5 )

Sawana is a village in Buldhana district in Maharashtra, about eighty-five kilometres from Jalna. The villagers in Sawana decided to build a temple dedicated to *Sri Chandan Shesh Narayan*.<sup>xxiii</sup> The locals were devotees of Sri Kajalkar Maharaj and they shared their hearts' desire with the saint. Sri Maharaj, for his part, felt happy about the plan and blessed the endeavour. In fact, he recommended that the villagers commence work forthwith.

During the planning, they realized that the construction would require a significant amount of water. The only feasible source was a large well in a farm next to the site of the temple. The owner of the farm was an ill-humoured fellow.

Nearly certain of his non-cooperation, the villagers requested the saint to act as emissary to deal with the eccentric neighbour. Sri Maharaj assented. Maharaj approached the owner with the request with great humility. However, permission was refused and all entreaties fell on deaf ears.

Sri Maharaj did his best to convince the man to extend help for this virtuous work, so that he could partake in the spiritual merit. The adamant neighbour retorted, "Forget the construction, I will not let them use the well to quench their thirst!" Realizing the futility of the attempt, the saint returned to the temple planning party.

The villagers, who were waiting at the site, were sorry to learn about the refusal. They felt sorrier that Sri Maharaj had to bear insults. The saint remained unfazed and advised them, "There is no need to feel sorry. Start digging a well in this very site, right next to the proposed temple structure. Start immediately!"

The villagers started digging with great enthusiasm. Within a span of seven days, the well was dug out. The hitch was that there was no sign of water. The villagers went back to the saint. Sri Maharaj paid a visit to the site, saw the well for himself. He seemed a bit upset and mumbled aloud, "How on earth is it possible?" Saying thus, he relieved himself in the well.

The following day, before the crack of dawn, the well was filled to the brim. With the sure, steady supply of water, construction works took off. Sri Maharaj himself consecrated the idol of the presiding deity of the temple, *Sri Chandan Shesh Narayan*, at the request of the villagers.

The temple stands tall today. In its precincts is a perennial well, ever filled with fresh water, the well that Maharaj gave life.

The neighbour who insulted the saint must have surely suffered pangs of guilt and regret. His well dried up after the incident. His huge well is still there in his farm. It continues to be without water. Take this to be the lesson of two wells.

## ( 6 )

The breadth of Sri Maharaj's awareness, his conscious self, was not limited by the senses. He knew the goings on in distant lands from wherever he was.

One evening, Sri Maharaj in Jalna, chatting with his devotee-friends. All of a sudden, Maharaj started shouting, "O...they are flying! The roof of the Hanuman temple has been blown away! The sheets, the frame as well! What a tremendous gale! Shivangaonkar<sup>xxiv</sup>, the roof of your Hanuman temple has been blown away! Go there quickly! You will at least be able to save some of the roof

sheets! The middle sheet has been blown off way too far! You will not be able to find it! Retrieve the others at least.”

Hearing the Master, a couple of devotees who were from Shivangaon, started for their village. They reached the scene of the hurricane by late evening. Extraordinary stormy winds had hit the village late afternoon. The roof of the Hanuman temple had been blown away! As a result of the frantic search by the villagers, all other roof-sheets were retrieved, save the middle one, as foretold by the saint.

### ( 7 )

It was a beautiful March morning in 1973. The festival of *Holi* had been celebrated a couple of days ago. Joy and mirth reigned in the town. Sri Maharaj was engaged in pleasant chitchat with some devotees. All of a sudden, Sri Maharaj roared, “What on earth is this Bansi up to? Hurry, go fast, get hold of an incense stick and light it in front of me! Quickly, lest Bansi should die needlessly!”

Everyone was puzzled at the outburst. Thinking some danger had befallen poor Bansi, their fellow devotee and friend, the gang followed the order post haste, started burning incense before the Master.

Within a few minutes, Maharaj regained his composure. He sat in *siddhasana*, a yogic posture, in meditative silence for fifteen minutes. In the meantime, a few others joined the devotees due to the commotion. The devotees sat there, looking at each other, waiting for the Master to reveal the mystery.

Sri Maharaj opened his eyes and started heaping curses at his devotee, Bansilal Raja Patil, fondly called Bansi. It was over. The saint explained, “Saved by a whisker, the lad was! He would have died in vain! Chasing mirages! Why does one need so much? One must be happy with what the good Lord has given! One should not be greedy.”

The devotees could scarcely restrain themselves after the perplexing soliloquy. They inquired, “What happened to Bansi, Maharaj? Anyway, he is far away. He is in Manwath<sup>xxv</sup>, isn’t he?”

Sri Maharaj replied, “Yes, my dear. He is in Manwath alright. But, since yesterday, a hidden treasure has been beckoning Bansi, telling him that it is hidden in such and such corner on his farm. This silly man immediately went to the farm, armed with his tools and implements, to dig it out! Had he dug further, he would have lost his life! He ought to have consulted me before taking this step! One of you, start for Manwath forthwith, and convey my message to Bansi. Tell him that he should never dig that treasure out. He won’t profit by it. In fact, the treasure would bring him nothing but misery and ruin!”

The devotees conveyed the Master’s message and the danger to Bansi’s life was averted.

### ( 8 )

Like Lord Dattatreya, Sri Maharaj too could be a strict disciplinarian if the need arose. The following event serves as a fitting, albeit slightly humorous, illustration of this aspect of the saint’s personality.

There was a temple in Kajla. A few villagers would sleep in the large assembly hall of this temple at night. Sri Maharaj used to visit the temple before retiring for the day, to sit and chat with these folk.

One of the villagers, a man, had the indecent habit of putting a leg up on the wall while sleeping. Besides being disrespectful, sleeping thus would expose his bare thigh. The scene was vulgar and particularly offensive to ladies who visited the temple at sunrise.

One evening, Sri Maharaj went up to this man to request him to end this practice. The man brazenly retorted, “It’s a habit. I cannot sleep unless I put my leg up.” Sri Maharaj rejoined, “If that is your problem, please go to your house to sleep.” But the man was not one to heed.

The exchange repeated a few times. On one occasion, the man was particularly rude to the saint, “You are a great *Maharaj*, right? Then, why don’t *you* get rid of my habit.” Sri Maharaj gave no response at the time. He simply left. The man returned to his habit.

Something curious happened on the following day. The man woke up in the morning at his usual hour. He began to bring the stretched leg down from the wall. But he simply couldn’t move it! The limb was stuck to the wall. He shifted the body in various ways in an attempt to move the leg, but failed. After a while, the tired limb turned extremely sore and the man started whining.

An hour passed. The man came to tears and broke down, he started wailing in pain. Several villagers had arrived at the scene by then. They lent a helping hand too, but to no avail. All their efforts came to naught. In fact, the pain worsened with all the strain.

Good sense dawned upon the errant man. As soon as he realized his mistake, he cried, “Maharaj, save me! I made a mistake. Please help me. Please someone call Sri Kajalkar Maharaj.” Word got to the saint, who gave the messenger a gentle knowing smile before rushing to the scene.

On seeing Sri Maharaj, the man cried again, “Maharaj, I committed a huge mistake, I seek your forgiveness! I will never repeat this act in the future... I swear. I bow at your feet. Please save me!”

Sri Maharaj, naturally benevolent, felt compassion for the poor man. He brought the holy ash lying in front of the Deity in the temple, smeared it on the man’s forehead and ordered him to rise. The Master lifted the stuck leg from the wall and gently placed it on the ground.

## ( 9 )

Anna Patil of Shivangaon was a sincere devotee and a dear friend of Sri Maharaj for over two decades. By virtue of their mutual friendship and attachment, Patil tended to forget that the Master was no ordinary man. Patil would caution and advise the saint as one would a friend, often with comical results.

This particular event took place in the winter of 1962. There was a natural chill in the morning air. The devotee and the saint stepped out for a walk. Sri Maharaj said, “Anna, its very cold today. Let us see if we find a tea-stall nearby.” The pair located a tea-stall at some distance and set out in its direction. *En route*, they noticed a crowd outside a house.

Sri Maharaj asked his friend, “Anna, why has the crowd gathered there? Let us go and find out.” Anna remarked, with a hint of irritation, “Leave it be, Maharaj! What do we have to do with it? Perhaps there has been a death in the house. I suggest we proceed to the tea-vendor without wasting time!”

Not heeding Patil’s words, the Master walked straight to the crowded courtyard of the house. There had indeed been a death in the house. A young man of about thirty-five had expired. His young wife was beside herself with grief, wailing uncontrollably next to her husband’s corpse.

The Master walked up to her and intervened, “Dear child...what good will your tears do? Get up, perform three circumambulations around the corpse and deliver a single sharp kick to its back.”

The poor girl, distraught, merely stared at the tall and imposing stranger in wonderment. She was in no state to fathom the bizarre command. Ultimately, Sri Maharaj said, “You will not be able to do this! I will do it myself.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

Maharaj walked around the corpse thrice, administered a firm kick to its back and said, “Come on! Get up! I have given you years from your next life.” Saying thus, Sri Maharaj suddenly turned towards his friend and said, “Let’s leave, Anna. We will not wait for a single moment now.” Like a bolt of lightning, the saint stormed out of the scene, Patil running behind him.

After sprinting for a considerable distance, the Master explained, “Anna, did you not recognize the dead man? He is Shrimanta Rama. I am performing the reading of *Sri Durga Saptashati* at his



cousin's place. If he had stayed dead, my reading would have been stalled due to the mourning! Danger averted!"

By Sri Maharaj's grace, the only tragedy that day was the duo missing tea.

## ( 10 )

One day, Sri Maharaj and Anna Patil were walking from the old part of the town in Jalna to the new settlement. As they reached a *Dattatreya* temple *en route*, a horse-drawn carriage passed them. In the carriage was an ailing young lady, ashen-faced, and her crestfallen husband. It was a heart-rending sight. The lady's weary head rested on her man's shoulder. Their four beautiful children were in the back of the carriage. As for the fate of the family, the writing was on the wall.

Sri Maharaj's every-mindful eye caught this sight in the din and craft of the street. He called out to his devotee, "Anna, Anna, stop this carriage right now!" Patil reacted with characteristic hesitation, "Maharaj, let it be! We will get detained for no reason, we have to reach the new town. We don't know these folks or where they are going! Let's not invite unnecessary bothers, please."

Realizing that Patil was in no mood to listen, the saint himself gave chase to the carriage and began shouting, "Wait wait! *tangewala*<sup>xxvii</sup>..O *tangewala*! Halt... pause a moment!" Back in the carriage, the unhappy couple saw a tall and respectable gentleman running towards them, trying to halt the carriage. They directed the driver to stop.

Sri Maharaj walked up to the couple and said, "Your wife is very ill. You are returning from the hospital, as the doctor has sent you home. What did he say? '*Leave it to the Almighty*', right? The doctors have no cure for her illness!" Just then, the infirm lady raised her head painfully, with great effort, to look at Sri Maharaj.

Sri Maharaj spoke sweetly, "My dear daughter, don't despair! You will recover completely. You will lead a happy and complete life with your family." Saying thus, Maharaj patted her on the back three times, blessing her. He then turned to the doleful husband, "Everything will be alright!" Sri Maharaj reassured them and bade them farewell. The carriage resumed its journey back. Patil witnessed the whole scene, absolutely wonder-struck.

Sri Maharaj took the reins of their lives in his hands. Needless to add, the young wife recovered and lived a full, happy life.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Notice how no one beseeched Sri Maharaj in this episode. The saint sprinted after the carriage to save the young wife. Divine grace flowed freely of its own accord.

## ( 11 )

The Master loved the devotees unconditionally. This was no bargain, yet the love was not blind.

Anna Patil was a gem, pure of heart, straightforward and honest. He had one vice though – he loved playing the *matka*, a game of chance where the players bet on numbers.

Patil had a huge estate, comprising agricultural land at his native village, Shivangaon. But, most of this estate was under the hold of his cousins, the rest had gone to tillers and tenants. The cousins had wrested Patil's share and were holding on to it. This was a proverbial thorn in his side and Patil felt a natural resentment towards the lot of them.

Patil used to visit Sri Maharaj at Jalna quite frequently. He was on one of these visits when he met an old gambling friend on the way. The friend was excited, "Hey Anna, what a stroke of luck! I had been to *Sri Jagadamba* temple in the morning. During *darshan*, I heard a voice in the temple, '*Tomorrow, bet on the number '10', my child. You will get ninety-nine to a rupee.*' "

This was enough for Patil. Thrilled at this tip, he replied, "I am heading to Partur<sup>xxix</sup> right now, I shall meet the moneylender and get my hands on as much cash as I can. I shall make the bet today itself!" Without wasting a single moment, Anna charged to the moneylender in Partur and got eight thousand rupees in hard cash.

As was his wont, Patil went straight to Sri Maharaj, to seek his Master's blessings for the bet. The devotee was beside himself with excitement, he did not even realize that he had reached Sri Maharaj's home. The all-knowing saint was eagerly awaiting his visit. Maharaj welcomed him heartily, "Anna, now that you are here, you must have *pithla-bhakar*<sup>xxx</sup> with me." Both of them were extremely fond of this delicacy. Anna assented. Sri Maharaj requested his wife to make the dish for them.

After the hearty meal, the pair began chitchatting, discussing trivia and local news. In the middle of the conversation, all of a sudden, Sri Maharaj's face turned sombre. He said, "Anna, I have been giving you everything you asked for. Today, I want something from you! Will you give it to me?"

The devotee's face registered mild surprise. He replied, "Maharaj, why do you ask thus? I will give you anything in the world. You are my *guru*, my Master."

Maharaj rejoined, "Is that so? Touch my feet and promise me that you shall give me whatever I demand!" Patil obeyed and asked, "Yes Sir, I give my word, I shall give whatever you ask. Tell me, what do you want?"

Not satisfied with Patil's *word*, Maharaj said, "Not just your word, Anna. I want your promise, take oath at my feet." Patil was perplexed but readily agreed out of love for his dear Master, "Yes Maharaj! Whatever be the oath, I will take, I promise..."

Happy with the assurance this time, Sri Maharaj said, "Promise me that you will not play *matka* henceforth, from this moment on. You shall not place a single bet in your life."

Patil was taken aback. Realizing the significance of the demand, he began imploring his Master, "O Maharaj! What are you asking of me? Alright, it is fine, I promise. But, please do make one exception, just one, for today, let me place this last bet...I will quit forever after it. Never will I play *matka* after that. Ever. Alright?" Patil was begging his Master's grace for the last bet. After all, Patil was going to hit the jackpot of his life!

Sri Maharaj's face turned grave, "No, Anna. Remember your oath, your promise. Do not backtrack. Didn't you say that you would give me whatever I ask for? Say no, if you do not want to give it to me."

Anna Patil was dismayed. He spoke in a low voice, "Alright, Maharaj! It is done. I am not one to disobey your command. I shall abide by the promise, I will not play *matka*."

The Master was extremely pleased with his devotee. He hugged the Patil, patted him, "Bravo, my dear Patil! You have proved yourself. You are a true friend! I am so fortunate to have a friend in you!"

Patil stayed over at Sri Maharaj's. He fulfilled his promise. He did not place the bet. However, he could not contain his curiosity and he had to find out which number had won. After dinner, he sneaked out of the house to check the winning number at the gambling den.

His number, the number '10', had won! His gambling buddy's tip was right. Patil could not help feel a pang of sorrow. He did the math: applying the 1:99 ratio, Patil ascertained that he would have won Rs.7,92,000 on a Rs.8,000 bet. What a grave misfortune! Patil returned to Sri Maharaj's place in a melancholy mood.

Looking at the devotee's gloomy visage, Sri Maharaj inquired, "What happened, Anna? Are you feeling alright?" Patil heaved a sigh, "What shall I say, Maharaj! I missed the jackpot. I wish you had let me play today's *matka*! I would have made a fortune, close to eight lakhs!"

Sri Maharaj replied calmly, "Annasaheb! This was a precarious moment in your destiny – the day had arrived to give you loads of wealth and wreak havoc, a terrible tragedy, a catastrophe. I have never been oblivious to the scorching hostility you feel towards your cousins and tillers, the spite that you have for them."

“If you had won the jackpot today, the fire of vengeance would have received fuel. Five men would have lost their lives.... at least five, Anna. You would have been ruined, my dear friend. Your own family would have met a terrible fate afterward. Do you hear what I am telling you, Patil? Do you agree with me? Did your mind not nurture such evil plans? Tell me the truth, what did you plan to do with the fortune?”

Patil was silent.

Sri Maharaj said, “Calm down. I knew all this, right from the start. This is why God led you to me, and well in time, before that fateful bet. Listen to me. God will look after your well-being and you will not suffer from any want in the world.”

The saint’s blessing proved to be far more precious than the lottery.

## ( 12 )

One day, a gentleman by name Jita Patil, resident of village Gunj in the Parbhani district, came to meet Sri Maharaj. The Patil hailed from what was once a wealthy family. But their financial condition had deteriorated considerably. The ragged *dhoti*<sup>xxxii</sup> and the old, dirty *sadra*<sup>xxxiii</sup> bore testimony to their poverty.

Seeing the man, Sri Maharaj summoned his devotee and friend, Anna Patil. The saint gave four *annas*, that is, twenty-five paise, one-fourth of a rupee, to Anna and instructed, “Go, get a dhoti from the local cloth store”.

How on earth could four *annas* fetch a *dhoti*? Which shopkeeper would agree to this ridiculous bargain? These questions however did not detain Anna. He knew the power of Sri Maharaj’s command. Why argue unnecessarily?

Charged with the task, Patil went to cloth store, handed the four annas to the shop-keeper, “Kajalkar Maharaj wants a *dhoti*!” The shop-keeper put the money in the till quietly and handed over a *dhoti* to Anna.

Sri Maharaj asked the Patil of Gunj to change into the new *dhoti* immediately. Addressing his troubled visitor, the saint said, “Don’t worry at all! Just follow my instructions: the river *Godavari* flows through your village. Bathe in the river. Carry its holy waters in a jar and go straight to the temple dedicated to *Sri Hanuman* in your village. Pour the water of the Deity’s feet. Follow this for eleven days straight. Villagers who are dead against you will come under your sway and influence of their own accord. You will regain your position and eventually, the village will accept you as the leader. You will attain happiness!”

Patil followed Sri Maharaj’s counsel and he was restored to his former glory and position in no time.

## ( 13 )

In a little-known village called Mohikhed, a father got his daughter married to a lawyer. The groom’s family was respectable. Dowry and other arrangements were settled by mutual consent.

A few days after the marriage, the lawyer sent his bride back to her parents for no apparent reason. Weeks later when the lawyer did not return to get his bride back, the father grew worried. He went to speak to the boy’s parents at their home. The in-laws flatly refused to take the girl back, saying “We do not want this girl! Take her back to your place the same way you got her.”

The distressed father came to Sri Maharaj and narrated his predicament. Sri Maharaj listened to the matter with patience, coolly opened his spice box, took out a single clove and handed it to the man, “Make a *govind-vida*<sup>xxxiv</sup> with this clove. Tell your daughter to keep it in her *tulsi vrindavan*<sup>xxxv</sup>. Every day, she must rise at dawn, offer worship to the *vrindavan*, perform hundred and eight circumambulations around it. Take your daughter back to her in-laws’ place on such-and-such date

and time. You wait outside the gate. Your son-in-law would be returning home from Pune. That magical moment will bind the couple together for life!”

Sri Maharaj read *Sri Durgasaptashati* for the girl’s benefit. By the grace of the Goddess and the blessings of the saint, the girl lived with her husband and his family in happiness and harmony after that day.

#### ( 14 )

A Master’s advice as well as injunctions are to be followed to the letter. A single lapse may result in untold losses. Sri Maharaj and four of his devotees, Appa Waghmare, Anna Patil and others, visited Shirdi, the temple of the saint, Sri Sai Baba. The day was *ashadhi ekadashi*, the most auspicious day for the devotees of Lord Vishnu, a day to be spent in fasting and in prayer. Sri Maharaj ordered the gang to eat onion fritters on the street. Tradition dictates that the devotees of Lord Vishnu should never consume onion, and hence the command was a rather enigmatic one. However, this was their Master’s order and the party went ahead and made a sumptuous meal of fritters and tea.

Sri Maharaj ordered everyone, “Now, close your eyes for fifteen minutes when I give the signal! No one should open his eyes, move or speak till I say so! Don’t accept anything from anyone. Alright, now, close your eyes!”

Everyone felt excited at this experiment and shut their eyes. Hardly five minutes must have passed, a stranger who was distributing the sweets offered to the saint Sri Sai Baba came near the gang and started calling out loudly, “Hey, take these *pedhas*<sup>xxxv</sup>! Take this holy offering!” Hearing this, Appa Waghmare, thought to himself, “After all, this is the Saint’s *prasad*. Let me have some.” He opened his eyes, took two *pedhas* and put them in his mouth quickly. He observed that Sri Maharaj and the others were still seated in meditation, their eyes closed. Appa thought that no one would understand that what he did and quietly resumed his posture.

Sri Maharaj opened his eyes and shouted: “O, Waghmare, what have you done? All is lost! Everyone, open your eyes now. Waghmare ate the sweets. What have you done? We were slated to receive the direct vision of God, but the golden opportunity is lost now!”

#### ( 15 )

Once Sri Maharaj was chit-chatting with Anna Patil, his devotee and friend, when Patil casually remarked, “Maharaj, for one to have a vision of Sri Ram, first he must be graced by Sri Hanuman, right?” “Right! First the devotee must have Hanuman Ji’s grace, then the Lord will bestow his vision,” replied the Master, who had himself experienced the direct vision of Sri Ram.

Patil persisted with this line of enquiry, “But, it is so difficult to have the vision of Sri Hanuman! Maharaj! Is this feat even possible in this life?” Maharaj calmly said, “Anna, do you want to meet Sri Hanuman? Come, I will make it happen! Are you prepared for the *darshan* though?”

Patil remarked, “What preparation? Maharaj, I am a sinner. What spiritual merit would I have to my credit, that Hanuman Ji should grant me the vision? Is it possible in this life?” Maharaj persisted, “Patil, I will ensure you get it!”

Saying thus, Sri Maharaj took out a snow-white, square piece of cloth, the size of a handkerchief. He wrote a *mantra*<sup>xxxvi</sup> on the cloth and issued the following instruction, “After your bath and ritual worship in the morning, unfold this cloth before the deities at your home and recite the *mantra* and pray for Sri Hanuman’s vision!”

Now Anna Patil was a gallant man, lionhearted and resolute. The gun-toting giant, blessed with an ox-like constitution, would travel great distances by himself, day or night. The man knew no fear.

As instructed, Patil woke up at dawn and finished his daily bath and worship. It was already mid-morning when he sat before the deities in his home altar. The sun was shining bright and the cattle were about to leave for grazing. Anna put on his spectacles, unfolded the cloth and started repeating



the *mantra*. The door of the room had been left ajar. All of a sudden, marvelous rays of light flooded the room. Anna rushed to the main entrance wherefrom this strange light seemed to originate.

As he peered into the courtyard, Anna noticed a terrifying sight: he saw before him the massive feet of Sri Hanuman. Anna's glance moved upward and he witnessed the terrible, fearful form of the Deity! The God's stature made it impossible for the devotee to see his visage.

Anna Patil stood there, dumbstruck and terrified. He felt goosebumps, his entire body went numb and he started sweating profusely. Ultimately, he called out, "Maharaj! Enough of this *vision*! Stop ... please make it stop!" The grand Patil collapsed to the ground, began rolling on the ground with fear and shut his eyes, reciting the holy name to overcome fear.

The terrific form vanished. Anna picked himself up. He was scared to touch the cloth now. With closed eyes, Anna picked up the article from the ground, folded it several times over and ran to Sri Maharaj. The sight of the saint gave him relief. Prostrating before the Master, Anna returned the cloth, "Maharaj...Maharaj! Keep this with you! This is beyond what we can handle!" The saint took the article back.

# GODMOTHER

## III. Life

### 1. Shesha – The Child Devotee

The year was 1940. Sri Kajalkar Maharaj was about thirty-six. Maharaj and his wife had two children, but they did not survive.

One day, Sri Maharaj was seated under an *audumbar*<sup>xxxvii</sup> tree, reading *Sri Gurucharitra*, rapt in Lord's devotion. *Sri Gurucharitra* is the principal text of *Sri Datta Sampradaya*, written in Marathi language. It is a work of hidden depths meant to be discerned through *parayans*, that is, systematic readings, which guide the devotee in spiritual life, the instructions stem from the fascinating stories of the incarnations of Lord Dattatreya narrated in the work.

A divine child appeared out of nowhere, he held a papaya in hand. With a sweet smile, the child offered the fruit to Maharaj and said, "Here, have *prasad*!" He vanished before the saint could react.

Sri Maharaj understood that the cherubic boy was none else than Lord Dattatreya himself, who had bestowed his ever-flowing grace on the saint. It was no ordinary papaya but the fruit of his *sadhana*, his spiritual practices.

The virtuous couple partook the fruit with great devotion and joy. In time, the saint was blessed with a beautiful girl child, Godmother. Godmother was born on the auspicious day of *Sri Ram Navami*, the birth anniversary of Sri Ram. The precise date was 6<sup>th</sup> April 1941. She was born in the manor of her maternal grand-uncle, Uttamrao Renghe. The divine child, the veritable gift of the Lord, was given the name, *Shashikala*. Sri Maharaj fondly called her *Shesha*.

Shesha was barely seven months old when Sri Maharaj took his bundle of joy to his Master, his *guru*, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar at Deulgaonraja. Prostrating to his preceptor, Sri Maharaj said, "*Maharaj!* She is your daughter. Please protect her."

Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj and his wife, Sri Saraswati<sup>xxxviii</sup>, accepted Shesha as their own. Little Shesha became their spiritual child and the saint and his wife became her godparents. She lived with them at Deulgaonraja for few months. After the end of the inauspicious period, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj took Shesha back to the family home at Kajla.

It is now established that children's minds are quick to absorb and assimilate what they learn in their early years and these experiences make lasting impressions on the personality. Shesha was indeed fortunate to have spent this tender yet critical phase of her childhood in the spiritually-charged environment at the home of the revered saint.

Following Shesha's return from Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj's place, the family lived in Kajla and Ambad villages. Sri Maharaj had a transferrable job in those days. In 1948 or thereabouts, it was decided that Shesha should stay with her maternal grand-uncle, Uttamrao Renghe, at his manor in Jalna. Uttamrao and his family were devoted to Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar as well.

The Renghe manor stands tall in a lane in the heart of the old town. The lane goes by the name 'Ganpati Galli' even today. The old manor had an atmosphere full of piety, where *sattva* reigned supreme, a perfectly conducive environment for spiritual development. The food was simple and the dress plain.

Besides, Shesha's father, the saint, would himself stay there for extended periods during his visits to Jalna. Uttamrao, her maternal uncle, had children of his own, who were about Shesha's age. Shesha got along well with everyone. Those were happy days. Innocence and purity naturally inspired good behaviour.

Little Shesha was an absolute darling. She was not a demanding child. After finishing her school and studies, she would spend hours in prayer at the home altar. Not for her childish past-times or



**Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar and Sri Saraswati Aaisaheb**

constant chatter. She was not keen on socializing with neighbours and relatives, as was custom in small towns.

She used to be immersed in prayer. Her doting uncle would take her out on his bicycle sometimes. Those were the only times she stepped out of the house. But even these outings were few and far between.

When Sri Maharaj would visit his preceptor at Deulgaonraja, he would take young Shesha with him. Godmother recalls, she was eleven years old at the time of the first of such *darshans* of Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj. The saint's wife, Saraswati, an extremely kind, pious and spiritual soul. Having realized Shesha's divinity, she began teaching her various hymns of deities and devotional songs; she also gave the girl a *mantra*, holy name, and instructions for the repetition. To this day, Godmother has continued its repetition - she completes eleven rounds on the rosary every day. Shesha, for her part, imbibed all the invaluable lessons at a very young age.

Saraswati was a perfect mentor to Shesha during those formative years and ensured that her pupil kept up with the lessons.

Everything Shesha did – whether it was repeating the holy name or reciting hymns - she did with immense devotion, she poured her heart and soul in every spiritual practice. The little girl was a picture of eternal devotion, an unparalleled sight. At the Renghe home, she made preparations for daily worship at the home altar, she would take care of lamp wicks, flowers, vessels or clothes of the deities.

Even at that age, Shesha would rise in the wee hours of the morning and start her daily prayers and worship after getting ready. She would read *Sri Haripath*<sup>xxxix</sup>, recite various hymns and perform the worship of the *tulsi vrindavan*<sup>xl</sup>. She completed her schooling till fourth standard, as was custom at the time.

She was barely eight years of age when she had her first brush with mystic powers, *siddhis*, such as clairvoyance, *antardnyan*, and asseveration, *vak siddhi*<sup>xli</sup>. The powers came to her of their own accord. Her father, the omniscient saint, understood his daughter's divinity and extraordinary spiritual prowess.

The rest of the family members realized that the words she uttered did come true, but they would dismiss these as coincidences and never set great store by them.

Shesha would see events before they actually took place. She knew the goings on in distant places without visiting them. She could decipher a person's past and read his future merely by looking at him – what the person has suffered in the past and what he was destined to suffer in future would become known to Shesha in a flash. However, Shesha, being in the *sadhak*, pupillage, stage, did not heed much to these mystic powers and never revealed them to anyone.

Her father would bless his young daughter, placing his hand on the child's head, "My Shesha will continue my legacy."

When Shesha turned twelve, she grew quieter. Her behaviour which was already respectful turned solemn, her attitude acquired a certain gravitas. Her speech was confined to answering questions asked of her, in a polite manner. Her sense of etiquette meant that she would not sit in front of her aunt.<sup>xlii</sup>

At this age, under the guidance of her mentor, Saraswati, Shesha started reading the great epics – *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* – and holy texts like *Sri Harivijay*, *Sri Tulsi Mahatmya*, *Sri Venkatesh Stotra*, as also several biographies, *charitras*, of saints. As Shesha grew a little older, she started reading advanced spiritual texts, like *Sri Dnyaneshwari* and *Sri Dasbodh*.

Shesha intensely studied *Sri Dnyaneshwari* for its insights on matters of the spirit. In course of study, she came across a new word, *atmaram*. Its meaning was revealed through a deep study of the work. The concept is like this - the soul, *atma*, and God, *paramatma*, are one. *Atmaram* is thus inside

everyone, the aspect of the Supreme Lord, the fraction of the Absolute. The true self within us is that One, the *atmaram*. The body-mind complex is not the true self, it is not the real “I”.

By the grace of Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj and his wife, Saraswati, Shesha assimilated several such spiritual precepts and received unparalleled guidance that served her well throughout her life. Godmother’s heart still overflows with loving gratitude for the revered saint and his wife, her mentor.

Saraswati prescribed a daily routine for Shesha, she would also tell her which sacred texts to read and explain their nuances. The insights in the more complex scriptures were elucidated by Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj himself, one of the highest authorities on vedic scriptures. Despite an extremely busy schedule, the preceptor would take out time to solve her doubts and answer her questions. It was here that Shesha learnt the importance of spiritual practices like repetition of the holy name, *naam-japa* and systematic readings, *parayans*, of sacred texts.

Saraswati gave Shesha spiritual texts like *Sri Saptashati Gurucharitra* and *Sri Datta Mahatmya* of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati and instructions on performing their *parayanas*. Shesha performed their *parayanas* for several years.

A great part of her *sadhana*, spiritual practice, was dedicated to repetition of the holy name, *naam-japa*. In the course of her *sadhana*, Shesha developed an interesting practice of counting the repetition: she would count the repetition itself on the beads and used grains to track the number of cycles of the rosary. She would feed these grains to the fish at the local lake. As part of *sadhana*, Shesha studied numerous scriptures and holy texts, all of which she recalls by heart even today.

By virtue of incessant *tapas*, her spiritual austerities, Godmother acquired *ritambara prajna*, deep and complete knowledge of the *dharmashastra* and the path of knowledge. When Godmother reveals it to learned men on occasion, they cannot help being impressed and offer their salutations. Besides spirituality, she also enjoyed stories which instilled moral values – she followed Sane Guruji’s works in this context – as also tales from *Sri Ramayana*. The twelve-year old Shesha was immersed in devotion. She came to be extremely attached to Sri Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and the idea of *guru*, Master.

On most days, Shesha had a single meal that was pure and sattvic. For dinner, she would eat one flatbread with sugar and clarified butter, or some puffed rice.

In those days, she would clean the courtyard and decorate it with *rangoli*. Apart from the area outside the family’s portion of the manor, she would clean and decorate the neighbours’ entrances too. The act, perhaps small in itself, was one of the early expressions of her ideal of universal, all-encompassing love.

Godmother recalls some spiritual experiences from those days. The first one took place in around 1953. Shesha entered a room in the Renghe home and a wall-calendar caught her attention. The page had a picture of *Sri Ram Pachayatan*, that is, Sri Ram, Sita Devi, Laxman, Bharat and Shatrughna. Ram-Sita were seated on the throne and Laxman, Bharat and Shatrughna stood behind them.

Shesha’s gaze was transfixed on Ram-Sita. After a few moments, the Deities in the picture started resembling idols. Bewildered, Shesha peered at the picture more intently. Her mind became absorbed in the form of Sri Ram and his divine consort Sita. She gradually lost outer consciousness as her mind became one with the deities. The Deities too came to life as the scene progressed as Shesha witnessed the splendour radiating from their forms and the magnificent lustre entered her eyes. The whole experience was a feast of divine rapture for the devout child! Shesha got so consumed and engrossed Shesha in this episode that she lost track of time.

The second experience is more fascinating. Shesha had started reading *Sri Dnyaneshwari* from Sri Maharaj’s personal library at the Renghe manor. One day, Shesha opened the holy book and she found two photographs right under the cover – it was one page with two pictures. The first photograph was *Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa*, the great saint of Dakshineswar with the word *Satguru* written



under; the second one was that of *Swami Vivekananda*, his chief disciple and a towering spiritual leader in his own right, with the words *Sat-Shishya*.

These words made a deep impact on young Shesha. She wondered, “*Sri Ramakrishna* is the *Satguru*! But what does it mean? And *Swami Vivekananda* is the *Sat-shishya*! What does that signify?” Shesha would spend hours trying to understand these concepts, contemplate on their meaning. She could not muster the courage to ask her father about them, being shy by nature.

In time, she came to comprehend these concepts through the sixth chapter of *Sri Dynaneshwari*<sup>xliii</sup>, during her countless readings, *parayanas*, of the work. When the meaning finally dawned on her, Shesha wondered, “Can I become a *Sat-Shishya* too? Will I meet a *Sat-Guru*?”

A few days later, she had a divine vision in this connection. It was a day just like any other. Sri Kajalkar Maharaj was seated in meditation in his room. Shesha offered salutations to him. All of a sudden, Sri Maharaj opened his eyes and asked her to open the book lying in front of him. On opening the book, Shesha found an image of *Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa*. It was an extremely beautiful photograph. Shesha was studying the picture intently and with great devotion. The ‘*Sat-guru*’, *Sri Ramakrishna*, regarded Shesha with great love and a tender, motherly affection. Shesha was captivated, lost in the picture.

She started experiencing sublime feelings of bliss. She was soon lost in divine ecstasy. The sweet smile, the loving eyes of the saint poured out radiance and splendour from another world that penetrated her eyes. This was her the first experience of overwhelming rapture. She simply could not keep the picture down, she felt as if she should adore the Master forever, with one-pointed devotion in her heart.

Shesha had become bliss itself. To this date, Godmother cherishes this early experience. In fact, she gets goosepimples as she reminisces about it and feels tempted to sit in silent meditation.

Godmother’s early experiences, rich and complete in themselves, point to a higher spiritual tenet, a truth confirmed by saints like Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual consort, Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, that, there is no distinction between God and his image. Be it an image, photograph or idol, the object is a representation of the divine. The image is a window to the spiritual realm, the other world, that plays its part by bringing the devotee closer to the deity, by connecting the disciple to the master.

Once when Shesha was living with her family in Ambad, she encountered a young calf at the crossroads. The creature appeared out of nowhere in particular and placed its front legs on Shesha’s shoulders. Within a few moments, the apparition vanished. After she returned to her home that day, young Shesha was blessed with the direct vision, *sakshat darshan*, of Sri Ram.

A few days later, Shesha had the vision of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda sitting on the rock by the sea. The scenic venue is famous as Vivekananda Rock at Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India. Although Godmother had never travelled to the place, she could describe the hallowed place, topography and all, with immaculate accuracy.

## **2. Tai – The Young Aspirant**

With the blessings of her family, Godmother was married to Madhukarrao Chatuphale, a kind, devout soul, in 1956. In time, Godmother gave birth to four lovely sons, who were brought up in a pure and virtuous environment.

Her husband’s job involved transfers. The couple moved to village Shelu in 1956, soon after their marriage; then, in 1957, they moved to Manwath, which was near Shelu. After staying in Manwath for ten years, the family moved to Nanded in 1967 before settling in Jalna for good, in 1975.

Godmother’s inner life as a devotee and spiritual seeker, *sadhak*, remained unchanged even after marriage. True to her ideal, she would spend her time in repetition of the holy name while doing household chores and tending to family responsibilities.

In those days, Godmother would rise very early, by three or four o'clock in the morning. After getting ready, she visited the local temples and offered worship to the *tulsi vrindavan*. Her constant companion was the holy name, her *naam-japa*. She would return home by eight o'clock in the morning, when the day began for the rest of her family. She single-handedly managed the household, the cooking and cleaning. The domestic work went on till noon. When she got a little respite from her duties between noon and evening Godmother refocussed on her *sadhana*.

At Manwath, between 1957 and 1967, Godmother met some like-minded women who were inclined towards devotion. The group, this ladies' club, would meet up in the afternoons, post lunch, and sing devotional songs, *bhajans*, together. Teeming with enthusiasm, the gang would engage in the study of holy texts as well. For Godmother, the club became another avenue of devotion.

Her father, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj, would occasionally visit Godmother's family. We have seen how Sri Maharaj, besides being a perfect *yogi*, possessed the authority to initiate disciples into spiritual life. The process is called '*shaktipaat diksha*', where the Master directs and transmits his spiritual power into the devotee to awaken the *kundalini shakti*, serpent power, lying dormant in the devotee, thereby opening the doors to spiritual awakening for the devotee. A fundamental understanding of the concepts of '*kundalini shakti*' and '*shaktipaat diksha*' would be beneficial for the reader. The ideas are easily explained in the words of Sri Swami Shivom Tirth, one of the greatest authorities in this path:

"In the scriptures of tantra Kundalini Shakti is much talked about. What is normally said about it is its form like a snake that is sitting with three-and-a-half coils, biting its own tail, and sleeping such that the entrance of sushumna nerve in the root center is enclosed by it. This is extremely powerful divine energy, on who's awakening and becoming active the closed mouth of Brahma-nerve sushumna opens up. Then this energy enters in it, pierces the six charkas known as mooladhar, swadhishtan, manipur, anahat, vishuddha and agya, reaches the sahasrar chakra, becomes one with Shiva along with jivatma upon which jivatma becomes free from the bondage and assumes the form of Paramatma itself.

"Kundalini Maha-yoga (Shaktipat) is a self-proven and self-perfecting spiritual practice. This means that the Kundalini power causes an initiate to perform kriyas (automatic movements) through the power of kundalini itself. Therefore, its other name is Sidha-yoga, or "the self-proven path of meditation". It may be relevant to mention that in every aspect, in body, in mind and in intellect, Shakti itself performs the meditation. An initiate must not make any effort at all; one's duty is only to surrender. The time and characteristics of the manifestation of Shakti are solely the work of the divine power (Shakti) itself. To practice this type of meditation means that one must simply allow the divine power, the opportunity to perform the meditation by itself."<sup>xliv</sup>

During one of the visits in 1957, her father desired to initiate the couple. Sri Maharaj instructed them to rise early and be seated in front of him. Maharaj said, "I will close my eyes first. Both of you, just keep looking at me. I will levitate, rise from my seat slowly, six inches at first, then two feet and later five feet. Don't get scared. When I tell you to shut your eyes, follow the command. Having shut them, don't open them until I say so."

The couple sat in front of the Master as instructed. No sooner had the couple shut their eyes, than the husband's co-worker rushed to their home and called out anxiously, "*Munimji*, come with me! A couple of employees have gotten into a huge fight at work. It is getting out of hand, they might kill each other! Please come with me right now!"

The husband immediately opened his eyes and left hurriedly. The initiation was ruined, much to everyone's disappointment.<sup>xlv</sup> Godmother lost the brilliant opportunity of being initiated by the saint.

Still, Godmother, ever hopeful, did not give up the quest for her '*Sat-guru*'. It was in 1958 that her fervent prayers came to fruition. She had always felt the need for a guru, a guide in spiritual life. Despite having a perfect Master as her own father, Godmother wished for formal initiation into spiritual life from a Master, *guru*. "Without a Master, *guru*, all of my spiritual austerities, my *sadhana*, are in vain. I need a Master's guidance," was her constant refrain.

When Godmother broached the topic with the ladies' club, everyone accepted her fundamental premise, the need for guidance from an enlightened Master, a *guru*. These women were ordinary villagers. High spirituality and notions like *anugraha*, pupillage, *diksha*, initiation, *brahma-vakya-bodha*, realization of the ultimate truth, were beyond them. Still, in their hearts, they felt the need for a Master, a guide in spiritual life. They verily believed that for progress on the path of devotion, guidance was indispensable.

The club unanimously passed a resolution - "We must take '*mantar*', meaning '*mantra*', or the holy name, from *Gurumaharaj*! And get a rosary! We must become disciples of a *Guru*!"

Godmother put forth the concrete proposal, "Let us all go to Deulgaonraja and get *mantra diksha*, initiation through the holy name, *mantra*, from Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj!" Everyone assented and the club carried out the plan successfully. They were initiated by Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj at an auspicious time.

After her initiation, Godmother redoubled spiritual practices. Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj imparted advanced training in spiritual life to Godmother, an exceptionally bright disciple. In spite of the physical strain of spiritual practices, Godmother charged ahead with great ardour. While she continued her spiritual practices, she added a cold-water bath in the morning to her repertoire. The repetition of the holy name was constant, without pause.<sup>xlv</sup>

### 3. Godmother: The Advent (1967-1975)

In 1967, Godmother's family moved to Nanded. They stayed here for almost eight years. The sacred river *Godavari*, called the *Dakshin Ganga*, Ganges of the South, on account of spiritual merit, flows through this blessed town. The earnest devotee that Godmother was, it was natural for her to add the holy dip in Godavari every morning to her spiritual routine. Come rain or shine, Godmother rose between three and four o'clock in the morning, walked to the river bank in pitch darkness. Neither the forbidding winters nor the distance to the river could deter her.

There was a beautiful temple dedicated to *Sri Balaji*, an aspect of Lord Vishnu in town. After her ritual bath, Godmother would join the early morning worship of the Deity with hymns and devotional music, called *kakad-aarti*, at half past five. She returned home in time for her household duties.

During her stay in Nanded, like at Manwath, Godmother was fortunate to meet several women, householders like herself, who were interested in the devotional path. The primary activity of the ladies' club in Nanded was assembling at Sri Balaji temple in the afternoon and singing devotional songs, *bhajans*. These blessed women were the first ones to chance upon Godmother's divinity.

The club members realized early on through their interactions with Godmother that she was extraordinary. For one, what she spoke invariably came true. Secondly, the advice Godmother would give during casual chats always worked. In time, the ladies began consulting Godmother on their worldly problems. Godmother would ask them to perform some devotional practices, for instance, a special worship of a Deity or a *parayana* of some holy text. The problem would vanish. This was direct causation – devotion yielded results. With time, as Godmother's fame increased, so did the club's members.

Godmother had her first experience of awakening of the serpent power, *kundalini shakti*, in this very Balaji temple. The year was 1972. The club would assemble every afternoon at the temple. The Deity, Sri Mahalaxmi, would possess Godmother. On one Thursday afternoon, the *aarti* was being sung in the temple. The spirit of the Divine Mother, *Sri Mahalaxmi*, entered Godmother and she started describing Sri Balaji, the Lord of Tirupati, starting with the Deity and subsequently the entire Tirupati Devasthanam, the temple complex, down to the last detail, as if it were right in front of her. She described everything with flawless accuracy. Godmother had never been to Tirupati.

There exists a rich culture of devotion in Maharashtra, beyond the recitation of hymns and repetition of holy names. The devotee dances for the Lord. *Jogwa* is one such popular dance form. The devotees play games as well, popular ones being *tiprya*, *fugdya* and *phere*. The dances and games



**Godmother with her *guru* Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar (sitting) and her family (her husband Madhukarrao (standing-R) and his father (standing-C))**

serve to lessen the gravity that sets in by virtue of devotional practices. Godmother would participate in all these with great joy and enthusiasm. Like her father, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj, Godmother too had mastered the art of blending in. To the ladies, she was one of them, their beloved *Tai*, elder sister.

One day, while performing the dance, *jogwa* at the temple, Godmother became deeply immersed in devotion, lost to the world. A light, in the shape of a flame, emanated from the brow of the Deity, Sri Balaji, and penetrated Godmother's eyes. The entire club witnessed this miracle. Incidentally, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj was present at the temple as well and witnessed the miracle first-hand. The saint was overjoyed and he spontaneously exclaimed, "Shesha has now achieved what is required!"

The perfect Master that he was, Sri Maharaj, fathomed the significance of the miracle. This is arguably the most significant event in Godmother's spiritual journey, which marked the advent of her sainthood.

She had received the direct blessing to work among the people, to alleviate their suffering and uplift them in every sense. To borrow from Sri Ramakrishna, the flame was her "*commission*" from God, the command of the eternal protector, Lord Vishnu. The seeker had turned into a saint.

One day, a ray of light emanating from the Deity entered her heart. The blue saree she was wearing transformed to a golden-yellow hue, the dress changed its colour. For the twelve years that followed, Godmother wore only yellow sarees.

This phase in Godmother's life saw the intensification of her *sadhana*— with *akhand naam-japa*, she would perform several *vratas* and *vaikalyas*, disciplines and spiritual observances. Be it observing fasts, vows or *parayanas* of spiritual texts, Godmother would perform them with utmost dedication. For instance, on full moon, she would observe the vow of absolute silence, *maun vrata*. During this period, a disciple of Sri Nana Maharaj Taranekar, a saint-disciple of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati - the incarnation of Lord Dattatreya – gifted her a copy of '*Sri Martanda Mahima*', the poetical biography of Sri Nana Maharaj, in verse. Godmother performed several *parayans* of this sacred book through the years.

Godmother would guide the poor, distressed souls who lay before her their worldly woes. Freeing the devotee of the imminent danger, she would put her on the path of devotion and provide guidance in spiritual life.

Devotees started visiting Godmother at her home, some would come for her *darshan*. These people brought various offerings and presents for Godmother, out of love, respect and gratitude – some brought money, while others brought foodgrains, sweets, flowers, precious articles made of gold and silver, sarees, clothes. But Godmother returned the gift back to the devotee as a token of blessing, as *prasad*. She would never keep anything for herself. If a devotee insisted and was not ready to take it back, she would distribute it among the needy and the poor, or gift it away to the local temples and shrines.

Her own father, Sri Maharaj, was very particular about this. One day, he asked her, "Shesha, what do you do with the offerings you get?" Godmother replied, "If its cash, I return it as *prasad*, same thing with the gifts." Sri Maharaj was extremely pleased with his daughter. Godmother's nature since childhood was like her father's, selfless and free of desire.

Godmother has always had great love for cows. She would offer a portion of her food to cows every day and incidentally, some cow would always visit her place on her own to accept the offering. Every Tuesday and Wednesday, she offered two flatbreads filled with jaggery, *gul-polis*, to cows.

Interestingly, despite her spiritual prowess, Godmother was a shy and reserved person by nature. This was a typical trait, not unusual in a girl hailing from a cultured family in Marathwada. As Godmother's life's work among the people increased, steadily but surely, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj realized that his daughter needed to be strong and courageous. With a view to help Godmother overcome these innate trait, Sri Maharaj advised her to repeat a *mantra*, holy name, and a hymn from *Sri Durga Saptashati*, as part of daily worship.





The special worship of the Goddess bore fruit. Godmother became known for her resolute and fearless nature, forthright in speech, undaunted in difficult times – the living Goddess Durga on the battlefield of life! Whether it is a powerful minister, wealthy industrialist or high-ranking bureaucrat, Godmother is direct in her speech and deed. She never hesitates in speaking her mind.

It was at Godmother's residence in Nanded that Sri Kajalkar Maharaj transcended human existence and merged with the Absolute in 1973.<sup>xlvii</sup> Before leaving the mortal coil, Sri Maharaj transmitted all of his spiritual merit, powers and energy to Godmother, who had fully qualified herself to receive it by dint of her intense spiritual practices.

At this time, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, the perfect Master and *guru* to both Sri Kajalkar Maharaj and Godmother, expressly conferred his benediction and blessing on Godmother. The Master commanded her to carry on her father's legacy as a saint, to help distressed souls and alleviate their suffering.

#### 4. Godmother: The Ascendancy (1975-1990)

Godmother moved to Jalna, her children in tow, sometime in 1975; as her husband had been staying there for a year owing to his transfer. Jalna was an industrial town and the period was one of general progress and prosperity. The urban environs of Jalna, which became her permanent home, were destined to be the centre-stage of her divine play.

Two years had passed since Sri Kajalkar Maharaj's transcension. A multitude of his devotees and disciples was based in Jalna, others just in the neighbouring villages and town. With the loss of their beloved Master, their beacon on the spiritual path, these devotees experienced a real want of guidance in matters both temporal and spiritual.

Sri Maharaj's flock soon learnt of Godmother's arrival in town. The prodigious daughter that she was, Godmother's fame preceded her. The devotees had heard of her mystic powers, her work among the people in Nanded. It came to be decided among Maharaj's senior devotees that Ram would be the first one to pay her a visit.

One fine morning, Ram went to meet Godmother at her home. A few people were already in the hall waiting to meet her when he reached there. Ram entered the hall, bowed to her and made a brief introduction. In a trice, Godmother said, "So tell me, *Rambhau*, do you know how to prepare tea?"

Ram was stunned. The reply came after some moments, "Yes, I can prepare tea." Godmother said, "Then make six cups, everyone will have tea." Ram muttered a response, something to the general effect of, "But, I...I..." Godmother completed the sentence for him, "Yes, you are a *тели*, an oil-monger. So what? Kindly prepare tea for everyone."

A little context is necessary to appreciate the incident and its significance for Ram. It so happened that in Ram's first visit to Sri Kajalkar Maharaj which transpired several decades before the above incident, the same setting obtained. When Ram went to seek *darshan* of the saint, a similar crowd was waiting and Sri Maharaj's first words to Ram were, "*Rambhau*, do you know how to prepare tea?" Ram hesitated a little and replied, "Yes, Maharaj." Sri Maharaj rejoined, "Then please prepare tea for all of us." Ram blurted, "But Maharaj, you are a *brahmin*, I am a *тели* by caste. Will you drink tea prepared by me?" Sri Maharaj was nonchalant, "Yes, indeed. What is the problem with that?"

Sri Kajalkar Maharaj had thus affirmed the ideal of universal love, unbound by social identity. This tenet is central to the *Sri Datta Sampradaya*, the devotional lineage of Lord Dattatreya in which Sri Maharaj was a perfect Master. It was common to serve tea as *prasad*, offering, at the place of both Sri Kajalkar Maharaj as well as his *guru*, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj. Godmother continued the same tradition.

The first encounter was sufficient to convince Ram. Soon, word got round among Sri Maharaj's devotees. The second devotee to visit Godmother was Anna Patil of Shivangaon, Sri Maharaj's closest friend, who was totally devoted to Maharaj and blessed with the saint's company for two decades. Buried treasure at his native home at Shivangaon was beckoning the Patil. Anna would hear voices in his dreams: "Anna, take me out! Your financial worries will be a thing of the past!"

Whenever Patil had consulted Sri Kajalkar Maharaj on the subject, the Master had been firm in his stance, “Anna, do you want this wealth, or do you want sons and grandsons, a full family? Do you want your lineage to stop with you?” Anna understood the import of these words, “No Sir, I have no desire for such wealth. May my family, my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, lead happy and fulfilled lives!”

The lustre of gold is not without power. Despite countless iterations of the Master’s advice, Anna Patil was optimistic about the treasure when he went to meet Godmother. He thought to himself, “Perhaps, the inauspicious time is over, perhaps the planets have shifted in their orbit, let us see, maybe Godmother will grant me permission to excavate the grand treasure.”

With these thoughts, he entered the room where Godmother was seated. Godmother too greeted him warmly. She introduced him to the other devotees present there, and began her address, “Anna, you will hear many voices at home. They will call you in your dreams. But, we don’t want that treasure. Your children, grand-children, may the Lord grant them full lives! What is the need for wealth which tempts fate, for treasure so inauspicious that it destroys lineages? No, we have no use for such treasure!”

The Patil was astonished, for he had not even uttered a single word about this issue. None other than him and his beloved Master was aware of it. Then, how did Godmother know of it? This convinced Anna that Sri Kajalkar Maharaj and Godmother were the self-same power.

As word about her spread, many more of Maharaj’s devotees visited her. Godmother was earning the reputation of being a ‘problem solver’. The poor and the distressed poured in from neighbouring villages and towns to seek solutions for their worldly woes. Godmother, for her part, helped one and all.

She recounts, “These folks would visit my place at all sorts of odd hours, , I would be busy with my household chores - cooking, washing utensils and clothes. The devotees would just arrive at my door. I used to attend to them, answer their questions, give them solutions, with the grace of my Master, my *guru*.”

Little children would run up to Godmother, innocently imploring her for rock candy. Godmother recalls, “I would make them chant the holy name of *Sri Ram* first. If the child could write, I would make her write the holy name in a notebook.”

Godmother made the elders do similar exercises – they would chant, repeat and write the holy name. She would send some devotees for the *darshan* of her Master, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj at Deulgaonraja. Godmother has always blessed people and worked in the name of her Master, her *guru*.

At Godmother’s request, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj graced Jalna on two occasions in 1976 - 23 February and 13 September. On the second of these occasions, the Master’s *padya-pooja*, ritual worship of his lotus feet, was performed. This was followed by a massive food distribution ceremony, *anna-daan*, organized by Godmother in honour of the Master.

She would always guide the devotee on the material plane as on the spiritual one. Her counsel was never in vain. One day, Godmother herself went up to a lay devotee and said, “You are just wasting your time loafing around with your pals. Instead, learn how to stitch clothes.” The man haughtily dismissed her suggestion, “I have a job at a company.” Godmother replied, “After work hours, you have a lot of time to spare, and no knowledge is ever wasted.” Saying thus, she took it upon herself to teach the man, starting with cutting the cloth. Ultimately, the man relented and learnt the art from Godmother and then taught his wife.

It so happened that a few weeks later, the company he was working for was wound up and he lost his job. But his life and that of his family remained unaffected, thanks to the tailoring business. With time, this business grew to such an extent that they had to hire workmen. The venture grew successful and they built their own family home from the profits.





**Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj visiting Godmother's family at Jalna in the 70s: with Godmother and her family (Above) and with the picture of Sri Kajalkar Maharaj worshipped at Godmother's home (Below)**



Sri Datta Maharaj was the son and disciple of her own Master, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj. A perfect master, the saint was a renowned authority on vedic scriptures in his own right. Born in 1910, Sri Datta Maharaj was thirty years her senior, a father figure. After Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj's passing, Godmother treated Sri Datta Maharaj as her *guru* and mentor.

Godmother had heard about Sri Datta Maharaj before the meeting. But the two saints had no occasion to meet as he was based in Pune and Godmother at Jalna. Her wish for audience with the saint was fulfilled only in 1976. Godmother was visiting Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, her *guru*, at his home in Deulgaonraja. Sri Datta Maharaj had come to visit the saint as well. Sri Datta Maharaj stood outside the Master's room, offered a full salutation, waited silently for a few minutes and left. Sri Datta Maharaj, true to the tradition, would not sit in front of his father and *guru*; if his father had some work, Sri Maharaj would listen carefully and obey the instructions.

Godmother who was extremely shy and reserved did not know how to initiate conversation with the illustrious brother. Eventually, she bowed to Sri Datta Maharaj and asked, "Sir, will you have a cup of water?" Just then, someone present at the scene introduced her to the saint, "This is *Tai* from Jalna." The ever-reticent sage replied in monosyllables, "O...is it? Alright...", or some words to that effect.

As a blessing, Sri Datta Maharaj gave a one-rupee coin, representing the grace of Goddess *Sri Laxmi*. As they parted, Maharaj spoke to her, "Let us see, I will visit your home when I am passing through Jalna on my way." The saint kept his promise. He would visit his spiritual sister at Jalna, when was passing through the town.

The awkward first encounter paved the way for a unique Master-Disciple relationship between Sri Datta Maharaj and Godmother. The two saints reaffirmed the vibrant path of devotion to the Master, *guru*, for the modern era. Both perfect masters, complete in themselves, led the way. They set the paradigm for the new generations, at once following the tradition and taking it forward.

It is for universal benefit that Sri Datta Maharaj donned the mantle of the Master. She, who is the Divine Mother Incarnate, became the Disciple, the perfect Devotee. A major, though perhaps less recognized, aspect of Godmother's advent is to teach the critical importance of devotion and self-surrender to one's Master, to illuminate this grand road to enlightenment.

In 1976-77, Godmother suffered from a severe illness, but, with the grace of her Master, she recovered fully. As mark of gratitude, Godmother organized a pilgrimage to Mahur, the abode of Goddess Sri Renuka, an aspect of the Divine Mother, in February 1978. Mahur is sacred to Lord Dattatreya. It is said that the Lord retires to Mahur every night.

Godmother and a group of devotees hired a truck for the pilgrimage. The party first visited Sri Nagnath, one of the twelve *dyotirlingas* of Lord Shiva, in Aundh, Hingoli. The second stop was the abode of Goddess Sri Renuka at Mahur where they performed the special worship of the deity. The next destination was Goddess Sri Yogeshwari, *Ambejogai*, in Beed, following which they proceeded to Sri Vaidyanath at Parli, another *dyotirlinga*. The fifth and last leg of the pilgrimage was Goddess Sri Bhavani at Tuljapur. Godmother herself guided all the devotees in performing the worship of the munificent deities.

It was 11<sup>th</sup> April 1978, the *tithi chaitra shuddha chaturthi*, when Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, the revered saint, took *samadhi* at his home in Deulgaonraja. The news reached Godmother in Jalna on the same day. Her sorrow was illimitable, one that weeping cannot symbolize. As soon as Godmother heard the news, she left her household chores midway and rushed to her Master's home, for the last *darshan* of her *guru*, to offer her worship at his lotus feet.

Godmother recalls the experience, "I have no words to express what I felt after taking my *guru*'s *darshan* that day. I collapsed, sat on the floor. I do not remember who gave me a hand, who lifted me off the ground, and who helped me on the bus back to Jalna. I do not remember anything except that a kind soul dropped me home. Such was my state! After returning home, the reality of his passing hit me harder. I could not get out of bed for seven straight days. I would cry constantly, 'I do not have





**Sri Datta Maharaj Kavishwar**

*anyone in this world! My saviour has gone – I am orphaned and without shelter!*’ It took me a week to pick myself up and resume my household duties, the mundane world was staring me in the face. It was in this depressed, distraught state that I resumed work, every moment was a gnawing stab of despair – ‘*Who is my saviour? Who is my parent?*’ I was constantly preoccupied with these thoughts.

“One fine day, perhaps in the following year, I learnt from the locals that Sri Datta Maharaj, the son and disciple of my Master, was visiting Deulgaonraja to deliver a series of spiritual discourses, *pravachans*. I was overjoyed! I finished my daily chores in haste and started for the place. In that excited, fervent state of mine, I had forgotten to carry enough money for the return journey, I just took the bus fare to Deulgaonraja. Throughout the journey, I kept thinking, ‘*When will I reach there? When will I fall at the feet of this revered saint?*’

“At last, I reached the venue where the discourse was organized and saw Sri Datta Maharaj himself. How can I describe that bliss? Words fail me. I saluted Sri Maharaj with the lamp, and Sri Maharaj gave me a one-rupee coin, a mark of his grace and benediction. My joy was boundless. I promptly invited Sri Maharaj to visit my home in Jalna, bowing down prayerfully and in earnest. Sri Datta Maharaj too realized my devotion, my *bhaav*, devotional state, and immediately assented. The loving sage said, ‘*I will visit you while passing through Jalna.*’

“Thus, I met my saviour once again! My father, my mother, my *guru*! I felt blessed. Just as my Master Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj would visit me, so would Sri Datta Maharaj, who was none else but the manifestation of his father, my Master. My life had a purpose. I had a reason to live, to serve this kind saint, my Master.

“I remember that even as I got into the bus back home from Deulgaonraja, I was lost in a state of exalted joy. When the bus conductor came, I realized that I had no money for the return fare, save for the blessed coin that Sri Datta Maharaj had given me. I was feeling terrible to part with this mark of benediction. As I was taking the coin from the fold in my saree, the bus conductor spoke, ‘*Someone at the back of the bus has already paid for your ticket. So, don’t worry.*’ Who must have paid for me? My mind was not in a state to inquire – I was so engrossed in the joy of meeting my Master!

“True to his word, Sri Datta Maharaj graced my home one day. I was thrilled and blessed. Maharaj had plain food, *dal* and rice, at my humble abode. All my spiritual merit bore fruit. Whenever Sri Maharaj would pass through Jalna on his discourse tours, he would visit my home.”

Sri Datta Maharaj Kavishwar was a phenomenon. An iconic saint, he was a perfect Master and high authority in the spiritual realm. He was born in the capital city of Lord Dattatreya’s kingdom, *Sri Narsoba-Wadi*, on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1910. Sri Maharaj was seventh in the lineage of saints and masters in his family.

At birth, Sri Maharaj received the direct blessing of the incarnation of Lord Dattatreya, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati. The saint announced, “*Vakratunda Maharaj* has incarnated, to continue his good work”. Sri Vakratunda Maharaj, Sri Datta Maharaj’s grandfather, was a spiritual authority, saint and master in *Sri Datta Sampradaya*. He was popular for rendering enthralling yet erudite discourses on *Srimad Bhagvat* to raise spiritual consciousness among common people.

Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati, the mighty Master, truly recognized the spirit of Sri Datta Maharaj. The divine child named *Dattatreya* was born enlightened, with perfect knowledge and realization of the Supreme.

Sri Datta Maharaj was a born spiritualist. He spent his childhood in the sacred, serene environs of Sri Narsoba-wadi, in the company of holy men. His early education of the *vedas* was completed under the divine guidance of Sri Dixit Swami Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati.

At the tender age of sixteen, Sri Datta Maharaj delivered such a prodigious discourse on *Srimad Bhagvat* at Sri Narsoba-wadi that he won the hearts of all, including his *guru*. The saint blessed Sri Datta Maharaj and arranged for a beautiful procession to felicitate the young genius. Sri Maharaj rendered discourses as a form of worship at Sri Narsoba-Wadi for forty years thereafter.

Sri Datta Maharaj was initiated through the *Gayatri mantra* by his father, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, who also conferred on him ‘*guru-gruh*’, that is, the authority to continue the spiritual lineage. Sri Sridharswami of Sajjangad, the spiritual authority and the disciple of Sri Samarth Ramdas, initiated Sri Maharaj by *sparsh diksha*, touch. Sri Dixit Swami initiated Sri Maharaj by the holy name, *mantra*. Sri Gulavani Maharaj initiated Maharaj through *yoga diksha* or *shaktipaat diksha*. Such were the tremendous blessings conferred on this veritable incarnation of the Lord.

The principal work of Sri Datta Maharaj include the following:

(a) Sri Maharaj was engaged in awakening the spirituality among the masses through his discourses on *Srimad Bhagvat* and other holy texts for over sixty-five years. He would travel across the state and the country to render these discourses.

(b) Sri Maharaj was the President of Sri Vasudev Niwas, a centre of spiritual excellence in Pune, and succeeded Sri Gulavani Maharaj, his Master and the disciple of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati and Sri Loknath Tirth Swami. Sri Datta Maharaj was given the authority to initiate devotees in spiritual life through *shaktipaat diksha* by Sri Gulavani Maharaj. Sri Maharaj also established Sri Vaman Niwas, a centre for meditation associated with Sri Vasudev Niwas.

(c) Sri Maharaj was instrumental in assisting Sri Gulavani Maharaj in the herculean task of organization and publication of the complete works of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati. Besides, Sri Maharaj authored the translation and commentary on *Vedant Parijat Saurabh*, the grand work of Sri Nimbakacharya on the ancient *Brahmasutras*. He authored *Sri Gurudev Charitra*, a biographical work on the life of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati.

(d) Sri Maharaj was extremely erudite. He was a *sanskrit* scholar and renowned authority on vedic literature. He held teaching positions in educational institutes, the most prominent being Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth in Pune.

(e) Sri Maharaj, the unassuming saint, received high renown and accolades for his spiritual and scholastic achievements. He was conferred with laurels and titles, such as ‘*Vidyavachaspati*’ by the President of India (1961), ‘*Rashtriya Pandit*’ by the President of India (1970), ‘*Nyaychudamani*’ by the conference of vedic scholars (1977) and ‘*Mahamahopadhyaya*’ by the Sri Shankaracharya of Sri Dwarka Peeth, to name a few.

In February 1980, Sri Datta Maharaj, Godmother and their respective families undertook a pilgrimage to Goddess Sri Renuka at Mahur. Godmother had divined Sri Maharaj’s desire to perform the worship of his *kul-devi*<sup>xlvi</sup>.

Sri Datta Maharaj conveyed his gratitude to Godmother in a letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1980. The letter, excerpted below, marks the start of *the revelations*, that is, the words and events by which the omniscient Master revealed to the devotees the divine persona of Godmother. The world owes an eternal debt to Sri Datta Maharaj for bringing Godmother’s divinity, hitherto concealed, to light, for the benefit of devotees, for her own nature being reserved and unassuming, the truth of her divinity would have never come to light.

Excerpts from the letter dated 2.3.1980

Sri Datt

Sri Vasudev Niwas

Pune 4

Date: 2/3/80

Mr. Madhukarrao Chatuphale,



Behind Ganpati Temple, Old Jalna,  
Dist. Aurangabad

... By Godmother's grace and blessing, we had an excellent *darshan* and worship of Goddess Sri Renuka, without any impediment and I am feeling content. ... (*on advice to Godmother's son*) Even otherwise, he has got Godmother as his own mother, who is always engaged in contemplation of what is good and auspicious for the world, who guides the devotees to the path of well-being, happiness, (*having such a mother*) is a result of his spiritual merit earned in his past lives. He should obey her instructions and ensure progress in the material and spiritual path. May the Almighty grant him the right intelligence, that is my prayer! ... I wanted to seek the *darshan* of *Bhagwati*, the Goddess, at Mahur-fort<sup>xlix</sup>, since many years. But, given the several limitations I face, I was unsure of it. But, Godmother, who is an aspect of the Goddess Sri Bhagwati brought me hope, took me along with her and fulfilled my desire. She has served us, with utter disregard to the strain on her own self, so that the pilgrimage could be completed successfully without any obstacle and for this kindness, I owe her an eternal debt. However, I could not do anything for Godmother. How can I, a householder, who is bereft of knowledge and strength, serve Godmother? She is verily the Goddess incarnate, who guides all the souls, as a mother would, in this world, without any desire in her heart, as the good saint said, '*I remain only for the good of the world*'.<sup>1</sup> Her desirelessness, dutiful and loving nature, overflowing with motherly love, is worthy of worshipful contemplation and emulation. Else, to help the work of *Satguru* in this manner such as hers, without a trace of doership and with such humility, is not possible for men of tremendous knowledge and wealth, for it takes the ultimate blessing of the Lord and one's Master, *guru*.

*'He, who has the firm conviction that the world is his home, becomes one with the world'*

This verse of Sri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj applies to Godmother with full effect. With the *darshan* of Godmother, who is divinity personified, with her pure motherly love, I am blessed. May the Lord of the Universe bless me so that Godmother may always shower her grace on me. I offer my full salutations to Godmother, who is the Goddess Incarnate, Sri Bhagwati. ....

Sincerely yours,

(Sd/-)

**D.D. Kavishwar**

The extraordinary letter brings to fore the divine aspect of her persona, the real nature of this living Goddess. Sri Datta Maharaj knew Godmother's destiny as a spiritual authority and leader, as he was himself as a high authority in that realm.

No wonder that in 1978, when a few devotees from Mumbai were visiting Sri Datta Maharaj in Pune, he asked them, "Have you ever been to Jalna? Godmother lives there, have you had her *darshan*?" He guided these seekers to Godmother, so that they would be blessed and purified by her *darshan* and her company.

Eventually, after Sri Datta Maharaj's transcension, his *maha-niryan*, in 1999, the vast tide of his devotees started offering their worship to the Master at *Sri Dattashram* in Jalna. It is a matter of their shared experience that their Master, Sri Datta Maharaj, and Godmother are one, the self-same spirit, the same power, *shakti*.

In February-March 1982, Godmother visited Deulgaonraja for the grand *Vishnu-yagna*, sacrifice dedicated to Lord Vishnu, organized in the honour of Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj. The event was attended by thousands of devotees of Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, various saints, scholars and priests, all of whom

had an equal respect and regard for Sri Datta Maharaj. Sri Datta Maharaj was the ritual patron, the *yajmaan*.

Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj was a highly revered saint and spiritual authority with a tremendous following in Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of the state. The ceremony culminated in the consecration of the idols of Lord Dattatreya and Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj at the temple dedicated to the Master, his *Samadhi Mandir*.

Godmother's devotion for her Master was boundless. During the construction of the temple dedicated to her *guru*, Godmother performed *sadhana* at the site in extreme cold. On the last day of this grand festival, Sri Datta Maharaj introduced Gopal and some other devotees to Godmother. After accepting their salutations, Godmother asked the party to visit her place at Jalna, the town being on the way from Deulgaonraja to Mumbai. She expressed a keen desire that the devotees have *prasad*, holy offering, at her place.

The bus from Deulgaonraja reached Jalna at 6:45 p.m. sharp. The party found it impractical to visit Godmother's place which was at a considerable distance of about four kilometres from the bus stand. Their train to Mumbai was scheduled to depart at 7 p.m. and they did not want to miss it. But a wondrous thing happened! As soon as the gang bought the tickets, the railways announced a three-hour delay in the departure time.

The devotees visited Godmother's place in the village. The local devotees received the Mumbai-bound devotees with warmth and affection, offered them *prasad* from the recent *yajna*, sacrifice. There was a heap of sweets, *boondi*, arranged in a room. The locals pointed out the depression on the top of this heap left by the cobra.

The serpent, a representation of the *kundalini shakti*, serpent power, is regarded as auspicious in the tradition. Every time a special worship was performed at Godmother's, a serpent would appear from out of nowhere in particular, grace the offering and leave of its own accord, leaving the impression of his coil on top of the heap.

One day, the precise date was 1 May 1984, a devotee visiting Sri Datta Maharaj in Pune, was praising the warm reception extended by Godmother during his recent visit. Sri Maharaj clarified, "Leave this worldly talk be, dear. Godmother can divine your faith and your sincere devotion. That is the real reason behind the way she treats you. She possesses infinite power and omniscience. She is ever engaged in *sadhana*. Be it mighty industrialists, high-ranking officers or men of wealth, notice how everyone is terrified of her! That you are devoted to her is indeed fortunate." The Master affirmed that Godmother did not care for outward or material attributes of devotees but their inner nature, devotion and sincerity.

An interesting incident that took place at *Sri Narsoba-wadi* in 1985-86 reveals the humility and positive attitude that are integral to Godmother's persona. Sri Datta Maharaj had advised Godmother to visit *Narsoba-wadi*. Godmother, excited to visit the holy place, took it as a direct command of her Master. Sri Datta Maharaj had asked her to stay at his family home, where a priest was residing with his family and the *agnihotra*, sacred fire.

Godmother immediately set out on the pilgrimage, with Dilip, her eldest son in tow. Word had been sent to the priest in charge of Sri Maharaj's home that Godmother was on her way. On reaching there, Godmother, true to her unassuming nature, introduced herself to the priest's mother as a devotee of Sri Datta Maharaj. The priest's mother, thus oblivious of Godmother's identity and her stature, directed them to a corner in one of the rooms where they could keep the luggage and take rest. The old lady then provided Godmother with the information about the temple, the site of the holy bath and allied sacred spots.

Godmother and her son proceeded to the temple after the ritual dip in the river Krishna and returned to the house in the afternoon. Although Godmother was exhausted from the arduous journey, she was determined to perform *naam-japa* in this sacred hamlet. She sat in the corner, continuously repeating the holy name.



The ladies of the house called her for lunch. After finishing lunch, Godmother returned to her seat in the corner and resumed her *naam-japa*. Then, the priest, his father, and others came to the house for lunch. The old lady, the priest's mother, informed him that some woman had come from Jalna through Sri Datta Maharaj's reference, but the priest did not pay any further inquiry and carried on with his routine.

After everyone had finished lunch, the old lady summoned Godmother in an angry tone, "Hey lady! You are just sitting there with your rosary for hours. Come here! Start washing the used plates and utensils." Thus, the lady dumped all the used plates, vessels and other utensils at the washing station. Without a word, Godmother rose from her seat, went to the station and started washing them. All the utensils were gleaming by the time Godmother finished the chore. She kept the utensils back in the kitchen and arranged them in perfect order.

Glancing around the room, she found more utensils that needed cleaning, fetched them to the washing bay and washed them. This pleased the old lady. She started complimenting Godmother, "You have washed the utensils well!" Godmother politely inquired, "Please let me know if there is any other work, any assistance you require." The lady replied, "Fine! I will, but this is enough for now!"

A little while later, a group of devotees from Mumbai came to the house to meet Godmother. The old lady saw each devotee offer Godmother full salutations and standing with reverence, waiting on her. She could not help staring at the scene. Just then, Uddhav a devotee of Sri Datta Maharaj for whom the old lady and her family had high regard, joined the party and took Godmother's *darshan*. They conversed briefly.

It struck the lady that Godmother was no ordinary woman. She pulled Uddhav away by his arm into the adjoining room and asked, "Who is this woman?" He was quick to retort, "Mind your language. She is no ordinary woman but a great spiritual authority! He is *Sri Bhagwati* herself, Godmother! It is not possible to fathom her true identity!"

The lady realized the extent of her offence. Pushing the other devotees aside, she ran to Godmother, bowed down and pleaded with her tearfully, "Please forgive me, Godmother! I committed such a huge mistake, nay an offence. I did not recognize you at all!"

Godmother said, "Why do you say so? Why are you offering me salutations? You are like a mother to me! I am a nobody, just an ordinary, uneducated native woman." The old lady continued, "No, please don't embarrass me further! I honestly did not recognize you." Godmother took her close and patting her back, said "But, don't you see? I could serve the priestly community today, all thanks to you! And that too, in this holy place, in the capital of Lord Dattatreya! Those who reside here – young or old – are all venerable!"

Godmother has always been an unassuming person, extremely hardworking and devoted to work. In the early days, she would sweep and mop her place, clean the cow-shed, feed the cows, decorate the courtyards with beautiful *rangolis*, draw water from the well, and so on.

During the auspicious month of *kartika*, Godmother would have her meals under an *Amalaki* tree<sup>li</sup> with family and neighbours. She would clean the seating area under the tree and smear it with cow-dung. She would play folk games, like *jhimma*, *fugadi* with the local women and mingle with them.

Saints are divine beings, aspects of the Infinite, who incarnate on the material plane for the good of the people. Their work is among the common folk, distressed souls whom they guide to the Lord. The eighties spelled a crucial phase in Godmother's public life, for it was in this phase that her interactions with devotees from large towns and cities like Pune, Mumbai and Aurangabad, grew considerably. Her mentor, Sri Datta Maharaj, who had a significant following among devotees and spiritual seekers in Pune and Mumbai, was instrumental in guiding her during this phase.

The institution of *yajna*, the sacrificial worship of dieties, dates back to the vedic times. Sages and seers, the knowers of subtle worlds and their higher truths, received divine inspiration from the gods

and goddesses in heaven, together with detailed instructions on how to propitiate them through the means of sacrifices.

The essential form of a *yajna* envisages the ritualistic offering of oblations in the sacred fire for various gods and heavenly beings, to secure their divine blessings, such as long life and good health, prosperity, happiness and heaven. Experience reveals that the benefic effects of *yajnas* extend beyond the individual and include the restoration of ecological balance, by ensuring proper rainfall and countering pollution.

It was in the spirit of these ideals that Godmother had organized a grand *Vishnu-yajna* in 1985 in Jalna. Sri Datta Maharaj presided over the *yajna*. Devotees from all over Maharashtra attended the festival, hundreds of devotees were given *prasad* every day. During this festival, on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1985, Godmother performed the ritual worship of Sri Maharaj. Sri Maharaj was offered a beautiful seat, *chauranga*, on the stage, with a lovely *rangoli* design drawn around it. First, Godmother anointed Sri Maharaj with fragrant oil. Then, she poured a jar of milk on Sri Maharaj, and followed it with a bath with warm water, thus completing the *abhishek* of the Master.

At noon, Godmother, together with her husband, performed the ritual of worshipping the lotus feet of the saint, his *padya-pooja*, according to the scriptures. This was followed by the weighing ceremony, *tula*, of Sri Datta Maharaj, with one-rupee coins. In the *tula* ceremony, divine blessings are sought for the longevity, good health and prosperity of the soul. The substance used as counter-weight is distributed among the devotees or donated for the welfare of the society at large.

Thus, the first order of business was gathering the rupee coins. The devotees reckoned the weight of Sri Maharaj, then seventy-five years of age, to be around seventy kilograms. A rupee coin weighs ten grams, so it was decided that eight thousand coins would suffice. In those days, arranging the coins in such great number proved to be an uphill task. Somehow the devotees secured the coins.

The ceremony began in great excitement. Sri Maharaj was seated on one end of the scale. After Sri Maharaj assumed his seat, the eight thousand coins were placed on the other scale. But, Sri Maharaj did not take off! The devotees thought this strange. They added five hundred coins. No movement!

The devotees frantically started hunting for coins and close to one hundred and fifty coins were added. Still, there was no sign of movement. The devotees grew tense. The auspicious hour was at hand and there was no time to fetch more coins from the town market. Besides, they could not keep the Master inconvenienced for long.

A mindful devotee approached Godmother. She was standing at the back of the crowd. On learning about the whole thing, she rushed forward. She took a handful of coins, perhaps twenty or thirty in number, and a lone leaf of the holy basil, *tulsi*, and placed it with the coins. No sooner than she did so, Sri Maharaj's side rose and the equilibrium was struck, much to everyone's relief and wonderment.

When the coins on Sri Maharaj's scale were counted later that evening, the devotees were shocked to find eleven and half thousand coins. This was truly amazing! Sri Datta Maharaj, the septuagenarian saint, could not possibly weigh more than eighty kilograms, certainly not a hundred and fifteen kilograms!

And the stranger circumstance was that of the number of coins. The devotees had counted the coins meticulously: the initial number being eight thousand, followed by five hundred and then around hundred to hundred and fifty coins. Godmother could not have fit more than twenty-five to thirty coins in her hand. Then how did the coins become eleven and a half thousand? The Lord, mysterious in his ways, is not without a sense of humour.

Godmother treated Sri Datta Maharaj as her own *guru*. She consulted Sri Maharaj on critical, important matters, be it the marriage of her children, shifting to a new home. At the same time, she was a guide to his devotees and disciples. She taught many of Sri Maharaj's devotees how to serve their Master.

For instance, Godmother was instrumental in convincing Sri Datta Maharaj to expand his existing home at Sri Renuka Niwas in Pune, to accommodate his growing family. Sri Maharaj was reluctant as the saint could not bear the thought of spending on himself. But, steadily and skilfully, Godmother convinced him otherwise. The close devotees and direct disciples of Sri Datta Maharaj wanted to contribute in the construction expenses as mark of gratitude for their Master, but the saint would have none of it. Once again, Godmother stepped in and ensured the fulfilment of their virtuous desire.

In this context, it would be apposite to recall Godmother's advice to few devotees on the auspicious occasion of *Akshay tritiya*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1984: "Don't think of visiting Sri Maharaj as an expense, but as a saving. You should serve him with love and devotion, to the best of your ability. Maharaj has a definite service planned for each of you, which he will reveal in good time. Anyone can serve one's *guru* when the going is good. But, your Master has given you this rare opportunity of service in difficult times. Seize it!"

On another occasion she said to his devotees, "Listen, that very Lord, Sri Narayan, who is reclining on *Shesh-naag* in the vast ocean, today, he has incarnated on this earth for us and lying in a small room in Sri Renuka Niwas at Pune, Sri Datta Maharaj's residence! The Preserver, the Controller of the Universe! Who can excel Him? He runs the whole show!"

To witness and study Godmother's devotional aspect is a most fortunate experience, the epitome of the exalted tradition of *Guru Parampara*, the Master-disciple tradition, in the modern age. That primeval energy, the *Adishakti*, the mother of all creation - this universe and millions like it - incarnated among lay devotees, to illuminate the path of devotion for the benefit of the world!

Every expression of devotional love for one's Master is special and sweet in its own way. Godmother felt that devotees should offer physical labour as mark of devotion during the construction at Sri Renuka Niwas.<sup>iii</sup> She said to Shashi, the devotee who was the civil engineer overseeing the project, "Shashi, let us do the filling work with our own hands, as a mark of our love and devotion for the Master! We should also get a chance to contribute in the construction, work with our own hands, to earn spiritual merit!" Shashi asked others and nearly fifteen devotees were rounded up in no time.

On 5<sup>th</sup> January 1986, Godmother inaugurated the service. The devotees lined up, Godmother among them, and poured heaps of earth into the footing pit. The entire pit was filled by the gang. Then, they watered it and levelled the whole thing. The whole exercise took seven hours of labour. Within a couple of days, the party had finished the work, for which the contractor would have taken a minimum of three to four days.

The devotees had a direct experience of Godmother's omniscience. After the filling work was over, Shashi went to meet Godmother. She said to him, "Shashi, one of the steel rods used in the ceiling, which is supposed to fit on top of the columns, is not proper, it will not fit in the distance between the columns."

Shashi had no idea of her prowess. He made a formal reply and simply ignored her warning. He thought that Godmother was feigning knowledge of civil engineering, a highly specialized and technical field of study, whose knowledge she lacked.

The construction continued under Shashi's direction. First, the pillars and columns were cast and then began the fitting of planks at the bottom of the steel rods. Right at this moment, one of the carpenters rushed to Shashi.

There was a problem: one of the rods in the ceiling of the hall was not fitting the distance between the columns. It was off by nine inches. Shashi was in shock. He ran to Godmother in that worried state, offered a full salutation in surrender, before he started with some hesitation, "Godmother, I realized the mistake you were warning me about. I am sorry."

Godmother was patient. She advised Shashi on finding a solution. Following the advice, Shashi consulted a senior engineer, who got a bracket specially designed to fit the distance.

Godmother had a mystic experience in 1986. She was visiting Sri Datta Maharaj and his family at Sri Renuka Niwas in Pune. At six o'clock in the morning, Godmother heard a voice from outside the hall where everyone was sleeping. The voice announced, "*Aham brahmasmi*", meaning '*I am Brahman*'. The phrase hailing from the *Brihadaryanaka Upanishad* in *Yajur-veda*, is one of the *Maha-vakyas*, the expression of eternal truth. The voice said it three times. The voice then asked Godmother to chant, '*Sri Gurudev Datta*' five times. Godmother repeated the chant. It was none other than Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati.

In August 1986, Godmother accompanied Sri Datta Maharaj, his wife Sri Laxmi and few devotees on a pilgrimage to Tuljapur. This famous temple town is home to one of the *shakti-peethas* in the state, the abode of Goddess *Sri Bhavani*, the Divine Mother. The recent showers had made the soil on the circumambulatory path muddy. Sri Datta Maharaj's feet left deep impressions on the ground. Godmother, who followed Sri Maharaj on the circumambulation, touched every footprint with her brow and circumambulated the path three times.

On the following day, Godmother mixed water with turmeric and vermillion and sprinkled it on this path and performed her circumambulations offering full salutations at each step. What renders this worship more commendable is that Godmother was observing an extremely strict fast – she was without food or water – for the past two months.

After offering worship, Sri Datta Maharaj was invited by the head-priest, Pathak by name, to his house for rest. Sri Maharaj assented and the priest accompanied Sri Maharaj, his wife, Sri Laxmi, and Godmother to his house and offered them seats in the hall. After some time, Gopal, a disciple of Sri Datta Maharaj, entered the room. He had come to ask after his Master. Sri Maharaj offered him a seat.

The seating was thus: Sri Maharaj sat at the centre of the room, his back resting against the wall. On his left were the deities in his regular worship which he had brought along with him. His wife sat on his right and Godmother was seated next to her. After a few moments of silence, Sri Maharaj spoke spontaneously, "The Goddess of Tuljapur, *Sri Bhavani* Incarnate is sitting here, in the form of Godmother. But, look at this crowd of devotees outside, instead of anointing her with vermillion, *kumkum*, they are running about. It is purely a result of Her grace, that we can anoint Godmother, the living Deity." The anointing of the actual Deity is not permitted at the Goddess' temple.

Gopal, the fortunate devotee, promptly got up and anointed Godmother's forehead with vermillion. Godmother, for her part, gracefully accepted the worship.

It was at some time in this phase in her life that Sri Datta Maharaj had asked his eldest son, Sri Ashok Maharaj, to read out the great spiritual text '*Yogvani*' to Godmother. The text is an authority on the subject of '*shaktipaat diksha*'. The Master would invariably ask his devotees to study it prior to their initiation.

A decade later, in 1995, when Shashi inquired of Godmother if Sri Datta Maharaj had initiated her back in the eighties, she replied: "Perhaps, it may be so! I could not understand when Sri Maharaj initiated me through *yoga-diksha*<sup>liii</sup>. But, I started getting the experiences as described in *Yogvani*. I started hearing the sounds of recitation of the holy name!<sup>liv</sup> Sri Maharaj started getting *sadhana* done from me!"

Godmother spent a great part of the late eighties, between 1986 and 1989, in near seclusion. This temporary withdrawal was designed so that she could focus on *sadhana* in solitude, before stepping into the grandest and busiest phase of public life – the glorious phase that began in early nineties and continues to date.

One of Godmother's most admirable qualities is her poise, her composure. She has remained unfazed during the most trying and exacting phases of life. During a ritual recitation of *Sri Dasbodh*, the holy text by Sri Samarth Ramdas, Sri Datta Maharaj spontaneously exclaimed to the group of devotees gathered at his home, "Godmother, who is seated here, possesses immense strength. What should we learn from her?" The unexpected question elicited no answer. A few moments passed before Sri Maharaj explained, "To speak neither good nor evil. To not attach oneself to anything,



**Sri Datta Maharaj and Godmother at the Sri Tuljabhavani temple**



learn this from Godmother. She has a family and responsibilities, like any ordinary householder, but she does not get caught up in them.”

In July 1989, Godmother accompanied Sri Datta Maharaj and his devotees to Sri Nareshwar in Gujarat which is a spiritual centre and home to the *samadhi* of Sri Rangavadhoot Maharaj, the twentieth century saint and spiritual luminary, who was a direct disciple of the revered Master, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati.

During this pilgrimage, Godmother had visions of Sri Rangavdhoot Maharaj everyday. Godmother saw him plucking flowers for the worship of the deities at the temples. Sri Nareshwar is on the banks of the river Narmada. *Sri Narmada*, the presiding Deity of the sacred river used to bestow her direct vision on Godmother in the mornings.

The Goddess, who took the form of a sweet, five-year old child, would accompany Sri Datta Maharaj on his way back from a holy dip in the river. During Sri Maharaj’s discourses, Godmother witnessed that various gods and goddesses would descend from heaven, *devaloka*, and listen to the discourse with rapt attention. These visions and experiences demonstrate the highest order of spiritual merit that Godmother possesses.

We have seen how Sri Datta Maharaj would visit Godmother at her Jalna home on his tours. On one such occasion, in October 1989, Sri Maharaj, his devotees in tow, visited Godmother at her home, on his way to Deulgaonraja. It was a Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1989. The devotees were seated in the hall, basking in the company of the saints. In the course of conversation, Sri Maharaj remarked, “... Once I take your *darshan*, with your blessings, I can offer my worship to Lord Balaji without any hindrance”.

Thereafter, the saint offered a full salutation to Godmother, who was actually thirty years his junior and his spiritual sister. There was no demur, no trace of protestation, on her face. She accepted the salutation with poise. The devotees stared at the scene in wonder - Sri Datta Maharaj whom Godmother treated as her Master and mentor, offering a full salutation to her! The Master, thus, reaffirmed Godmother’s divinity, her true identity as the Divine Mother.

## 5. Godmother: The Glory (1990-Present)

Godmother resumed her public life in 1990. It was a joyful time for her family. Her sons had purchased a plot of land for the family residence. The idea was to construct a home for the whole family, all four sons and their children, so that everyone could stay under one roof with Godmother. The building plans for construction had been discussed with Sri Datta Maharaj in the July of 1989.

Sri Maharaj had given some key inputs. He advised that the home should have an independent room for Godmother as she needed solitude for her *sadhana*. Sri Maharaj praised Godmother, “She has put hundreds of people on the path of devotion. She may speak her mind, may even sound critical, harsh on occasion, but please appreciate that she has earned tremendous merit through her *tapasya*! Consider her *anna-daan* ... Godmother has fed lakhs of devotees!”

The sons approached Godmother for her blessing. But she was in no mood to grant it just yet. At first, Godmother resisted the very idea of constructing a home for her family and decried the whole project as self-centred. The devotees explained to Godmother that her benevolence and protective role extended to her own family too. It was after much convincing from her devotees that she relented.

Godmother gave her consent but only in principle. There was a catch. Saraswati Aaisaheb, her mentor and the virtuous wife of her Master, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, passed on in 1969. Her last rites had been conducted on an isolated farm in the distant village of Sultanpur, a far-flung and remote place by any standard. Two decades ago, the senior devotees of Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj had initiated the construction of the shrine dedicated to her memory, a *Samadhi Mandir*, but the project remained in a state of suspension since its inception.

Godmother took a vow that she would not grant permission for her own family home till a proper shrine was erected in the memory of Saraswati, who was more than a mother to her. Learning of this



**Sri Saraswati Aaisaheb Samadhi Mandir at Sultanpur**



stand, Gopal and Nandkumar, two devotees of Sri Datta Maharaj, took on the responsibility to complete the project.

It was through Godmother's initiative, her *sankalpa*, spiritual determination, and the exemplary efforts of select devotees, that an elegant and compact shrine - *Samadhi Mandir* - was erected on the farm in the honour of Saraswati, an exemplar of virtue. Besides mentoring hundreds of female devotees, including Godmother, Saraswati was engaged in spiritual activities throughout her life such as distribution of sacred texts of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati. She perfectly complemented the Master and would invariably accompany him on his discourses.

The *Samadhi Mandir* is a product of an artist's imagination, a symphony of tradition and art. A beautiful holy basil plantation, *tulsi vrindavan*, adorns the centre-stage in the shrine, a representation, nay a perfect tribute to the saintly wife of the revered Master. Godmother inaugurated the shrine by offering worship. Needless to add, the shrine may never have seen the light of the day but for Godmother's resolute will.

Back at Jalna, Godmother's fame spread far and wide. As devotees flocked to meet her in increasing numbers, it became necessary to establish an independent institution, an *ashram*, for their sake. It was the time for the blessing of her father, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj, to actualize. In his last days, the saint had prophesized the birth of an august institution, a spiritual sanctuary and retreat, a centre for devotional worship.

Godmother envisioned a grand sanctuary for driven, dedicated seekers and devotees, for the spiritual advancement of thousands; a place that would ensure the preservation of the ancient spiritual path, *sanatan dharma*, and one that would offer a warm welcome to all castes and creeds; a large complex where *annadaan*, *go-seva* and *yajnas* would be performed, where *naamjapa* and *parayanas* would be offered as worship, thus catering to varieties of devotees and devotional practices. In this institution, the fundamental material requirements for devotion, food, shelter and sanitation, would be made available under one roof, so that the seekers do not end up wasting time in arrangements and focus on *sadhana*.

The grand design of *Sri Dattashram* was the *sankalp*, the divine resolution, in the heart of this living Goddess. Sri Datta Maharaj was consulted on the matter. A towering authority and Godmother's mentor, Sri Maharaj was also endowed with extensive experience in the field of institutional administration, as the President of *Sri Vasudev Niwas* from 1974 to 1999.

Sri Datta Maharaj made two critical recommendations. The first one was that Godmother along with close devotees should establish an independent trust for *Sri Dattashram*. His second counsel was that Godmother should have her family residence within the temple complex. This would be in the best interest of all, especially in terms of access and convenience of devotees.

A meeting of the close local devotees of Godmother was held on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1990 to chart the plan of action. The party decided that twelve plots would be dedicated to *Sri Dattashram*. The site of the *Ashram* was a far-flung area bearing the name '*Sadguru Nagar*'. It was a large parcel of vacant land on the outskirts of Jalna, at a distance of about seven kilometres away from the town. A major highway, the state highway SH-177, also known as Aurangabad-Nagpur road, bounded the site at one end.

The land was organized: twelve plots for the Ashram and one plot for the family residence that was purchased by Godmother's children. This phase of establishment was completed in the record time of two days, for *Sri Dattashram* was an idea whose time had come.

Sri Datta Maharaj inaugurated the construction of the Ashram on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1990. *Sri Dattashram* Trust was formed on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1991, with Godmother as the head of the institution.

Nearly a year later, Godmother shifted to her new home, *Sri Guru Niwas*, meaning 'the Abode of the Master', with her family in December 1992. Godmother installed two large photographs of Sri





**Sri Dattashram in the 90s**



**Sri Dattashram (present)**



**Sri Guru Niwas – Godmother’s family residence**





**Entering the Temple Complex: Elephant-gate entrance (Top) and Paduka Mandir entrance (Below)**





**Spire of Sri Paduka Mandir with the Holy Audumbar tree (Centre) with the Yadnya-Mandap (Left)**



**Sri Abhirameshwar**



Dhundiraj Maharaj and Sri Kajalkar Maharaj at the home altar, which were worshipped with great devotion.

The construction of the Ashram was completed in 1993. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1993, the auspicious day of *Sri Ram Navami*, the birth anniversary of Sri Ram, the temple was opened to devotees.

An interesting event transpired in the inaugural year. Sri Datta Maharaj was visiting the Ashram and the devotees thronged to the gate to welcome the Master. The all-knowing Godmother had specifically asked Baban, one of the devotees, to stay put at the altar-place in the prayer hall and not come out. Baban quickly finished cleaning the altar and, being unable to contain his excitement, ran to the gate where the devotees were felicitating Sri Maharaj.

While Baban was standing near the gate, a snake bit him. He immediately cried out in terror. The creature was obviously venomous, as Baban's foot had turned blue-black. The devotees gathered around him and took him to Godmother. Godmother lashed out at Baban, "I had told you not to step out, I had warned you. I knew this would happen." Then, she tapped her heel on the ground three times. In a matter of a few seconds, Baban's foot became normal. The agony ceased completely. Right then, a devotee's attention was drawn to Godmother's feet. They had assumed the dreadful black hue. She had taken the venom onto herself.

At the time, the form and scale of the Ashram were modest. It had simple concrete structures with tin roofs. A large prayer hall was the principal structure. There was a small office near the hall, a kitchen and four rooms meant for devotees.

Despite its humble façade, the place was vibrant, with dynamic currents of sublime devotion and the presence of Godmother. The principal objects of worship were black-and-white photographs of the two revered saints – verily the manifestations of Lord Dattatreya - Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj and Sri Kajalkar Maharaj. Worship was offered to these photographs.<sup>iv</sup> Godmother desired to install a framed photograph of Sri Datta Maharaj between the two images.

But the unassuming Master declined permission to place his own image alongwith those of the elders for whom he had tremendous reverence. Godmother's determination aside, she could not disregard her mentor's wishes. Ever resourceful, she came up with a solution, "Sri Datta Maharaj is verily the *eka-mukhi*, uni-faced, Dattatreya of this era! It was the Deity's promise that he would bestow his vision on devotees in this form in this age." Sri Gulavani Maharaj, one of the chosen successors and direct disciples of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati, was vouchsafed this vision by the Lord. Being an adept artist and painter, Sri Gulavani Maharaj himself drew a picture of *eka-mukhi* Dattatreya.

Godmother secured a copy of the framed picture and installed the image at the altar in the prayer hall. The saint had no grounds to protest, since it was the picture of the presiding Deity of Sri Dattashram and his own chosen ideal.

A year later, in 1994, Godmother had another picture installed in the shrine: the *Ram Durbar*, Sri Ram, with Mother Sita, Laxman Ji and Hanuman Ji. The photograph was installed on the auspicious day, the *tithi-puja* of Swami Vivekananda, his birth anniversary as per the lunar calendar. Godmother fulfilled her long-cherished dream of becoming the '*Sat-Shishya*'.

A beautiful couplet adorns the wall in one of the halls at the Ashram – '*Yaad hai to abaad hai, bhool gaye to barbaad hai*', which translates to 'So long as you remember God, shall you prosper. Forgetting him will spell your ruin'. Godmother is fully aware of the difficulties faced in the paths of *yoga* and *jnana*. Hence, her advice to the world is simple – focus on the repetition of the holy name, *naam*, and the devotional hymns in praise of God, *sankirtan*.

Since inception, Godmother had made it clear that caste-based rules and practices will not be observed at the Ashram and all forms of worship would be open to all devotees, whether it is *naam-japa* or *parayans*, *prasad* or *seva*. The spiritual centre is driven by the ideal of universal goodness and faith in humanity.





**Sant Dham: Shrine dedicated to Sri Kajalkar Maharaj (second from L), Sri Dattatreya (second from R) and Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar (R)**





Another rule of Sri Dattashram is that, the Ashram makes no plea for donations of any kind, no contribution is ever demanded from the devotees or general public, for any of its philanthropic or charitable works. Godmother has issued strict instructions to this end to the devotees as well as the volunteers and staff working at the institution.

Purely voluntary contributions and services, rendered for the love of God, are, of course, accepted at *Sri Dattashram*. This is a truly unique trait in the modern age and is observed only in genuine centres of spiritual excellence today. It is, indeed, the strength of her *tapa* that sustains the perpetual fest of *anna-daan*, food distribution, and *go-seva*, service to cows.

Two great *yajnas* were performed at Sri Dattashram, *Sri Vishnu-Yaag* and *Sri Datta Yaag*, in 1994 (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> May) and 1995 (8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> March). Sri Datta Maharaj presided over the *yajnas*. Thousands of devotees from all over the state attended these festivals, offered their worship and partook *prasad*. The priests who performed the *yajnas* were rewarded handsomely for their service by Godmother, who also distributed clothes, blankets, utensils and other essential goods to the labourers and the needy persons.<sup>lvi</sup>

During the *Sri Datta Yaag*, the diverse forms of worship were at their exaltation. The devotees had their fill and there was something for everyone - devotional songs by accomplished singers like Meerabai of Gulbarga, discourses on spiritual subjects by Sri Datta Maharaj, *padya-pooja* and *dhun*, the chanting of the holy name.

The focal attraction of the fest was the initiation by the holy name, *mantra diksha*, of several devotees by Sri Datta Maharaj, which took place on the ultimate day, 12th March 1995. In the evening, the rain gods blessed the sacrifice and heavy showers graced *Sri Dattashram*, a remarkable event in the middle of March in this arid town.

Sri Datta Maharaj blessed Sri Dattashram thus: "This place is born as a result of the *tapa* of Godmother, it is home to all the Gods and Goddesses." Several sincere seekers have experienced the divine presence of Deities in the environs of the Ashram.

Godmother cherished a desire to build a shrine dedicated to *Padukas*, the lotus feet of Lord Dattatreya, at *Sri Dattashram*. At her request, Sri Datta Maharaj consecrated the *Padukas*. Shashi, a civil engineer by vocation and a dedicated devotee of Sri Maharaj, had rendered tremendous service to the Master. He had previously delivered first class projects, like *Sri Datta Amareshwar Sansthan* at Aurwad, *Sri Vaman Niwas* at Pune, and the extension of Sri Maharaj's bungalow, *Sri Renuka Niwas*, at Pune. It was decided to place Shashi in charge of this construction.

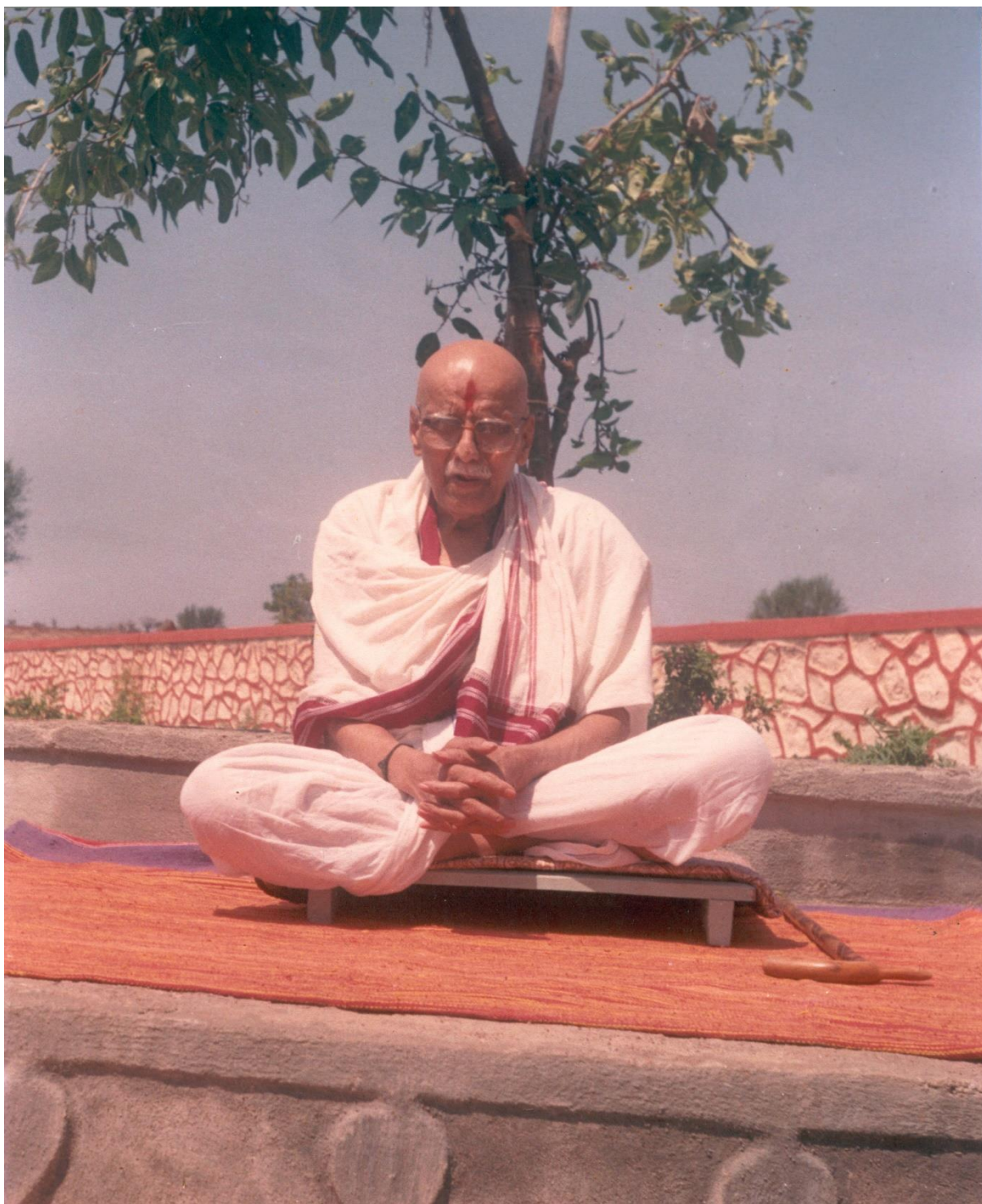
Sri Datta Maharaj sent for Shashi on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1995, the final day of *Sri Datta Yaag*, at around 11 o'clock in the morning. Shashi presented himself and bowed to his Master. Maharaj asked, "So, Mr. Engineer, what is your view? Where do we install the *Padukas*?"

Shashi was a little puzzled, since it was Maharaj whose guidance on the issue was awaited. He humbly requested the Master, "Please guide us, Master." Some devotees had opined that the lotus feet should be installed at the west end of the plot, the site of *yajna-mandap*, the sacrificial altar. Sri Maharaj went to that site and touched the elevated platform and asked, "Here?" The devotees remained silent.

A few moments later, Sri Maharaj turned back and walked a few steps to the enclosure of the holy *Audumbar* on the east end of the plot. Patting the mighty tree, Maharaj declared, "Install them here, right below this *Audumbar*!" The tree is sacred to Lord Dattatreya. Bowing to the Master, with folded hands, Shashi assented, "As you command, Maharaj."

A few hours later, Sri Maharaj said to Shashi, "So, below the *Audumbar* means the *Padukas* will resemble those at *Sri Narsoba Wadi*!" Sri Maharaj said with a sweet smile, "Start the work once you secure Godmother's permission." Shashi respectfully bowed to the Master and left.

The original intent of the designers of the *Paduka Mandir* – Shashi and his son Dr. Harshad Nagle, also a civil engineer – was a compact shrine to the lotus feet of the Lord. As instructed by Sri



**Sri Datta Maharaj at the site of Sri Paduka Mandir in front of the holy Audumbar**





**Yajna-Mandap**



Maharaj, the father-son duo met Godmother with their design, to seek her approval. She said, “Start with the excavation works first, you can start them tomorrow at the auspicious moment, we will decide the design later on.”

However, Shashi persisted with his request, as some design, even a rough and ready, was required before commencement of works, as excavation would require settling the dimensions of the platform for the *Padukas*.

Godmother replied: “You and Harshad, have your bath and meet me at Sri Maharaj’s worship room here. You can take the *darshan* of the *Padukas*.” Later, the pair of them arrived in the room where the *Padukas* were kept. Godmother was waiting for them.

She immediately instructed an attendant to remove the protective cloth from the *Padukas* and they had the holy *darshan* of the revered *Padukas*. Godmother said, “Sit down here, the *Padukas* themselves will give you the design.”

The design of Sri Paduka Mandir was revealed to Shashi and his son when they were meditating upon the lotus feet. As soon as they opened their eyes, Godmother asked the duo, “Isn’t it octagonal? Let the temple emulate the shrine! Make it grand!” Harshad drew the revised plans based on this inspiration, which was reaffirmed by Godmother.

The design of the shrine that the *Padukas* inspired is truly marvellous: the shrine is octagonal and so is the enclosure for the holy *Audumbar* at the back of the *Padukas*. The dimensions of the structure are forty-three feet in diameter, while the octagonal roof in the form of an umbrella over the *Padukas* is nine feet in height. The platform on which the *Padukas* were installed stands three feet in height.

It is interesting to note that the total number of triangles comprising the *Sri Chakra*, the symbolic representation of the Divine Mother, is forty-three while the principal, larger triangles are nine in number. The Goddess herself is engaged in the worship of the presiding Deity, the Universal Master, Lord Dattatreya at *Sri Paduka Mandir*.

The inauguration of the works commenced on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1996<sup>lvii</sup>, the auspicious day dedicated to one’s Master, *Guru Poornima* and the *Paduka Mandir* took four years to complete.

About the site of *Sri Paduka Mandir*, Godmother said the following to a devotee, “Since the birth of the planet, this land has stood unchanged, pure and untouched. No man, no desire has touched it, ever.”

Her eyes had a mystical glow as she spoke these words, her mind was on a different plane of consciousness. Godmother was witnessing the birth of the blessed land in front of her eyes right then.

It was around 1996-97 that Godmother’s glory as a saint and a spiritual authority spread to the major cities and towns like Mumbai, Pune and others. The golden phase of her spiritual life began. Devotees from all over the state and later the nation started pouring in.

*Sri Paduka Mandir* was inaugurated on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2008, on the auspicious day of *guru dwadashi*. The revered high priest, Nyayachudamani Pandit Rajeshwar Shastri of Dharwad, one of the foremost vedic scholars in India, devoted to Sri Datta Maharaj and Godmother, performed the *sthapana* ceremony, the installation, of the *Padukas*.

The *Paduka Mandir* is an east-facing temple, which can accommodate around three hundred devotees at a time. The *Padukas*, lotus feet of the Lord, are directly below the holy *Audumber*, just like in *Sri Narsoba-wadi*, the pilgrimage center dedicated to *Manohar Padukas* of the Lord. The silvern backdrop of the *Padukas* is ornate and immensely beautiful in design. A glass enclosure surrounds the larger shrine, which is home to the *Padukas*, the holy *Audumber* and the idol of Goddess *Sri Jagdamba*, an aspect of the Divine Mother.

The devotees can offer circumambulations around this shrine. The path is decorated with brilliant carvings. The spire of the larger shrine is made of glass. Every morning, the rays of the sun fall



through this glass spire directly on to the lotus feet, as though they are touching the Lord's feet in salutation.

The day, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2008, also marked the inauguration of *Sri Raghavalaya* at the Ashram, a beautiful temple dedicated to Sri Ram with the idols of the deities of the *Sri Ram Darbar*, Sri Ram, Mother Sita, Laxman Ji and Hanuman Ji.

The temple complex houses a serene *Shivalaya*, the shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, called *Sri Abhirameshwar*, situated at its north-west corner. The *shiva-linga* is a *siddha*, that is, divine. It has the form of a *Baan-linga*, a peculiar kind of *linga* secured from the bed of the *Narmada* river. Both *bel* or *bilva* and *tulsi* leaves can be offered to this *shiva-linga* in worship. This shrine was inaugurated on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2011, on the birth anniversary of Sri Datta Maharaj.

Additionally, *Sri Dattashram* also houses Sri Uma Maheshwar, the movable *shiva-linga*, to which special *abhisheka* worship is offered in the auspicious month of *Shravan*.

Godmother has performed *Sri Ayut-Chandi Yajna* at *Sri Dattashram*. The sacrifice, dedicated to Goddess *Sri Durga*, is ten-year long programme of performance of ten thousand recitations of the sacred text, *Sri Durga Saptashati*, also known as *Sri Chandi Paath*. Ten thousand recitations are completed each year, taking the total recitations in the sacrifice to one lakh, equivalent in merit to a *Laksha-Chandi Yajna* sacrifice.

Sri Datta Maharaj had given Godmother the *sankalpa* for this sacrifice, while praising Godmother for her determination and blessing her, he said "Her *sankalpa* is that of a Great Emperor, a *chakravartin raja*." The currency of the festival which lasted between 2008 and 2017 witnessed the conferment of several rewards and gifts to the participants as well as unstinting charity, not to mention *anna-daan* on a tremendous scale.

Most of the traditional festivals of Maharashtra are celebrated at *Sri Dattashram*, including *Vat-Purnima*, *Makar Sankranti*, *Vaikuntha Chaturdashi*, *Harihar Bhet*, *Guru Purnima*, *Guru Dwadashi*, *Sri Datta Jayanti*, *Sri Ram Navami*, *Sri Krishna Janmashtami*, *Navratri*, *Dussera*, *Ganesha Chaturthi*, *Diwali*, *Holi*, and so on.

Festivals hold special importance in spiritual life as they bring man closer to divinity and nature. The divine energy at play on these special days are extremely beneficial to the seekers. All these festivals are celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm.

*Sri Dattashram* is a world unto itself, a heaven on earth. Spiritual practices and charitable activities are carried on incessantly. Various *paaths* and *parayanas*, *yajnas* and *rudra-abhishekas*, *homas* and other rituals are performed. Dedicated devotees, seekers and volunteers work tirelessly to make this happen, without expectation. This is the divine inspiration, *sankalpa* and *tapa* of Godmother at work.

Spiritual luminaries and authorities like the heir apparent of the *Sri Sringeri Sarada Peeth Shankaracharya* H.H. Sri Vidushekhara Bharati Swamigal (21 January 2019) and the *Sri Shakatpur Peeth Shankaracharya* H.H. Krishnanda Tirtha Swamigal (2009), Sri Sri Ravishankar, and several others, have graced *Sri Dattashram*.

The temple complex abounds with tremendous divine energies. Those who enter the place experience an immediate sense of peace, dissolution of negativity and ceasing of restlessness. The seeker is propelled towards achieving their potential perfection and divinity. Godmother insists that the devotees, for their own benefit, must visit the place at least once a month, to take their fill of spiritual merit and blessings which lasts until the next visit.

Godmother has a deep love for animals and this translates to how compassionately they are taken care of at *Sri Dattashram*. The ants and sparrows are fed sugar and grains, parrots seeds, dogs flatbreads, cows fresh fodder and wheat gruel.

Godmother has a special love for cows. The Ashram is home to a large number of cows, who live happily in a dedicated *go-shala*. She ensures that the cows at the Ashram are well looked after in the



### **Sri Paduka Mandir**

**The Padukas of Lord Dattatreya and the idol of Sri Jagdamba**





**Sri Paduka Mandir – the Padukas**





**Sri Jagadamba at the Paduka Mandir**





**The Holy Audumbar tree**





**Sri Raghavalaya**



**Sri Abhirameshwar**





**Nandi at Sri Abhirameshwar**



## Sri Uma-Maheshwar





cattle-sheds. They are fed nourishing meals, such as wheat gruel, *lapsi*, besides fresh green fodder. In drought-like conditions, Godmother has huge vessels of fresh water placed outside the Ashram gate for the passing cattle.<sup>lviii</sup> Service to cows is considered as one of the highest forms of service.

This spiritual sanctuary, grand and immaculate in design, displays great mindfulness. To ensure steady supply of fresh, fragrant flowers for the various Deities and Masters at Sri Dattashram, Godmother laid out a lovely garden within the complex. Godmother is personally fond of Arabian jasmine, *mogra*. The garden boasts nearly a dozen varieties of the fragrant flower.

Besides, there are roses of varied colours, Spanish cherry, *bakul*, night jasmine, *parijat*, hibiscus, *jaswandi*, common jasmines, *jai-jui*, magnolia, *champa*, and many other plants. Ashram is home to scores of trees of diverse varieties, that lend a sense of freshness and joy to the whole place.

Godmother is keen about the environment. Her pointed instructions give an insight into her vision. For instance, she has advised that instead of using the popular drip irrigation method for the garden, small canals be made to water the plants and trees, so that the water keeps flowing in the garden. This way, the birds can quench their thirst and the method will ensure growth of fresh grass, which can be fed to cows.

‘Waste not, want not’ is the motto at Sri Dattashram. When Godmother receives cloths that are too short for stitching, she asks devotees to fashion flags and decorative frills from them. If rice grains or puffed rice gets crushed or powdered, the kitchen staff uses them for South Indian dishes like *dosas*. Similarly, the unusable strings and shreds of cloth that are generated during stitching of clothes are used to stuff cushions.

The extra sweetmeats like *pedhas* are used to make sweet flatbreads called *pedha-polis*, like the popular delicacy *puranpoli*. If too many *batasas*, a sweet primarily consisting crystallized sugar, arrive as offerings at *Holi*, they are dipped in water and transformed into refreshing lemon *sherbet*. Equally, Godmother is very particular about every vessel and kitchen equipment, down to the last utensil, despite the grand scale of the Ashram. She says, “This is God’s place, His home, His vessels, be careful with them.”

## 6. Godmother as a Spiritual Preceptor

During his four-year stint as the engineer-in-charge of the *Paduka Mandir* at Sri Dattashram, Shashi was blessed with the opportunity to receive direct guidance on various aspects of devotion and spiritual life from Godmother. Shashi’s meticulous accounts of the lessons recorded by him at the time form the basis of this segment.

### (A) Importance of Guru’s Darshan

The audience with a saint, a holy person, is not an empty formality. It has tremendous significance in spiritual life. Even if a devotee or disciple has met his master several times, each meeting, each *darshan*, is vital, for the Master bestows a blessing on his devotee, which is real, though intangible. The blessing and the spiritual merit earned from the *darshan* manifests in several ways and across diverse dimensions, in his worldly and spiritual life.

Godmother herself lays great store by *darshan*. Its importance became apparent to Shashi when one day he did not accompany Godmother and her family for lunch out of formal concerns. Godmother said to him, “You have deprived us of the spiritual merit we would have earned from your company, the blessings you received from your recent *darshan* of Sri Datta Maharaj.” Her words give us a vital lesson in that, the *darshan* blesses not only the devotee but also those come in close contact with the devotee.

On a second occasion, Shashi expressed some reservations about meeting his Master, Sri Datta Maharaj, too frequently within a short span of time, since it would disturb the octogenarian master. On hearing this, Godmother reprimanded Shashi thus:



## At the Garden











***Go-Shala at Sri Dattashram***





“What? The Master bears so many pains for us, and is this what you make of it all? Shashi! What are you even saying? Who keeps your breath going each moment? Who is the one that drives you? Who inspires your action? Each moment, every second, your *Guru* is thinking about you, caring for you, he is standing behind you in spirit, always, will he be inconvenienced by one visit? The veritable Lord of the Universes, the God among kings, the One who runs the world, that Master, that *Gurudev*! It is that Supreme who is lying in a small room in *Sri Renuka Niwas*. He has incarnated on this plane only for the benefit of devotees like you and me. Will he feel tired by rising from his bed to meet you? ...

“(On being offered a cup of tea and snacks by the Master) ... You are indeed so fortunate, so blessed! Do you realize it? The Master wants to grant you something eternal, a perpetual blessing, a boon, and through the tea, you are actually receiving the nectar of the Master’s grace! Never, under any circumstances, refuse anything that the Master offers you. In fact, you should ask for more. Why should you refuse His grace, his love that flows in the food?

“Consider this, today, the Master is on the material plane. We are able to converse with this veritable Lord. He is conferring his boons, his blessings on us directly. You have not reached that stage in spiritual life where you can access his blessings after he transcends the material world. So, make hay while the sun shines, make the best use of this opportunity! Let me tell you this, when you visit me after seeking his *darshan*, I too derive the spiritual merit, and bask in it. I feel the ultimate joy, the bliss of meeting my *guru*.”

### (B) Criticizing Others

One morning, Shashi was chit-chatting with an elderly devotee at the Ashram. This gentleman was a good soul, who had been volunteering for the better part of his retired life at the Ashram. Many subjects related to the Ashram came up in the natural course of conversation.

These were the early days of the institution and the devotee was narrating the life there, how the devotees and the volunteers conduct themselves, and so on. The talk casually drifted to the issue of discipline among the current employees. The elder devotee was rather liberal in criticizing their tardiness and inefficiency.

The pair was chatting in one of the rooms at the Ashram meant for the devotees’ rest. This room was shut from the inside. It was at a considerable distance from the room where Godmother was seated, nearly a hundred feet away and separated by a series of walls and passages. There was, of course, no way Godmother could have heard them, or at least that is what the pair of them presumed.

The conversation was interrupted by a sharp knock on the door. Shashi opened it to find that Godmother had sent for him. He rushed to Godmother. Godmother started in a raised tone, a little sternly: “What was going on inside that room? Why should you keep listening to these stories? What do you have to do with all of this? The Master has established this Ashram, let him worry about all this, it is him who looks after this place. Why should one criticize others?”

A little later, her anger subsided and she continued, “One should not even participate in such discussions, leave alone criticize others. Focus on your work here. If you wish to think of anything, let it be your own faults and mistakes. A devotee should always be mindful of this ... You know the power, the authority of our Master. Does he not praise this place? He is keeping a constant vigil over this institution.”

Her advice then progressed to the quality of *sattva* and how a seeker must ensure that he lives in an environment where his *sattvic* tendencies are nurtured. The devotee’s mind should be cultivated to be happy, content and *sattvic* at all times. This applies with greater effect when one is eating, since the emotions while eating have an impact on the mental tendencies, that are formed by food.

### (C) Approach towards Anna-daan

An incident in the nineties tells us a great deal about Godmother’s idea, her emotions about *anna-daan*, food distribution service. That day, Shashi and the team had worked for twenty-four hours straight, for they had to cast the first slab of the *Paduka Mandir*. The job which should have ordinarily taken ten hours, took the entire day.

The local labour force and the contractor really tested Shashi's patience on this occasion, with the reporting drunk to work, the slow pace of progress, the problems with machines, the inadequate materials, the untimely breaks and a general lack of preparation, to name a few inefficiencies. All this after Shashi complying with their demands for "extra pay" for the delay – the delay resulting from their ineptitude and they were neither morally nor lawfully entitled to the overtime!

To top it all, when the labour contractor demanded food for everyone at the end of the shift, since it was lunch-time, Shashi finally lost his cool. He fired the leader and told him off.

Later, Shashi recounted the entire incident to Godmother when he went for her *darshan*. To his bewilderment, Godmother broke down in tears. Shashi was at a loss. Godmother explained herself, as she wiped her tears, "Shashi! What have you done? It was Sri Datta Maharaj who had come to ask for lunch in the form of these labourers. And you refused him food? No no, what happened was not good. What is this place for, after all? To feed the world, right? Who owns all of this? The Master, right?"

Shashi experienced a deep sense of embarrassment at his act. He promptly apologized for the pain he had caused Godmother. Offering a full salutation, he said, "I made a mistake, Godmother. I promise that I shall never refuse food to anyone, whatever the circumstances."

The incident reveals Godmother's perspective on *anna-daan*. She regards every soul who comes for *prasad* as worshipful, as if he is the Master. Thousands of devotees partake *prasad* every day at the Ashram. *Anna-daan* and *naam-japa* are the twin pillars of *Sri Dattashram*.

#### (D) Her Role as a Needle

In the course of conversation with some senior devotees, Godmother explained her role in their spiritual lives. Let us hear this in her inimitable words:

"In the interest of religion and one's spiritual progress, every devotee must perform service and offer worship to the fullest degree. Repeat the name of the Lord, as much as you can. Sri Dattashram and its temples, monuments to the path of devotion, for whose benefit are these? They are for you, or else what purpose do they serve? Does the Master have need for them? Your worldly affairs, your family life, it goes on. It does not require such great attention. Think instead of what you have to attain, as a devotee, as a seeker? What you have to learn from the Master, who is our true mother?"

"I know my words prick many a heart. They sound bitter. But I will prick you and keep pricking! Your material life goes on. But, when will you turn to God, to spirituality? I am the needle! Say what you may. But I will keep pricking you – whether you stay here or go home. But, remember, the thread that I bind you with is Him – the venerable Master, *Sat-guru*! This thread unites, it ties the material and the spiritual planes together. The Needle may not last forever. But the stitch it makes, that is permanent. Do you understand?"

"Once your mind and body, your sense organs, turn toward spiritual life and God, then your '*Atmaram*', that Inner Guide, the true aspect of the Absolute within us, will keep your *sadhana* going."

Godmother is completely devoted to her Master, *guru*. She says, "Everything here belongs to Him, the Master. It is the Master who does everything, he inspires me, drives me, I am but an instrument of action, a machine. It is the Master who is the operator." Her words echo the *bhaav* of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa towards his chosen ideal, Goddess *Sri Kali*, the Divine Mother.

#### (E) Importance of Disciplines in Sadhana

Godmother gave Shashi invaluable advice on the importance of discipline during *sadhana*:

"When you eat food at someone else's home, your host gains merit for having fed you, but you get indebted to him. You will have to repay the debt, in some form. The spiritual merit you have earned goes to the host and you become a sharer in his sins. Here, if you have been invited, the intensity reduces, but if you dine uninvited, then the food gets polluted. If your *sattva* level is extremely high, then the food will leave your system quickly.

"So, the next time you find yourself in such a situation, where you have no option but to eat outside of your home, then better eat at a restaurant outside by spending your own money. Never eat at someone's home. If such

a person is not spiritually inclined, then his demerits, his faults will unconsciously infiltrate you and you will assimilate them. This will ruin your physical and spiritual purity. Your sadhana will get hampered as a result. Your spiritual master's blessings may be lost. If it is unavoidable, have fruits and milk. Do not have water under any circumstances. The evil and unholy tendencies of the host will affect you more in case of water, they are transmitted to a greater extent.

"Similarly, if you set out for some work, do not take anyone along with you. This applies even to close devotees of your master, *sadhakas* and friends, unless they have an equally sincere desire that the task be completed. Otherwise, your friend's fate, his destiny, may generate an impediment in your work. A person's mental tendencies or thoughts affect us unconsciously – all this happens on a plane that is unseen, unknown to us, in the realm of the unexpressed.

"If one does not abide, one may encounter failures, if the companion's thoughts are powerful enough. Your master, your *Sat-guru*, is constantly clearing the obstacles in your path, but your friend's thoughts collide and act on your sub-conscious mind and you find that all of a sudden, the golden moment is lost!

"When your Master or any spiritual authority, entrusts you with the task of delivering a message or article, consider it as your chance to serve them. When you get such an opportunity, by the grace of God, ensure that the blessed task is accomplished first before proceeding with other work. You will succeed in your endeavours by virtue of the merit you earn from serving him.

"Ensure that you keep the entrusted message or article close to you, and preferably on your person. If it is not practical to do so, then ensure at least that it is not strewn around, kept at someone else's house, or at an unclean place. If the article does not reach its destination in a pure and uncorrupted state, you shall have to bear the sin. To serve your master is a tight-rope walk, an ordeal by fire. The service must be performed with complete faith and devotion for it to bring you spiritual merit and material gains.

"After taking leave of your Master or visiting a temple, head home directly. If you keep roaming around the town, or visiting someone, the grace, the blessing that you have earned in your Master's company, or from the deity, gets strewn around, scattered in the wind and lost to you. They do not reach your home, the place where they are actually meant for. Similar is the case of offering, *prasad*. You should not carry it around wherever you go lest, its purity, its auspiciousness gets destroyed. Then, instead of purifying the person who consumes the *prasad*, the offering may pollute or harm him. If this injunction has not been followed, bring the offering in front of the Master or the Deity before consuming or distributing the same."

### (F) Expectations from Devotees

Godmother has a special love for *sattvic* devotees, who are firm on the path of devotion. She expects that the devotees spend maximum time in performing *naam-japa*. If his inclination is towards other varied devotional activities and programmes at the Ashram, then he should participate in them wholeheartedly.

Devotees may spend time in contemplation, *manan* and *chintan*, and the reading of spiritual texts. But, idle chit-chat and debates on religious, political or social issues are not appreciated by Godmother. Equally, she does not appreciate chronic critics, cantankerous people and gossip-mongers.

Troubles on the material plane cause obstacles on the spiritual path. This is why Godmother gives solutions to resolve them, so that the person can be free from his hassles and focus on spiritual life. It is not expected of such devotee to forget God as soon as the problem is over and resume worldly life. The devotee must cultivate a feeling of love and gratitude towards the Lord and serve Him wholeheartedly thereafter.

In this context, Godmother attaches particular importance to *naam-japa*. Her view on *naam-japa* is best illumined from the following incident. Gopal, a dedicated devotee, recounts an incident that took place in the early days of the Ashram. Gopal was walking up to the washing bay to wash his cup after his afternoon tea. Godmother instructed her attendant to take the used cup from him and said, "I do not want your time to be wasted in washing utensils. Your time at this place is for *naam-japa*."

The lone incident reveals the critical significance of the holy name. The purpose behind the world-class facilities for devotees under one roof, food, residence and sanitation, is freedom from logistic hassles, so that the devotees may concentrate exclusively on spiritual practices. Godmother does not expect any material benefit or gift from the devotees. She is among us to instil the spirit of devotion and elevate our consciousness to a higher realm, to confer blessings of permanence.

#### **(G) 'The Master works through all'**

During the construction of *Sri Paduka Mandir*, Shashi used to be busy on the field, as he was committed to deliver the first-class temple for Godmother and the Ashram. Many a time, Shashi would notice that Godmother stood in the scorching dry heat on the field, watching the works at site.

On occasion, even at noon, she would sit on the blazing concrete floor. Then, Shashi would go near Godmother, bow to her and request her to rest inside the house. Godmother would respond, "These labourers, artisans, managers and yourself, you are all forms of the Master, the Master is building the temple himself. All of you are working so hard in the heat. I am just sitting here. So what if I have to bear the sun?"

A few days later, on a regular work day, Shashi had scheduled finishing of the concreting work of the columns and roof slabs by the end of the day. It was late afternoon after the lunch-break. The sun was breathing fire. Shashi climbed up on an elevated platform, around twelve feet in height, wherefrom he could observe the labourers work.

It must have been an hour since lunch break and the work had slowed down. The women were moving the sand and the men gravel and stones. Looking to the sluggish pace, Shashi did a quick visual survey of the field, to ensure that no one was idle.

To his surprise, a woman was sleeping with her saree fold over her head in the foliage under the holy *Audumbar*. Shashi had a fit of anger. The columns and roof are to be filled by the end of the day and this dame was fast asleep – does she not realize that the lunch break is long over? He then had a second thought: what if the lady has fainted in the heat?

Shashi stepped down from the pedestal and started walking towards the sleeping lady. Mid-walk, he was interrupted by a hushed voice. He looked in the direction of the voice. It was Suvarna, Godmother's attendant, making signs, asking Shashi to be quiet, "Do not say anything!" Coming closer to him, Suvarna said, "That is Godmother sleeping there!"

Slightly embarrassed, Shashi said to Suvarna, "Let us try to make some shade for her, let me get some tarpaulin." Right then, Godmother woke up. Shashi drew near, bowed to Godmother and said, "What is this, Godmother? Why did you sleep in the open, in this blazing heat?" Godmother: "Why not? Do you or your labourers work in shade?"

Godmother supervised a substantial part of the construction. She would make frequent rounds and Shashi and the contractors were astonished to learn that she knew which grade of cement, what type of sand, gravel, stones are to be used and where they can be procured from, and so on. In her free time, she had even helped labourers with construction work in the past, as she disliked sitting idle.

#### **(H) 'Do not think that I will not find out'**

Godmother's devotees are prone to make one mistake – assuming that they can keep their lapses hidden. It is a result of falling for her human façade and forgetting her divinity. Godmother is very particular when it comes to instructions. She expects that devotees abide by her advice and complete the tasks assigned to them. In the early days of Sri Dattashram, Godmother would often visit her mentor, Sri Datta Maharaj, at Pune for weeks on end.

Before leaving, she would guide her devotees and allocate work to some - a detailed set of instructions would issue forth. To some devotees, she would assign cow-shed duty, some others cleaning and cooking, others would be told not to leave town until her return, and so on. She would warn, "Do not think that I am absent from this place. The service that you have been asked to render,





**Arrangements for Accomodation: Sundar-Datt Niwas (Top) and the Upper Floors of the Principal Wing of the Complex (Below)**



the disciplines, keep at it. I am monitoring it constantly. Do not forget that I am ever-aware of your actions, no matter where I am.”

Baban, a simple devotee, was given a taste of this omniscience. As usual, Godmother had returned to the Ashram from Pune and the devotees had lined up to offer their salutations. Baban’s turn arrived. He sat on his knees, folded his hands and offered his salutations.

Godmother gave him a severe look and said, “What is this? What had I told you?”

Baban looked a little puzzled, “What is it, Godmother?” he asked.

Godmother: “You are asking me? Did I not tell you that till I return, you are not to eat or drink anything outside of home? Yes or no? I had also asked you not to travel out of town.”

Baban: “Yes!”

Godmother: “Then, why did you have tea outside? And that too, not at one place, but four different ones. Didn’t you?”

Baban: “I made a mistake, Godmother”

Godmother: “‘*Mistake*’, was that it? The first and second instances were still fine, but the third one, that was the bad one. I had even previously warned you not to have tea at that man’s place! Still, you went ahead. What do you think? You suppose everyone who offers you tea loves you? You do these silly things and repent later. What came over you? Why did you drink tea at his place?”

“If you people don’t want to listen, then why do you come to this place and salute me? You do not understand where your well-being, your happiness lies, how people are and how this world is, and you act foolishly and unmindfully! If you do not want to listen to me, do not come here henceforth. I am so pained by your actions; do you know what I have to bear as a result of your foolishness?”

Just when the inquisition seemed to be over, Godmother continued in the same tone, “And I had told you not to leave town!”

Baban (interrupting): “No...but Godmother, I did not leave Jalna.”

Godmother: “That is true, you did not leave town. But you had planned to leave for Nagpur? Tell me the truth!”

Baban: “Yes, Godmother. I had thought of attending a political meet at Nagpur.”

Godmother: “But why? Was the session going to be stalled by your absence? Were you going to lose anything by missing it? And did you cancel your plan because of my injunction? ...No... that darling daughter of yours pleaded, ‘*Please stay, Pappa, don’t go!*’ That is why *Pappa* cancelled his trip. Am I correct?”

Baban’s eyes welled up and he began weeping, pleading before Godmother, “I am sorry, Godmother, I made a huge mistake!”

Godmother maintained the same tone, “You admit to your mistake, right? Then go to the prayer hall and do two rounds of the rosary, else, you will not get the *prasad* tea.”

Now, Baban started snivelling uncontrollably. Godmother calmed down. Smiling at him, she said in a sweet voice, “That is enough now, go! Have the tea first and then do two rounds of *naam-japa*! Go!”

A similar thing happened to Shashi. Before leaving for Pune, Godmother had issued a command that no one was to leave the Ashram precincts under any circumstances. This, of course, was applicable to everyone, without exception, including Shashi as well as her own family, her family residence being inside the Ashram.

A couple of days later, a wealthy and important businessman of Jalna, Radheysham by name, sent invitations to Godmother and her family and Shashi for his grand-son’s naming ceremony, which was

followed by dinner. Shashi had made up his mind to forgo the invitation. For one, there was Godmother's prohibition and secondly, he did not know this gentleman at all.

The same evening, Dilip, Godmother's eldest son, met Shashi. Dilip asked, "Sir, did you get Radheysham's invite as well? Shall we go together?" Shashi said, "I don't know the host well. Please carry on without me". Hearing this, even Dilip decided against attending the function. Shashi and Dilip had dinner with everyone. Dinner concluded at around half past eight in the evening.

Since nine o'clock, the devotees started coming to the Ashram for offering worship before retiring for the day. The regular devotees came – Baban, Shankar and gang. Everyone gave them the same message – '*Radheysham is eagerly waiting for Godmother's family and Shashi to join them.*' Still, Shashi decided to stay put. At last, the host sent a special envoy with an earnest request. The messenger, who was known to Dilip, told them, "Radheysham Ji has said that he will wait for you. He will not have dinner unless you give him company".

Hearing this, Shashi and Dilip felt obliged. They rushed to the venue, arrived there at quarter to eleven on their scooter. The hosts were indeed waiting for them. Dinner was served. The spread was lavish, to say the least. Though Shashi and Dilip were not hungry, they had one *puri* each along with delicious cashew curry, for the sake of their earnest host.

Godmother returned to the Ashram in the following week. The devotees queued up for *darshan* as was the norm. Shashi joined them too. When his turn arrived, Shashi offered a full prostration to Godmother and then stood before her with folded hands. Godmother looked into his eyes, smiled ever so slightly and inquired, "So, did you enjoy the cashew curry?" Shashi gave a faint smile, a little embarrassed.

Another incident happened during the early days of *Sri Dattashram*. A young child, part of the group of lads staying at the Ashram to recite *Sri Durga Saptashati*, felt intensely hungry one afternoon. He was feeling shy and decided to keep quiet. The omniscient Godmother who was at her home realized the matter immediately.

She asked someone to send for snacks for her and to find out which of the boys was hungry. As she ate the snack, the boy's hunger pangs ceased. Soon afterwards, the attendant found the hungry lad and took him to the dining area for snacks.

Experiences of devotees reaffirming Godmother's omniscience abound. Once Shashi wanted to leave for Mumbai for an important meeting and Godmother was requesting him to stay back. He had been meaning to sell his house at Goregaon in Mumbai for the longest time and he had finally found a decent buyer. The deal was struck and both parties decided to meet and conclude the transaction.

Shashi had booked the tickets for Mumbai in the expectation that Godmother would assent to his request. As soon as he broached the subject of leave, Godmother said, "Do you have to leave today? Can't you leave tomorrow? Is your work going to be completed as soon as you reach there?"

Shashi was unrelenting and explained the urgency to Godmother. It was not so much about the remuneration, but he could not keep the counter-party waiting and besides, *Angaraki Chaturthi*, a day sacred to Lord Ganesh, was an auspicious time fixed by consent. Moreover, he promised her that he would return to the Ashram as soon as the meeting was over. Godmother granted her permission: "Since you have already decided, you may go."

Shashi left Jalna by the evening bus and reached his Goregaon home at around a half past eight the following morning, on the day of the meeting. As soon as he stepped in the home, his son informed him that the buyer had called just a few moments ago, to inform them that the day of *Angaraki Chaturthi* was not suitable for the deal and they had to postpone the meeting by two days. Shashi received a call from Godmother that night, she asked, "So, you left with such haste, did you finish the work as planned?"



When someone presents himself before Godmother, she understands everything that there is to know about him – his thoughts, his deeds, his past, present and future, everything. He cannot hide anything from her.

If an atheist, cynic or crook comes to test her, Godmother shows him her terrifying aspect. Even before he begins to speak, her volley commences, “So, you have come here to test me? Get lost! Do not come here again, this place is not meant for people like you! And what test do you want to put me to? I am a simple, uneducated village-woman from Marathwada! That’s all I am! So why the false salutation?”

If his stars are favourable, the gentleman repents at this act. He is contrite and begs forgiveness. Godmother takes pity and asks him to do repeat the holy name in the prayer hall.

### (I) Evil minds and their role

Godmother explained the difficult subject of evil-minded people and their role in the life of a saint. She began, “Even in spiritual centres like this Ashram, the Master keeps evil-minded people, arrogant, envious and impure souls, close at hand. The idea is that through close contact with the saint, their evil tendencies will subside and their minds will be spiritually elevated.

“The devotees with good, sattvic tendencies are protected by the saints. At times, their goodness is put to test, call it *sattva-pariksha*, test of goodness. The devotees’ bad *karma* is burnt away.

“With Sri Maharaj’s grace, we have good, sattvic devotees in this Ashram. If someone gathers evil tendencies from the outside, tendencies that bring men to sin and ultimate ruin and enters the Ashram premises, these tendencies get burnt and destroyed here. Evil takes many forms, like crookedness, sinfulness, cruelty, harmfulness, anger, passion, arrogance, doubt, and so on. To ensure that such evil does not harm good devotees, the saint takes the wrath and harmful effects of these sinful and evil tendencies upon himself. To get rid of this evil, the saint has to bear terrible hardship. It is not for nothing that Sri Datta Maharaj says, ‘*Being a Maharaj is not easy!*’

“Even when God gets angry, the Master, the *guru*, looks after the devotee. If the Master is angered, then no one in the three worlds can save him. That is the reason why saints do not get angry at anyone. I understand that at times even the senior, elder devotees in the Ashram bicker and indulge in backstabbing campaigns against good souls. What they fail to understand is how much suffering they cause the saint by their words and deeds. As for the good devotees, those who are engaged in earnest service here, Maharaj looks after them. In truth, he has already taken care of their interests without them knowing it.”

### (J) “Is this the limit of your knowledge of geography?”

On an auspicious day in 1998, Shashi expressed his desire to Godmother, he wanted to recite the *Sri Datta Namsankirtan*, a hymn on Lord Dattatreya by Sri Rangavdhoot Maharaj, the disciple of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati. Shashi wanted to recite it from sunrise to sunset, for twelve hours straight.

He ended up spending the entire day at work and he could not find time for the recitation. It was midnight. When Shashi expressed this to Godmother during *darshan*, she asked him to start the recitation.

Shashi replied, “But how can I do it now? The sun has set long ago and its already night.” She laughed, “Is this the limit of your knowledge of geography? Just because the sun is not shining here in Jalna, does that mean that it is not shining anywhere? The sun is shines forever – does it ever rise or set in reality? You may proceed with the recitation.”

The instruction demonstrates a fundamental axiom in spirituality - the omnipresence of the Lord, unbound by space and time, eternal, absolute and all-embracing.

**Godmother**









## 7. Some Facets of Her Divinity

Outlining the persona of a saint, a veritable incarnation of the Supreme, is hard, defining it is impossible. The humble devotee is able to see what the saint reveals by her grace. His own failings limit the understanding of the subtler aspects of the divine persona. A comprehension of these established truths is essential before making a foray in this chapter, which discussed certain specific aspects of Godmother's persona.

### (A) Amalgam of Pragmatism and Spiritual Power

Godmother's handling of worldly affairs is inspired by pragmatism. This can be best illustrated in her comprehensive guidance to the volunteer-devotees during the construction works at Sri Dattashram. She would instruct the devotees tasked with the construction and its oversight on which specific department to visit and when, as also the official they would need to meet, the correspondence to be addressed, the problems they would encounter and the solutions to overcome the same.

Her guidance to devotees in temporal matters is equally reflective of her innate practicality. The power acting on the material plane is well-versed with the lay of the land, the dominion over which it acts. Thus, when youth, unhappy and disgruntled with circumstances at work, approach her for a solution, she will rarely advise them to quit. Rather, she counsels them to work harder, after informing them the qualities they lack and how to imbibe them. Heeding her advice, the person finds the work environment favourable and thrives.

It is indeed amazing to see her guide diverse seekers from all walks of life, civil servants, businessmen and professionals alike. A graduate in medicine consults her on postgraduation and prospects, an industrialist on reviving his tottering enterprise, and the all-knowing saint guides all with equal dexterity and precision. Godmother has given invaluable and unfailing guidance and life lessons to countless souls for over six decades.

Godmother is a divine phenomenon and at the heart of this incarnation lies incomprehensible power that guides the mind to the Supreme, while conferring temporal success on the devotee. She transforms one's destiny by a glance and sets devotees on the spiritual path forever.

Several experiences reveal a unique blend of pragmatism and spirituality. Godmother is one with universal consciousness, the cosmic mind, and thus understands every thought in every mind.

One Diwali evening, at dusk, Godmother was seated under a *Neem* tree, conversing with devotees. A young man of twenty came for her *darshan*. It was his first visit to Godmother. After offering salutations to Godmother, the man introduced himself, gave his name and place of residence. She gazed at him intently for a few moments and began, "Your family has built a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. However, regular worship is not being offered at the temple. The *shiva-lingam* at the temple must be offered water everyday."

The youth nodded in affirmation and said, "I will go now, offer *bel* leaves and the like..." Godmother interrupted him, "No, not like that! Clean the temple first, perform *abhishek* and ritual worship, light a lamp before the Deity. Do this and you will succeed in your endeavour."

Her guidance bore fruit. The man's problem was material, but the solution spiritual – the worship of the auspicious and beneficent Lord.<sup>lix</sup>

At times, Godmother directs devotees to a particular duty or service at Sri Dattashram, based on their past *karma*, and its sincere performance serves to clear *karmic* debts.

Mangesh, a devotee, wondered how Godmother understood all languages, despite the lack of formal education. Godmother replied, "On this earth, milk, food and water tastes the same everywhere. The languages of animals are same throughout. The earth, in her divine form as Goddess *Prithvi*, *Sri Bhudevi*, understands all languages. If an individual becomes one with all creation, she

understands the very souls of others. Language ceases to be a barrier and the person comprehends everything automatically.”

Sri Gurudev Ranade of Nimbal, a revered spiritual luminary of the twentieth century, was reading an English book in the presence of his *guru*, Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj Umadikar. The Master casually asked Gurudev, “What are you reading?” Gurudev, labouring under the impression that his Master does not understand the English language, started explaining the contents of the work in their native tongue, Marathi. His *guru* interrupted him and gave a brief description of the contents of the entire book.

Gurudev was naturally astonished. He asked the Master, “Sir, how is it that you know the contents?” After all, the language barrier is very much a part of the human experience. The Master coolly replied, “*Ramraya*<sup>lx</sup>, who created the languages? Of course, God! Those who know the Creator know his creation too.” It is in this light that one can fathom Godmother’s comprehension of all languages.

### (B) Austerities

The inner spiritual life of this gentle and ever-smiling saint is intensely austere. Godmother, who is a *tapasvini*, a perfect yogic master, performs *sadhana* in the form of incessant repetition of the holy name. She fasts for days on end. At times, she does not have a meal for six months at a stretch, she will drink only a little milk or water. Despite this, she is perfectly active and engaged in her untiring spiritual ministry at the Ashram.

Earlier, her innocent devotees would feel concern due to her eccentric dietary regime and request Sri Datta Maharaj, her mentor, to intervene in the matter and counsel her. Sri Maharaj would, for their sake, say something to Godmother at times, just to humour the devotees.

One day however, the Master responded to the complaint directly and told them, “She is a perfect *yogini*. She does not require a regular intake of food or water.”

One afternoon in the mid-nineties, it must have been half past twelve, Shashi, the engineer in charge of *Sri Paduka Mandir*, arrived at Godmother’s home for lunch. Sandhya, her daughter-in-law, had arranged plates for everyone except Godmother. Shashi found it strange to find his gracious host missing. Besides, Shashi wanted to offer salutations to Godmother before meals as was his wont. Therefore, he inquired with Sandhya about Godmother, to learn that she was on the terrace.

Shashi tiptoed to the terrace. The concrete surface of the roof was burning like embers. In that scorching heat, Godmother was seated on the terrace floor, deep in meditation. Her eyes were half-closed in a state of transcendence. Shashi was stunned.

It took her half an hour to descend on the plane of normal consciousness. She looked at Shashi and exclaimed, “Why are you standing in the sun?”

Shashi humbly replied, “Shall I make a canopy shade for you, covered with grass, so that you can meditate on the terrace, to protect you from the scorching heat?” Godmother simply shook her head, a little hesitantly, “No, no!” Her life is full of such extraordinary events.

### (C) Humour

It was the late nineties. Godmother was in poor health for a couple of weeks, nothing serious, but her doctor had advised rest at home. A devotee had arranged a colour television with a video player at her residence at the Ashram, so that she could watch Sri Datta Maharaj’s discourses of *Srimad Bhagwat*<sup>lxi</sup> with her family and that would keep her from feeling bored and restless.

In fact, the discourses were the only way to keep Godmother inside, as she was prone to step out and survey the ongoing construction with Shashi and his team. In the evenings, after work, Shashi joined Godmother and her family, as he too loved his *guru*’s discourses.

One day, Godmother was absorbed in the discourse. Her family and Shashi were listening attentively too. Two hours passed. In one scene in the video, Sri Maharaj took a break and asked his daughter-in-law to offer some milk or coffee to Godmother.

Here at her home at *Sri Dattashram*, Godmother called her sons, “Hey, Dilip, Raju, , pause the film for a bit. Ask Sandhya to give me some coffee or milk!” Coffee was served and it was after Godmother finished her coffee that the play button was pressed. The discourse resumed post-coffee here, the same way it resumed on the screen. The incident, full of humour as it is, shows her reverence for Sri Datta Maharaj.

This must have been in the early or mid-nineties. Sri Datta Maharaj had come to see Godmother off as she was returning to Jalna after spending a few days with Sri Maharaj and his family. A devotee from Jalna had arrived at Maharaj’s Pune home in a Tata Estate car, a sedan with an unusually large boot, to drive her back to Sri Dattashram.

Sri Datta Maharaj glanced at the rather unique vehicle and remarked in jest, “This dickey is huge – it can accommodate Godmother!” For Godmother, that was it! She insisted that she would lie in the boot of the vehicle throughout the journey. Despite repeated entreaties, she remained firm. Sri Maharaj’s family put a mattress in the boot for Godmother and throughout the entire journey, she was lying in the boot of the car.

#### (D) Perpetual Guidance

In the course of a conversation with Shashi, Godmother shared the inner workings of her mentor-pupil relation with Sri Datta Maharaj:

“I don’t know how Sri Maharaj does it. Every moment, Sri Maharaj is guiding my actions. The perfect Master instructs me on the what, when and how of every act! I can now understand how Lord Dattatreya spoke to Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati. The idol of the Triumvirate got angry and upset at the saint, even punished him on occasion! It was at the command of Lord Dattatreya that the saint would act and behave. I can appreciate all this now. Shashi, Sri Maharaj speaks to me, instructs me. This interaction takes place deep in my inner consciousness, my *antaryaam*. The inspiration and the instruction issue from within.”

“Sometimes I tell my daughter-in-law, ‘*Please serve me lunch, I am very hungry.*’ But, in my heart, Sri Maharaj orders, ‘*Wait for some time, don’t have lunch just yet!*’ Everyone at home gets confused. They discuss among themselves, ‘*What is this now? First, Mother says ‘serve’, then ‘wait’.*’ No one understands my behaviour, which they naturally find erratic. ‘*Why is Godmother behaving like this?*’ But I act in keeping with the Master’s instructions.”

“That’s not all! Sri Maharaj instructs me to act in one way in front of the devotees and later appears in my inner consciousness and directs me to do the exact opposite! The devotees think, ‘*Godmother is so adamant, she doesn’t even listen to Sri Datta Maharaj, her mentor!*’ Truly, I don’t understand Sri Maharaj’s actions!”

Thus ended the praise and the plaint.

#### (E) Knowledge of the Subtle World

One day, an elderly volunteer-devotee raised a concern – why was Godmother letting some of the sweetmeats and fresh fruits offered by devotees to rot? She could easily distribute them among children or feed the poor. The gentleman had been offering tireless service to Sri Dattashram for several years. Despite his devotion for Godmother, he was unable to accept her approach. The sheer improvidence of it caused him distress.

A few weeks later, some Pune-based devotees of Sri Datta Maharaj had gifted the biography of His Holiness Sri Loknath Tirth Swami Maharaj, a spiritual luminary and the champion of the *shaktipaat* form of spiritual initiation.

The senior devotee who was naturally inclined towards spiritual works, began reading the biography. The following dialogue between the saint and a disciple caught his attention:





**Sri Datta Maharaj visiting Godmother at Sri Guru Niwas, her family home in Sri Dattashram**

The disciple queried: ‘Sir, you accept gifts, sweets and fruits, offered to you by devotees. Some offerings, you distribute among the devotees, while others lie rotting in a corner, or you ask them to be immersed in the river, or in the Ganges. Could you kindly illumine the reason?’

The Master replied: ‘Some offerings are brought by devotees out of true love and respect for me, with a pure intent, without any expectation. I both understand and appreciate such love and devotion and accept these offerings and distribute them amongst everyone as prasad. However, other offerings, no matter how expensive or precious they are, are gifted with a different motive. The intent of the giver is full of desire and expectation of material fulfilment, sometimes the giver’s karma is extremely evil, he is a grave sinner or an evil-minded person. His offerings are like poison. While I have the power to digest the venom, my devotees will suffer if they consume the sweets and fruits. That is why I protect my innocent children by keeping such offerings away.’

The passage brought tears to the senior devotee’s eyes and he ran to Godmother. In a voice choked with guilt, he began, “Mother, I am sorry, I was wrong, please forgive me!” Godmother replied, “Sir, calm down, please calm down, what happened?”

The devotee regained his composure and recounted the entire incident. Godmother, the unassuming saint, burst out laughing, “O...how silly of me! Even I was not aware of all this! Maharaj made all this happen! He cares about his devotees!”

### (F) Philanthropy

Godmother is unstinting in her charity, which is an integral aspect of her nature. Her philanthropy is of the liberal kind and finds its origin in the divine motherhood, the ideal of all-encompassing, universal love for humanity that she stands for. “Give unto others and God will give unto you,” is her motto. Thus, the gifts and donations received at Sri Dattashram are spent in charity.

On the humanitarian side, the relief works of Sri Dattashram under Godmother’s guidance deserve mention. The Ashram undertook monumental relief work during the floods of river *Krishna* in 2019 and Covid-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022. Sri Dattashram received high praise from the State authorities.

In August 2019, *Sri Dattashram* sent food and essential commodities for thousands of families in the Kolhapur-Sangli region, which was severely marred by the *Krishna* river floods. Essentials included medicines and toiletries, cleaning and housekeeping equipments, mats and mattresses, gas stoves, clothes for women, cooking vessels and utensils, stationery items.

Additionally, ten and half tonnes of fodder was sent for the cattle and financial assistance was rendered to *Sri Nrusinh Saraswati Swami Datta Dev Sansthan* at *Sri Narsoba Wadi* in the region. One item in the list of essentials specially reveals Godmother’s mindfulness - a hundred and twenty kilogrammes of alum. Alum is a homely yet highly effective solution for water purification and this was necessary for those families, given the condition of water supplied during and after the floods.

Another illustration of philanthropy was in August 2021, when the Ashram sent food for the flood-ravaged town of Shirol in Kolhapur district, together with twenty tonnes of cattle fodder for the farmer community.

Between 30<sup>th</sup> March and 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic was raging in the region, *Sri Dattashram* distributed more than a lakh and twenty thousand cooked food packets amongst the pandemic-affected populace. Thousands of distressed souls were fed every day. Devotees volunteered their tireless service to accomplish the feat under Godmother’s able direction. The Ashram worked together with several state and public-spirited bodies to help the region tide over the most excruciating phases. What a festival of love and benevolence, a celebration of humanity!

Throughout the testing phases of the pandemic, the good saint remained calm and optimistic, she brooked no despondency. Her dauntless spirit of generosity reassured thousands of souls, her grace rekindled the spark of joy in their hearts and homes.<sup>lxii</sup>

Godmother is eager to extend personalized support to those in genuine need of aid. Over the past six decades, she has helped countless people in myriad ways.

For instance, Godmother gave someone a sewing machine together with sound advice on economy and finances that improved her lot. Godmother would ask this lady to stitch blouses for herself, dresses for idols in the personal worship of Sri Datta Maharaj, and pretty dresses for young girls during *yajnas* and festivals. Pleased with her sincere work, Godmother told the devotee, “Sri Datta Maharaj has blessed your hands. You need not worry.”

Godmother got her sarees pressed from the lady’s son. While ironing Godmother’s clothes, the son would sense a beautiful, heavenly fragrance. After a few years, the boy lost his job. Unfazed by the circumstance, he took up tailoring. With the grace of Godmother, the youth prospered and from the handsome earnings, his family built their own home and set up a huge showroom and tailoring workshop in town.

Over the years, Sri Dattashram has also offered service to other spiritual organizations and institutes by hosting programmes, such as *parayan saptahas*. The Ashram regularly felicitates *warkaris*, devotees of Lord Vishnu who journey to Pandharpur on foot, when they pass through Jalna. Godmother perceives the form of Lord Vishnu in their pure souls and gifts them beautiful sarees and clothing, high quality shawls and blankets and the like.

## 8. Her Message

The message of a saint echoes through the ages. Incarnations rarely descend for a single teaching. They illuminate the trail that leads the devoted to the Divine, bringing to the fore an entire way of life.

From her life, one learns that God heeds prayer, that the Lord of the Universe accepts the offering of devotion. We have seen how her advent has animated the path of devotion for countless men and women. Her life is an offering at the lotus feet of the Lord.

Godmother says that, in the present age, *Kali-yug*, the repetition of the holy name, *naam-japa*, feeding the poor, *anna-daan*, and helping those in need in general, bear great importance.

### *Repetition of the Name of God: Naam-Japa*

In the present age, life is short, joy is fleeting and sorrow unending. Give yourself unto God. He will save you in hard times. True to her words, devotees and seekers serve at Sri Dattashram in the thousands and find peace and happiness.

She believes that it is extremely difficult to perceive the real nature of one’s soul. To attain this self-realization, one must engage in the repetition of the holy name. The name, *naam*, and form, *roop*, are but one. While repeating the holy name, the devotee should visualize the form of the Deity. To get the direct vision of the Godhead, one must maintain strict discipline. For one, the devotee should avoid the company of unholy people and atheists. They must not mix too freely with the crowd, nor speak too much.

The heart should constantly chant the name of the Lord. At the end, the name will merge with the form. One will discover the true nature of the soul and once this happens, the continuum of birth and death, the life-cycle as it is, comes to a permanent halt.

The name given to a devotee or a disciple by the Master, *guru*, is based on one’s own *upasana* and *sadhana*, spiritual practice, in the past lives. The merit accumulated from past lives is carried forward and ultimately elevates the devotee.

It is for this reason that Godmother advises people to avoid worldly attachments and be ever-conscious and mindful of the goal. In the ultimate destination of the soul, there is no darkness, no light, no sun, no moon, as expressed in the celebrated verse in the Mundaka Upanishad, Verse 2.2.10, which reads thus:



*na tatra sūryo bhāti na candratārakaṃ nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto'yamagniḥ|  
tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvaṃ tasya bhāsā sarvamidam vibhāti || 10 ||*

The verse translates as: the sun shines not there, nor the moon and the stars. Nor do these lightnings shine. How could this fire? All shine after him who shines. All this is illumined by his radiance.

### *Feeding the Poor: Anna-Daan*

It is her teaching and a truth established by all other saints and divine incarnations that God himself eats through the mouths of the devotees. Good *sattvic* food consumed at a holy place generates pure intelligence, which is necessary for devotion. Such intelligence drives progress both on the spiritual as well as material planes.

Countless devotees partake food at *Sri Dattashram* and several dedicated souls offer their time, energy and resources as service here. Godmother maintains that the Lord does not remain indebted to the devotee. When the devotee offers service to Supreme, He, who is the Sustainer of the Universe and ever-hungry for devotion, looks after the welfare of his devotee and rewards them handsomely.

The golden thread that weaves together the fabric of her spiritual ministry is selfless action. She regards work as a service to God. The counsel of Lord Krishna in the *Bhagvat Gita* on *Karma Yoga*, the ideal that modern sages like Swami Vivekananda actualized through their life, finds an effortless expression in her life.



***Prasadalaya: Dining-halls dedicated for Anna-daan***



## IV. Grace

The tales of Godmother's grace, her *leelas*, are spread over five decades. Her journey as a saint began in the seventies with the blessings of two saints: her father, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj, and her guru, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj. It is impossible to enumerate all the instances of her divine grace. What follows, therefore, is only an assorted selection. These true stories recounted by responsible devotees from diverse walks of life represent hard facts, personal experiences witnessed first-hand by the devotees.<sup>lxiii</sup>

### (1)

The story dates to the eighties. Vasanti, a two-year old girl, whose family was devoted to Godmother, was taken severely ill. She was suffering from chickenpox, a deadly disease in those days. Her mother and her sister-in-law sought guidance from Godmother, who told them to offer worship at the temple of the Mother Goddess and the *Awli* tree, in the form of circumambulations and start *naam-japa*. The women abided by the advice.

The disease was expected to last for seven days in the normal course. The family felt reassured on account of Godmother's benediction. It was the festival of colours, *Holi*, and there was joy and mirth in the air! Vasanti's aunt was keeping her company while the rest of the family was engaged in the traditional celebrations on this auspicious day.

In the middle of the day, Vasanti's illness took a turn for the worse. The child seemed gravely distressed. Her fever was rising despite the treatment. The situation at home grew tense. All were in two minds – should they take the child to the doctor or Godmother?

In this commotion, they saw Vasanti's eyes roll back all of a sudden. Her little head had fallen to the side. The family was terrified. The sign was clear - the child was dead.

The child's aunt asked her mother, "What should we do? Do we rush her to the hospital or Godmother?" Fearing the worst, the mother had an emotional collapse. She cried, "Godmother....!"

It was two-thirty in the afternoon. The family rushed to Godmother's place with the little girl's body. The mother was beside herself with grief. Godmother rushed out urgently and inquired, "What happened?" One of the family members informed her, "Godmother, see, Vasanti just collapsed. Her eyes have rolled back and her head fell to her side. Her body is growing colder by the minute. What shall we do?"

Godmother replied, "Nothing has happened! There is no need to be afraid. Light some incense near the child. All of you form a circle around her and start repeating the holy name, '*Digambara Digambara Shripad Vallabh Digambara*', the *Digambara mahamantra* of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati! Don't stop the *naam-japa* till the incense is burning."

Godmother sat herself in front of the lifeless child, her rosary in hand, and went into meditation. The family sat in a semi-circle. One of them lighted incense near the child's head and everyone started repeating the *mantra* in that terrified state.

The scene lasted for an hour. The incense was all burnt out. All of a sudden, one of them noticed that the girl had started breathing. The breathing was deep, as it is during sleep. Seeing this, the family redoubled their chanting. Their faces lit up with wonder as they repeated the holy chant with renewed fervour.

A few minutes later, the child woke up, stretching and yawning. She looked at everyone around with a sense of surprise, unable to comprehend the scene! At last, she rose and sat up straight, smiling sweetly at her mother. A bright new day had dawned in Vasanti's life that afternoon. She actually asked for her toothbrush!

By the grace of Godmother, the child was reborn. To date, the family celebrates this day as her birthday.



## ( 2 )

The story dates back to the early eighties. Ram, Godmother's devotee, was involved in a dispute. The matter was in court. He had engaged an accomplished lawyer to represent him: a man with a sterling reputation in the courts. This story is about this learned Advocate.

The *Sahib* was fairly religious minded and God-fearing, but showed a characteristic aversion for Godmother, despite his wife being an ardent devotee. The Advocate felt that godmen and saints were hocus pocus and to stay away from them was a mark of wisdom in these treacherous times.

The wife tried very hard to convince him to visit Godmother but once, but the lawyer did not budge. When the good lady narrated her plight to Godmother, she casually responded, "When the time is right, everything will happen as you desire. Meantime, you continue with your worship and *naam-japa*!"

Here, the last hearing of Ram's matter was at hand. Ram visited Godmother for her darshan and upon offering salutations, said, "Godmother, tomorrow is the final hearing of the matter. May your blessings be upon the case."

Godmother was quick to respond, "Ask your lawyer to read the book that I tell you about. It is a fat volume, a veritable tome, so I shall tell you the relevant page number, column number, paragraph number, etc. Just ask the lawyer to prepare himself on the basis of the caselaw cited therein."

The volume dated back to the year 1942. Godmother told Ram the precise location of the book in the lawyer's office, which was lying on one of the upper racks gathering dust.

Ram went straight to the lawyer's office to convey her message. After listening to his client patiently, the learned lawyer casually enquired, "How far has Godmother studied?" Ram replied, "Till fourth standard! But don't worry about all that. Please check whether the book, page and paragraph numbers, etc. she has given are correct."

Intrigued, the lawyer retrieved the volume from his library. He began studying the paragraph. He was startled. The paragraph was the perfect fit for the case and deserved to be placed before the Judge at the hearing. The *Sahib*'s confidence received the much-needed boost and he exclaimed with gusto, "Superb! *Rambhau*, take it from me, we shall win the case tomorrow!"

Sure enough, the lawyer studied the relevant paragraph thoroughly. The following day, before entering the Court, he offered salutations to Godmother in his heart, after a mental apology for his conduct thus far. In court, he presented the arguments before the Judge, the arguments founded on the strength of the paragraph in the old volume that Godmother had directed. The arguments were concluded that day and the judgment was reserved.

At the hearing fixed for the pronouncement, the Judge announced that Ram had succeeded. The Judge was thoroughly impressed with the lawyer's arguments and made special mention of that paragraph from the vintage authority.

Later that evening, the stalwart accompanied Ram for Godmother's *darshan*. They made an offering of sweets and prostrated before her. Now it was Godmother's turn to act surprised. She modestly said, "*Vakil Sahib*! What are you doing? I have studied only till the fourth standard and you are such a highly educated and accomplished lawyer! Please get up! It is not proper to salute me like this."

Ultimately, Godmother accepted the salutation. The lawyer sat with her, discussing spirituality for six hours straight. Godmother resolved all his doubts and difficulties.

## ( 3 )

The year was 1982 and the month May. A quaint old town called Badnapur lies between Aurangabad and Nanded, near Jalna.

A school-teacher's son, a lad of fourteen, was enjoying the annual summer break. The lad finished his lunch and ran off to play with his mates. It was scorching hot outside, so the gang decided to play indoor – cards, carrom and the like. They had a wonderful time. Four hours later, they called it a day and the school-teacher's son started for home. The time was around five o'clock.

As dusk turned to night, his parents grew anxious. There was no sign of their boy. The couple learnt from his friends that he had left for home hours ago.

Two days passed. The poor couple was at the end of their tether now. Their searches were in vain. They offered prayers at all the local temples. On the second day, the local priest told them about Godmother in the course of conversation.

The couple rushed to Jalna immediately along with few of their friends. Godmother received them warmly and reassured them that the child was alive and would return home. She asked that all of them should perform *naam-japa*. She asked for a shirt belonging to the boy. One of the school-teacher's companions fetched the shirt from their home.

Godmother had them sit in front of the images of Lord Dattatreya, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj and Sri Kajalkar Maharaj. They offered incense to the deities and repeated the holy name till the incense was over. The holy ash from the incense was smeared on the boy's shirt. After all this, Godmother assured the party, "You may return home and continue the repetition of the holy name. There is no cause for concern! Your son will return by himself within three days! Repeat the name with complete faith and devotion as many times as possible!"

The couple and their companions ate the *prasad* given by Godmother, offered salutations to her and returned to Badnapur with a composed mind. The couple together with their entire family continued *naam-japa*.

Now, the other side of the tale. The boy left his friends' place that day, late in the afternoon. As he was walking back home, at a highway crossing, he encountered a huge truck headed in his direction at high speed. "Will the truck kill me?", these were the last thoughts he remembers now. The boy froze.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself sleeping on a bench at some railway station. He was at Manmad Junction, a town nearly two hundred kilometres from Badnapur, where he had frozen at the crossing. He woke up utterly confused. All he could remember was that day – he played with his friends, then left for home and the huge truck racing towards him!

Questions raced in his mind - "How did I reach here? Who brought me? What day is it today?" He could not fathom anything. The mind naturally moved to his home, "My parents must be worried for me! How do I return home? I do not have any money on me." The boy was very hungry. He began pacing the platform anxiously. The station was packed with passengers and goods, as the major trains were set to depart. The outside was as chaotic as the inside.

An hour passed. By then, the major trains had left and the scene grew quiet. The station-master casually walked up to the platform. When he noticed this boy, he somehow sensed that this was the same child who was reported missing a couple of days ago.

The station-master gently initiated conversation with the boy and learnt the whole story. The kind man offered him tea and calmed his nerves. Ultimately, the station-master, at the boy's request, put the lad onto the train to Nanded. The train halted at Jalna where the boy got off and found his way home to Badnapur on the following day.

#### ( 4 )

December, the last month in the Gregorian calendar, was a tricky month for Gopal, a resident of Mumbai. His leaves at work were almost all utilized, all but three. At Godmother's instruction, Gopal had recently visited Sri Datta Maharaj, his *guru*, at Pune. He would always seek *darshan* of his *guru* before visiting Godmother at Jalna. His friend Uddhav was accompanying him to Jalna this time.

At Pune, Gopal intimated Sri Datta Maharaj about the situation regarding his balance leaves before leaving for Jalna.

Gopal spent a day in the company of Godmother and the other devotees. He sought permission to leave for Mumbai on the following morning. He had to, as only two days of leave were balance and he needed both: one for a social function, *viz.* to attend the marriage of Shashi's son Harshad, and the second for a spiritual one, *viz.* to spend time with Sri Datta Maharaj, who was visiting his city, Mumbai, later that month. He was, of course, labouring under the impression that Godmother would not insist on his staying over for longer on this occasion, considering his situation. Sri Datta Maharaj, for one, was strictly against the idea of missing work.

Godmother has been against whiling away time in socializing and that included attending weddings, social events or parties, whether they be of family, relatives or friends. She believes that time is best spent in spiritual practices, *naam-japa* and the company of saints. The rest, the worldly matters are entirely secondary.

As soon as Gopal broached the subject with Godmother, she retorted, "Why do you need to spend the leave on attending Harshad's wedding? Is it so important for you to be there?" Gopal answered promptly, "Yes! Godmother, it is essential to attend the wedding. Sri Datta Maharaj will attend the function to bless the couple and I am charged with waiting on Sri Maharaj!"

Godmother: "You do not need to be there. And, what of Sri Maharaj visiting Mumbai? Let him visit. You do not need to go to the station to receive him." Saying thus, Godmother indirectly conveyed her view.

Gopal decided to take a holistic view of the situation and decided to leave. In those days, there were but a few private buses between Jalna and Mumbai. Gopal and his friend ran from pillar to post in search of bus tickets and somehow managed to procure two tickets of a '*Humsafar Travels*' bus at the end of the day. They went back to Godmother and happily informed her of their plan. She did not respond. But her face turned grave.

The bus was slated to leave at 9 o'clock in the night. The pair of them had to reach the bus stop at least fifteen minutes before the scheduled departure. It was getting late, but their conversation with Godmother lingered on. Finally, when Gopal and Uddhav set out to leave, there was no time to get a rickshaw. Fortunately, at the Ashram, they met devotees with scooters, who took them to the bus stand in the nick of time.

The stand was a small, roofless shed with a young boy was in charge. Gopal and others made the usual inquiries about the bus. They were informed that the bus would reach the stop in about fifteen minutes. They requested the boy to inform them no sooner than the bus arrives and stood chatting by the side of the road.

Every five minutes, they would check with the attendant, who would tell them that the bus was due soon. After a few minutes, a bus arrived at the stop, but it stood facing Jalna. When they asked the chap again, he informed them that this bus had come from outside and he assured them that they would be alerted as soon as the Mumbai bus arrived. Later, a bus for Pune arrived at the stand. The young attendant got busy in assisting the passengers get on and off on these two buses. Gopal and others casually made a mental note and dived back into their discussion.

After a while, the buses left the stand and the chap went away. He returned on the scene only at 10 o'clock at which time Uddhav asked him a little sternly, "Hey, what is this? Why is it taking so long? When will our bus come?" The chap looked a little puzzled and said, "Sirs, your bus left!"

Uddhav fumed at the reply and came close to hitting the chap when Gopal stalled him, "Sir, stop! Please don't hit him! I am finding the whole thing a bit mysterious." Gopal turned to the boy and asked, "Pay attention to what I am asking! Don't be scared! We will not hit you, but you must tell us the truth. You were supposed to alert us once the bus reached the stand, right? Then, why did you not do your duty?"



The attendant replied, “*Saheb*, what are you saying? Why, the bus arrived, I escorted you into the bus and seated you in the bus. However, a few minutes later, just when the bus was about to leave, you told me that you had changed your minds and got off. I had to hunt for two alternate passengers to fill your seats, which I managed albeit with difficulty. Please, take your ticket fee back.!”

The devotees were properly stunned. Only Gopal realized what happened – this was Godmother’s play, her *leela*. The devotees returned to the Ashram to find Godmother seated there, conversing with devotees.

Seeing Gopal and Uddhav return, Godmother exclaimed, “How is it that you both returned? How did you miss the bus? You are so careful while travelling, what with the reaching, noting every board, every sign carefully...” Saying thus, she burst out laughing!

Gopal said, “Godmother, a few months ago, when Shankar’s brother was to leave for Nanded by train from here and you engaged him in conversation till after the scheduled time for departure. At the station, no one could understand why the train was not leaving. Everything was in order and ready – the motorman, the guard, the signal, everything, but the train was not leaving. That evening, you let Shankar’s brother leave the Ashram a proper half-hour after departure time. It was only after he entered his compartment that the train left the station. No one could fathom this event. That day, he caught the train. Today, we missed the bus. The cause was the same. If you really wanted us to stay, why did you not say so?”

Godmother replied with smile, “You don’t follow when I speak plainly.”

A beautiful verse in a hymn in *Sri Durga Saptashati* demystifies the episode. The verse goes: “*Ya devi sarva bhuteshu bhranti-rupena samsthitha | Namastasye namastasye namastasye namo namaha ||*” Meaning that, the Divine Mother is present as confusion and delusion in every being.

In this tale of the missed bus, Godmother created an illusion in the mind of the attendant boy that he had indeed helped Gopal and Uddhav get on the bus and that they changed their travel plans and got off the bus. On the other hand, with Gopal and the others, she interfered by blocking their perception of the Mumbai-bound bus. Neither Gopal nor other devotees could see the bus that duly arrived at the stand at the appointed hour and waited there till all the passengers got on the bus, except Gopal and Uddhav, that is!

## ( 5 )

This happened in the early nineties. Gayatri belonged to the upper echelons of Cosmo Films Ltd., one of the leading manufacturers of packaging films in the country. The company has its headquarters in New Delhi, where Gayatri was stationed. The company had a huge manufacturing plant in Aurangabad. Gayatri was visiting the plant for work. She had an occasion to interact Amar, the manager at the plant at Aurangabad, in the course of their meetings.

Gayatri walked up to Amar after the last meeting and said, “The real purpose of my visit is different. Is there a place around here that seems like a temple but is not a typical one, but, at the same time, one that you cannot deny to be a temple? And is there a lady who resides in such place?”

Amar, for his part, checked all the local temples and spiritual institutions in Aurangabad, but could not find such a place. Finally, Amar called his maternal aunt to inquire about such a place.

As it happened, the lady, his aunt, was devoted to Godmother. The following day, she took Amar and Gayatri to Sri Dattashram. At the entrance, Gayatri asked them to halt for a moment and said, “Now, I will tell you what is inside the gate!” Saying thus, she described the entire place with absolute precision. This was Sri Dattashram in its original form, without idols. It had a prayer hall dedicated to the images of the saints, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj and Sri Kajalkar Maharaj, and the deities, Lord Dattatreya and Sri Ram Darbaar. A wall was adorned with the *Digambara Mahamantra*, the holy chant of Lord Dattatreya.

The party went up to see Godmother. Gayatri exclaimed, “This is the lady! I have been seeing this lady in my dreams for the last two years. I don’t understand what she says.” Godmother said to her, “That is the reason why I called you. Your business was merely an excuse.” That day, Godmother gave her spiritual guidance and allayed her doubts.

And this is how Amar was introduced to Godmother. Sitting in the prayer hall, he wondered, “This place is the abode of Lord Dattatreya, but I am a devotee of Goddess Sri Durga, the Divine Mother.”

Amar’s ancestral home at Beed was a fortress with a temple dedicated to the Divine Mother. In the past, the idol of the Divine Mother had baskets full of gold ornaments. Several litres of milk would be poured on the deity as part of the sacred bath ritual, *abhishek*.

Amar went for Godmother’s *darshan* afterwards. As Godmother recounted these facts with unalloyed precision to Amar, he saw the living form of the Goddess in the place of Godmother. Terrified, Amar ran out of the room. In the course of the conversation that ensued upon his return, Amar candidly confessed to Godmother about his reservation of the worship of Lord Dattatreya. Godmother resolved the doubt with a smile, “Who is the Goddess? She is the power, *shakti*, of the Triumvirate, the holy trinity, Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva.”<sup>lxiv</sup>

Amar was left speechless.

Godmother advised Amar to continue the worship of the Divine Mother. He used to read *Sri Durga Saptashati*, the spiritual text of hymns with seven hundred verses dedicated to Goddess Durga. Godmother asked him to visit Sri Dattashram and read the text systematically, in *parayan* form, every Sunday.

One Sunday, Godmother asked Amar to go to his home directly.” Godmother obviously meant Aurangabad, where Amar was residing with his family. But, Amar conveniently took her as referring to Beed, where his ancestral house was situate. He started for Beed. His car broke down *en route* that evening and he had to wait on the road for more than twelve hours before help arrived.

Once Godmother asked Amar to get his boss, the Chairman of the company, to meet her. Amar dutifully conveyed the invitation but the Chairman kept postponing the visit. Godmother, who was very keen, told Amar, “Amar, there are direct flights between New Delhi and Aurangabad. Your boss can easily visit the Ashram in the morning and return back the same day.” Still, the boss did not turn up.

A few weeks later, the share price of the company started declining rapidly. A highly reputed company had recently entered the market. The competitor was in the process of setting up its plant in Aurangabad itself. Amar rushed to Godmother for guidance.

She spoke calmly, “I could foresee this. That is why I was asking your boss to visit the Ashram. Now, you begin *parayans* of *Sri Durga Saptashati*.” Amar completed did several *parayans*. A peculiar thing happened. The competitor changed its plan and moved to Nashik. The share price of Amar’s company steadily rose back to its former level. No one in the stock market understood the reason.

In 2005, Amar was transferred to a small town in Gujarat, Karjan, where his company had a manufacturing unit. It was a small plant, worked by twenty employees, mostly workmen. The company bosses, in fact, wanted to shut it down. Amar felt concern for the welfare of the employees who stood to lose their gainful employment if the bosses’ plan materialized.

Coincidentally, the same time, Godmother was visiting *Sri Nareshwar*, the sacred place dedicated to Sri Rangavadhoot Maharaj, who was a direct disciple of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati and a spiritual luminary in his own right; and also, *Sri Garudeshwar*, the temple dedicated to Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati.

Amar took the opportunity and met Godmother at Sri Garudeshwar, with the workmen. He narrated the predicament to Godmother. She said, “If they do what I say, they will not be out of their

jobs. Tell them to visit this place, Sri Garudeshwar, once a week to offer their prayers at the lotus feet of the saint. On the rest of the days, they should offer worship at Sri Nareshwar. If they do this, the boss will not shut the plant.” The workmen followed her advice and the plant continued its operations. The poor workers followed her advice. The bosses’ plans for the plant did not actualize.

The following tale recalls the protective role of Godmother. Amar was visiting Godmother with his wife and children, a son and a daughter. When the family was about to leave, Godmother said to Amar, “Amar, you will find a series of jewellery stores on the road back home. Buy four gold rings from any of these stores and wear one ring in each finger, without fail.” Amar found her counsel a little odd, but nodded in assent out of respect for the saint.

About an hour into the journey back home, Amar’s son started complaining of great, shooting pains in the abdomen. The boy had to be admitted to a hospital, the nearest one they could locate in the vicinity. The pathology reports revealed appendicitis and the case was serious enough to require immediate surgical intervention. The doctors decided to operate the following day. Amar went to break the news to the son. The son was in extreme agony. In that state, he pleaded with Amar “Dad, forget the operation! Just do what Godmother told us. Get those rings.”

Amar ran out of the hospital and the frantic search for a jewellery store began. It was already late evening and most stores had closed for the day. Only one jeweller was open. Thanking his stars, Amar purchased the rings and wore them.

In a short while, the boy started recovering. The agony ceased. When they ran the tests the next morning, the reports were all clear. The boy was discharged from the hospital within a couple of hours.

When the incident was narrated to Godmother by Amar a couple of days later, she said to Amar, “That is why I told you to wear the gold rings. His appendix was about to burst and I wanted to stitch it with the gold rings....”

At Godmother’s request, Amar dedicated Sunday mornings to *parayanas* of *Sri Durga Saptashati*, the scriptural text dedicated to Goddesses *Sri Mahalaxmi*, *Sri Mahakali* and *Sri Mahasaraswati*, all aspects of the Divine Mother. On one such lovely Sunday morning, Amar finished his *parayan* and offered salutations to Godmother. That day, Amar was in a hurry as he had to report for work to prepare for the commencement of a new phase of operations at the plant. The entire manufacturing set-up had to be taken apart, cleaned and properly lubricated first. The workers and engineers at the plant were directed to finish the preparatory works by early afternoon so that they could commence trials upon Amar’s return. The Chairman of the company was scheduled to visit the plant the following day for inspection.

Godmother noticed Amar’s restlessness while he was seeking her leave. She remarked, “Amar, did you finish your reading?” Amar nodded. Godmother asked, “You seem to be in a hurry to leave?” Amar explained the position. Godmother inquired, “So, who is working at the plant at present?” Amar responded, “My colleagues have taken the entire equipment apart. As soon as I return, we will re-assemble it and start production.”

Godmother smiled and said, “Amar, do you know that your employees have misarranged the connections of the principal machine back at the factory? The northern connector is mixed up with the eastern one and the western one with the southern. Now, go to the factory and set things right in front of your boss this evening.”

Amar was bemused. His boss was arriving only the following day as per the schedule intimated at the plant. In this confused state of mind, Amar reached at 4 p.m. Upon reaching the plant, his colleague announced, “Sir, the machinery is ready, but the plant is not working. The boss has been calling incessantly.” Amar remembered what Godmother had told him in the morning.



Amar went up to the machine. While he was checking it, they received a call from the Chairman, “I have reached Ahmednagar and shall reach the factory in an hour and a half.” This was the second event Godmother had warned about– the unexpected arrival of the boss.

Amar quietly checked the connections and found them to be off. The mistakes were precisely as Godmother had warned – the third element of the warning.

Sure enough, the boss arrived at the plant and started blasting the engineers in charge. Several rounds of trial and error ensued and ultimately failed before Amar interjected. Amar spoke respectfully, “Let’s check the connectors once.” This angered the Chairman further, “Don’t talk rubbish.” But, Amar persisted, “Sir, there is no harm in checking, right?” The boss relented. The electrical engineers at site began checking the connectors to find that they had been set incorrectly.

The connectors were set right and the manufacturing resumed. The boss praised Amar for his presence of mind and intelligence. Amar knew in his heart that it was Godmother’s foresight that had saved the day for him!

## ( 6 )

The events that follow are of recent vintage, the year must be 1992-93. Prabhat, a devotee of Godmother and Sri Datta Maharaj, was into the business of manufacture of chemicals supplied to multinational companies like Kodak and Agfa. His firm had its production plant in Paithan, Maharashtra. The rough and tumble of commerce is ubiquitous. Those couple of years were particularly tough for Prabhat’s firm.

It was in these dire circumstances that his firm received a huge order, three tonnes in volume, from Agfa, a market leader in imaging technology. The order, successfully delivered, would significantly allay his financial woes.

The firm worked hard to fulfil the order on time. However, to Prabhat’s shock, Agfa rejected the product and asked the firm to collect the delivered goods. His firm would be in the red, a rather deep shade at that, if Agfa carried out its threat.

Prabhat needed divine intervention. He rushed to Godmother without wasting any time. In a piteous tone, Prabhat implored to her, “Godmother! Please protect me this time! A huge order has been rejected by Agfa, on the ground that it does not meet their requirement. I am unable to pinpoint the deficiency in the production process. Please guide me.”

Godmother replied, “Don’t get upset. Sit in the hall and repeat the holy name. This time your order will be accepted. But, please take care on the next occasion.”

Prabhat rejoined, “But, Godmother, I do not know what is wrong with the product. Why is this happening?”

Godmother: “What did Agfa inform you when they rejected the order? What is their required specification?”

Prabhat was a bit hesitant. The problem involved a complex issue in the field of chemical engineering, and a highly technical one at that. He was not sure if Godmother could appreciate it. The reason, was that, 1 kg. of the product should ideally fit in 700 cc in terms of volume. However, the volume of the firm’s product was 780-800 cc, thus off by about 80-100 cc. Prabhat was facing some difficulty in explaining the concept of “volume” to Godmother in layman’s terms.

Having already understood both the concept of volume and his firm’s problem, Godmother interrupted him to render this advice: “Prabhat, just see...imagine that you are putting dal flour through a sieve. First, put the product through an extremely fine sieve, as in the one used for wheat flour (*maida*), and keep the fine flour aside. Then, take another sieve, as in the one used for wheat flour, that is, less fine as compared to the previous one and put the remainder of the product through it. Keep this flour aside, in a separate container. Repeat this for two more times, reducing the fineness of the sieve each time, and keep the respective flours aside and separate. The particles in each type of

flour will display differences in size and density. Now, take the weighing scale, put a kilogramme weight on one scale and on the other, mix these different types flours in the perfect proportion to get the desired volume. To attain the perfect proportion, you may have to try different permutations and combinations, varying the quantum of the types of flours, but it is an achievable task. Once the experiment is successful, you can note the quantities of the different kind of flours used to get the perfect proportion. Thus, your order will meet the specification standards.”

Prabhat was perfectly stunned. Godmother had just given the solution so effortlessly. Even the experts in the field, highly qualified chemical engineers he had consulted could not find an answer.

Godmother’s formula worked and how! The firm made the perfect product. Every order of theirs was successful. The Divine Mother is praised in *Sri Durga Saptashati* as intelligence personified. Howsoever specialized the subject of chemical engineering may be, it is not beyond the ken of the Goddess.

### ( 7 )

Dilip, a highly successful doctor based in Beed with a roaring practice. It was a busy Sunday morning at his hospital, when his wife suddenly expressed a wish to seek Godmother’s darshan. Dilip, a dedicated devotee of Sri Datta Maharaj and Godmother, was quick to assent and the couple decided to pay a quick visit to Jalna, about 100 kms. from the hospital - a two-hour drive. The plan was chalked out. The couple would leave immediately early, seek darshan so that Dilip could return to the hospital by 1 p.m. or so.

They reached Sri Dattashram by 10 a.m., according to plan. Godmother was seated in Sri Raghavalaya, speaking with devotees. Seeing Dilip and his wife, she sent her attendant to inform them to remain seated. Several devotees came for darshan and Godmother was busy with them. Here, the couple grew restless since Dilip had to resume his work, do the regular Sunday rounds for his patients. Moreover, it was very unlike Godmother to keep them waiting for such a long time. Today, whenever they would make an attempt to rise, Godmother would send word asking them to wait.

This went on till 1 p.m. when, finally, Godmother sent for them. She conversed with them for more than an hour – nothing exceptional, just a casual chat about their family, her own health and so on. Then the couple had *prasad* lunch, at her insistence, as a result, it was already 3 p.m. by the time they left. They were already very late.

Their car arrived a place called Gevrai *en route* at 4:30 p.m. They were greeted by scenes from a major riot. Glass pieces were strewn everywhere, so were bullet casings and the works. A casual enquiry with the locals revealed that a violent fight had broken out between rival anti-social groups at that precise spot at around 12 noon - several rounds of bullets were fired and mob-lynching ensued. The vicinity looked deserted now since the police had arrived at the scene just sometime before. The situation was brought under control only by 4 p.m.

The realization that dawned on the couple was a happy one. The mystery behind Godmother’s unusual behaviour was resolved. Had she allowed them to leave Sri Dattashram as per their plan, they would have stepped right into the trouble, the centre stage of the riot and in the heart of the conflict.

Back at the hospital, the patients were safe and sound. Thanks to Godmother, so was the good doctor and his wife.

### ( 8 )

The year was 1976. Ram, a devotee of Godmother who was a public works contractor, wanted to bid for a government tender. He went to to consult Godmother in the matter. He would always seek her advice before undertaking any new project. Ram asked, “Godmother, I have to fill the tender by quoting a certain percentage above the given mark. How much shall I quote?” A breeze blew a scrap of paper lying on the floor near Godmother and it landed near Ram. He threw a casual glance at the paper: it contained nothing more than a single figure “+56”. Godmother asked, “What is written on

that scrap in front of you?” Ram replied, “+56”. She said, “That’s the answer to your question then! Quote +56”

Ram submitted the bid accordingly and won the first round! The competing bids were ‘+65’ and ‘+72’. The next step was personal discussion with the tendering authority. Ram was duly invited for the meeting. But somehow, Ram missed the appointment. The lapse caused much irritation to Godmother. Godmother positively chided him, “Rambhau! You have not gone for the meeting still! You should have gone there sooner! It is too late now!”

Ram rushed to the authority’s office. He was dismayed to find that his competitor, the one with the ‘+65’ bid, had been selected for the job in the personal discussion round. The competitor had agreed to bring his quote down to ‘+60’ and undertake additional works. Besides, the evaluation report found Ram to be financially weak in relative terms. The recommendations given by the tendering authority had already been sent to the Ministry at Bombay for final approval.

Ram had a political contact, an MLA, and they decided to pay a visit to the Ministry to explain his position. The politician assured Ram that he would guarantee Ram’s financial capability. He was convinced that the pair would meet the approving authority directly and secure the contract.

Before starting for Bombay, Ram paid a visit to Godmother and relayed the news. Godmother said, “That officer has his cabin on the sixth floor. You will get in the elevator and the elevator will stop on the third floor. The officer will get in the lift. Your friend will make the introductions. Enjoy the tea, watch the cricket match in Madras and return here!” Ram was in no mental state to comprehend all this. How could he watch the match in Madras when he was setting out for Bombay? He decided to stick to his plan.

The train of events that ensued was amusing indeed, albeit not for Ram. Ram landed in Bombay, went straight to the Ministry with his politician friend. The pair got in the lift at the ground floor. The lift halted at the third floor. The officer in charge of the contract stepped in the lift and introductions were made. All of them got out at the sixth floor. The officer asked Ram directly, “Sir, is your friend here to convince me to award you the job?”

Ram was slightly taken aback. The politician however proffered his view, “Sir, Ram could not attend the personal interview in time, for some unavoidable reason. Please excuse him for that. As far as financial capacity goes, do not worry at all. Ram is a close friend and I will support him financially if need be.” The officer responded, “I must say this with regret – the matter has progressed beyond me. I cannot do anything at this stage. The work order has already been issued in favour of the other party, signed, sealed and delivered!”

Later, Ram and his friend went to the government rest-house and had lunch. They were relaxing in the lounge. The television was on. The sports channel was telecasting the cricket match being played at Madras. Ram watched the match and got in the evening train back. That night, at around eleven o’clock, Ram went for Godmother’s darshan. Godmother asked Ram, “So, Ram, how was the Madras cricket match? You see the waiter served only two cups of tea. The third one was for me. He forgot that! So, Ram, please make some tea now – for me and yourself.” Godmother meant that she was witness to the entire chain of events at Bombay.

After tea, Godmother spoke in her characteristically patient tone, “Ram, wait for a few days. You will get that contract for free, through the good offices of a local Jalna man.”

Her words came true. With the help of a local politician, Ram secured the contract for the project, that too, for free. Surprisingly, Ram’s competitor, the contractor who had been commended for the job had not been awarded the work order and the job had remained pending all this time. Ultimately, the work order came to be issued in favour of Ram’s firm on 1 January 1977. This order changed his destiny and his firm’s fortunes. His firm would emerge as the market leader in time.



One afternoon, Godmother was conversing with devotees of Sri Datta Maharaj from Mumbai, who were visiting her, when a strapping youth stepped in the hall. The man cut an impressive figure, with his fine clothes, ornaments and aristocratic bearing, all of which indicated family wealth.

Godmother broke the ice, "Which village do you hail from?" The youth gave the name of the village. Godmother asked, "Who gave you this address?" The man responded with the name of the gentleman. His answers were to the point.

Godmother asked, "Are you an adopted child in this family?" The youth replied in the affirmative, a little startled with the question. Godmother continued, "Even your father was adopted in this family, and so was your grandfather! Isn't it true?" The man replied, "Yes."

Godmother said, "Then? When will this tradition cease? Do what I tell you. First, throw away the old, vintage things stuffed in your house. Give them to a scrap dealer. But, don't take any money in return. Just give them away."

The youth interjected, "Are you referring to the stuff in the old house or our new home?" Godmother replied, "Both." The youth asked, "But Godmother, there is nothing like that in the new place." Godmother responded, "How come? A charm (*tayit*) is kept in the southern corner of the new home! Just throw it out, far away."

"Listen carefully to what I tell you. The old manor has a huge entrance, which leads to a courtyard, which houses an underground water-tank right in the centre. At its right corner is a washing bay and a tap. Start digging there. Dig deep and you will discover an earthen pot with silver coins embossed with a Queen's mark. Sell those coins to the local jeweller. But, don't use the money for yourself. Instead, feed the poor." Godmother explained the significance and meaning of *anna-daan*, food distribution, to the young man.

The young man realized that all the signs matched the actual position at site.

Godmother: "There is a temple dedicated to the village deity, the mother goddess, the *Gaondevi*, in your village. Do you offer worship at the temple?"

Man: "Yes, of course."

Godmother: "Tell me, whose idol is placed on the right just after you enter the temple?"

He replied, "I don't know!"

Godmother: "Alright then, whose idol is to the left?"

He gave the same response and added, "I have not observed so closely."

Godmother: "What is the point if such a *darshan*? When you visit a temple, you must offer worship to all the deities. In the temple dedicated to your village goddess, at the right-hand side is Lord Ganesh and on the left is Lord Hanuman! Visit that temple every day without fail, alright? Offer worship to all these deities. Having followed all my afore-mentioned instructions, you will be blessed. Come here with *pedhas* the next year.<sup>lxv</sup> Understood?"

The youth was completely overwhelmed. Realizing the value of Godmother's advice, he prostrated himself before her and left for his village, with a heavy heart.

The curious devotees who witnessed the exchange asked Godmother afterwards, "Why did you ask him to get rid of the old stuff and not enjoy the money from the sale of the buried treasure?"

Godmother explained, "It is like this: the original owner of the house, the ancestor who lived there before the adoption saga, had purchased those old artefacts and utilities with his hard-earned wealth. Today, these things are being used by outsiders, strangers to the blood-line! The ancestor had stored and preserved the wealth and material goods intending that they be used by his own flesh and blood. Whereas today guests, outsiders, were reaping the benefit of all this. The ancestral spirit is finding it

tough to bear this. That is why he is causing obstructions in the lineage of the adopted members. My guidance will remove the obstacles. Once the man follows my advice, his family will grow and children, both boys and girls, and grandchildren will be born in his family!”

Needless to add, her words came true and the youth became a father in a year.

### ( 10 )

It was late evening, must be around nine o'clock, Nitin was at home with his family when suddenly everyone realized that nine-month-old daughter, Shreemayi, was missing. They checked with the neighbours and called out her name several times but there was no response.

A few moments passed. Nitin's wife, for some reason, looked at the canal flowing outside the house, about five feet away from the compound. She got a vague feeling that she saw bubbles rise up on the surface.

From out of the blue, the wife heard a voice in her head, “Put your hand in the canal over there”. She immediately ran out and put her hand in and pulled out a piece of clothing. She could not identify it in the dark and thinking it to be a random article, flung it back in the water.

The voice spoke to her again: “Shreemayi is in the canal, put your hand in deeper.” The wife put her entire hand in and felt something heavy. She lifted her to find that it was their child.

The mother was beside herself in tears and started crying profusely. She placed the kid in Nitin's hands. Shreemayi was not opening her eyes. Everyone gathered around them feared the worst. The family started offering mental prayers to Godmother in all earnest. The child was taken to the nearest hospital where she was admitted in intensive care.

The doctors were able to pump all the water out of the child's lungs and she fully recovered within a span of three days. The medical men were stunned, the chances of survival in drowning cases being slim.

Shreemayi and her parents visited Sri Dattashram for Godmother's darshan a few weeks later. When they narrated the incident to Godmother, she calmly said, “God was kind” and gifted beautiful clothes to the child. Godmother blessed the little girl saying, “This child has been born again.”

Needless to add, it was Godmother's voice guiding the child's mother.

A similar incident took place in the life of a young couple residing near Pune a few years ago. The husband was taken seriously ill with high-grade fever, the temperature ranged between 103 and 104 continuously for six-seven days at a stretch. The local doctor could not find what was wrong. The entire family was devoted to Godmother. The young wife started praying fervently to her, imploring her grace. She heard a name in her ear: “Dr. Neeraj Adkar”.

She learnt from her inquiries that Dr. Neeraj Arun Adkar, M.D., a reputed doctor and surgeon, is based in Aundh near Pune, but a few minutes from their home. He happens to be the grandson of Sri Datta Maharaj, the saint's daughter's son). The girl rushed to the doctor with her husband. The husband recovered completely within a short time under the good doctor's treatment and care.

### ( 11 )

In or about 1983, Sri Datta Maharaj was visiting Godmother's place at Jalna. He was slated to leave for Pune. Godmother was none too happy with the thought of Sri Maharaj having to travel by state transport bus, as he was wont to. She ordered Ram “We are leaving for Pune tomorrow, organize your car.”

Ram was flummoxed. His car's roadworthiness was suspect. In fact, he had planned to send her for repairs. Ram was quick to convey this difficulty to Godmother. The tenor of her response was not without some severity, “Can the car be driven on the road?” Ram replied, “Yes, Godmother. It does, but the journey to Pune is too long and Sri Maharaj would be travelling with us, I am not sure about the whole thing, given the condition of the vehicle.”

Godmother remained firm, “You do not need worry about that. As long as you can drive the car, bring it here tomorrow. We will leave for Pune early in the morning. We have to escort Sri Maharaj.” Ram assented, a curious admixture of competing emotions, one of apprehension and the other surrender, drove him to do so.

The ramshackle vehicle arrived at Godmother’s doorstep on the following morning and the trio started for Pune – Sri Maharaj, Godmother and Ram. The ride was smooth – they were proceeding at an average speed of around sixty kilometres per hour. The car did not have to halt anywhere, which was quite surprising, given its track record. for Ram.

A couple of hours into the journey, Ram realized that the vehicle was in desperate need of fuel. The fuel gauge hit the reserve indicator, which meant that the car would run for five more kilometres, before refuelling.

If only they found a fuel station on the way, otherwise he was headed into an awkward situation! He turned back to speak with Godmother, but she spoke before he could, “Rambhau, carry on. No stops in the way!” Ram pleaded in earnest,

“But, Godmother, the car needs refuelling. We will have to fill petrol. We did not come across any fuel station until now. But, there is one ahead ...” Godmother interjected, “The car will not stop anywhere except *Sri Renuka Niwas*!”

He realized that it was a command. The car seemed to obey the command too. For it ran for a good three hours after the gauge had hit reserve. The old *Fiat*, the rare beauty that she was, ran on reserve for a hundred and fifty kilometres not less perhaps more!

## ( 12 )

Experiences of divine grace follow steadfast devotion. Ram was a sincere devotee of Sri Kajalkar Maharaj and Godmother. A couple of decades ago, Ram had purchased a fleet of trucks for his business. With time, some turned rickety and old. Presently, he had no absolutely use for one of the vehicles, as this particular one required constant repair and serious maintenance. Ram was eager to get rid of it but despite issuing several advertisements, the old warhorse had no takers.

When a vehicle is in disuse for long, it falls in a state of disrepair. A similar thing had happened in this case. Maintaining the white elephant was costing him dearly since it entailed payment of heavy taxes and duties, besides regular upkeep. Ram, a true man of commerce couldn’t help feeling a tad disturbed about the whole deal. One day, he took this predicament to Godmother.

This time Godmother’s counsel was counter-intuitive. She said, “Park the truck on the road. Wash it with water and then hurl the dirty water that falls off the truck back onto its body!” Ram had got the vehicle freshly cleaned, painted and serviced, thinking it would sell easy.

Heeding Godmother, Ram stood the truck on the road and followed her advice. To his great astonishment, the vintage machine was sold within a day and at a rather handsome price too! A saint’s word has never been known to fail.

## ( 13 )

Spontaneity has a high value in the sphere of spirituality. A saint possesses the power to bless the devotee in a single meeting, a simple yet life-changing piece of advice, sometimes, a silence that quietens doubt.

Manisha, a middle-aged woman, used to be disturbed and cheerless. Myriad struggles in life contributed to her emotional state. Psychosomatic diseases, diverse aches and pains, caused by negativity worsened her condition.

It was in such a state that Manisha met Godmother, when the latter was visiting one of her devotees in Mumbai. Godmother lent her an ear before she began a little sharply, “You enjoy reading. Read more crime fiction! What else will it bring you except darkness? You have a good husband, a



beautiful child, a lovely home to call your own and financial stability. What is this great pessimism that is making your life so miserable? Stop reading this trash at once!”

Manisha remained quiet for a while. In a state of astonishment, she managed a query, “Then, what shall I read?” Manisha loved reading. It was her singular hobby and passion. Godmother gave the answer, “Read the biographical works of saints. Subscribe to Kalyan, a spiritual monthly by Gita Press, Gorakhpur. Read biographies of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati, Sri Gondavalekar Maharaj and other saints.”

Manisha followed the advice and soon experienced a paradigm shift in her thinking patterns. Her world-view improved drastically. She found happiness for the first time in decades. The aches and pains vanished without a trace.

Such is the power of Godmother. She identified the root of Manisha’s problems, her thought patterns, and treated the source of her troubles. The biographies of saints are instrumental in cultivating a positive outlook towards life that true devotion to the Lord brings. Their stories, their miracles, cannot fail to infuse a sense of hope which is essential for the living. They reaffirm that devotion to God is a purposeful exercise, one that bears fruits and not just an empty ritual.

#### ( 14 )

This story is from the early eighties. Narain, an ardent devotee of Godmother, had what first seemed like an asthmatic attack. The other symptoms included incessant cough and fever. The condition worsened to such an extent that he had to be admitted to a hospital. The diagnosis did not take much time – the pathology pointed to tuberculosis.

His wife rushed to Godmother. After patiently listening to the wife, Godmother said, “It is not tuberculosis! Don’t listen to the doctor! Get him out of the hospital and bring him here for *prasad*, holy offering, tomorrow.”

The following day, Narain visited Godmother at her home – a sumptuous meal was served: rice, dal, vegetables and *ghee*<sup>lxvi</sup>-laden *puran-poli*!<sup>lxvii</sup> Narain was heavily diabetic, which she knew of. Godmother reassured the devotee, “*Kaka*, you don’t have that disease! Even if you do, the Master will take care of it. There is no need to worry. Eat to your heart’s content! It will not harm you!” Narain partook the divine offering.

True to her word, Narain’s condition ameliorated in no time. The recovery, albeit gradual, was complete. A few months later, Godmother asked him to carry out medical tests if he wished, but Narain did not find them necessary.

Narain lived a happy and healthy life, spending his golden years serving *Sri Dattashram* in every way he could. By her grace, thousands of devotees have overcome disease and distress and found the strength and vitality to beat terminal illnesses like cancer.

#### ( 15 )

A marvellous experience from the twenty-first century speaks directly to Godmother’s power to transmit spiritual knowledge to the devotee. The gentleman, a scholarly educationist who taught management at postgraduate level at Nagpur, was pursuing spirituality for decades.

He had heard of Godmother from his daughter who had recently got married into a family devoted to Godmother. The gentleman was fascinated by all the wondrous experiences recounted to him by his daughter and her in-laws.

Naturally, Jalna beckoned. The moment he got off at the bus stand, the man started experiencing powerful vibrations, strong currents of divine energy that enveloped his consciousness. His body temperature fell. The constant fluctuations that characterize the mind’s inner working ceased completely. His mind found the freedom that belongs only to the higher realm of Spirit. This mystical experience kept on intensifying as he drew closer to *Sri Dattashram*.

After reaching the Ashram, he was invited to meet Godmother. The devotee offered salutations and was offered a seat.

After the routine introductions, Godmother began, “What do you think of me?”

Devotee: “The Mother, the Divine Mother Incarnate, *Sakshaat Bhagvati*.”

Godmother: “What *Bhagvati*? I am an illiterate woman. What do I understand of your management?”

The man was a sincere devotee, who could not be distracted with such red herrings. He had realized in the innermost chamber of his heart that Godmother was none other than the *Kundalini*, the Primeval Energy incarnated on earth. However, his heart began pounding fiercely and he broke into a sweat.

This time she spoke with severity and authority. She said to him, “Sit down! I don’t understand anything about the subject you teach, about management. Who do you say I am?”

Devotee: “*Adishakti*, the Primordial Energy, the Divine Mother of the Universe!”

Godmother: “Why? What makes you say that?”

Devotee: “Your aura and your presence, Mother! I sense overwhelming currents of divinity issuing forth from the very *gopuram*, the spire of *Sri Dattashram*. These waves draw the devotees here. No sooner I entered this place than I felt powerful vibrations of divinity. The atmosphere here is charged with God consciousness.”

As he was finishing the soliloquy, the devotee felt Godmother’s eyes penetrating his subtle body, the seven *chakras* and the whole aura. He saw his entire electromagnetic field and its contours.

Next, he witnessed a radiant halo of seven colours behind Godmother. Gradually, her aura grew in splendour, became so bright that her body could not be seen. For the five minutes that followed, the devotee saw nothing of the physical realm. He was in the intimate presence of the Divine. Her ethereal form of *Adishakti* took over the experience. Infinite power in the form of radiance emanating from her Being pierced his own self. The divine energy that she manifested illuminated his seven *chakras*, as he lost outer consciousness of the world. The mind went blank, bereft of thought.

After the experience, Godmother simply asked him, “Are you satisfied now?” The gentleman replied in the affirmative and offered his salutations.

## V. Epilogue

The seers of the *Upanishads* analyzed the Absolute, the *Brahman*, in the negative as *neti-neti*, neither this, nor that. The Power of the Absolute, the *Shakti*, has been described as *acintya*, beyond comprehension, in *Sri Durga Saptashati*, the sacred text of the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a veritable incarnation of the Lord, expounded on the power of the Divine Mother through his life and teachings. Swami Vivekananda, who went on to become the Master's chief disciple, was reluctant to worship the Goddess *Sri Kali*, the Divine Mother of the Universe in his early days when he was still Narendra Nath Dutta. In relation to the myriad problems faced by his disciple, Sri Ramakrishna explained, as long as one has a body-mind complex, one is within the jurisdiction of the Divine Mother, never mind the state of spiritual advancement or wisdom. Only the Divine Mother had the power to relieve Narendra of his troubles.

Sri Ramakrishna's own non-dualistic, *advaitin* teacher, Totapuri, was an enlightened master. The Divine Mother made an example out of this knower of *Brahman*, who ultimately acknowledged Her dominion after realizing that he could not even give up his life without Her permission.

Thus, the highest knowledge proves fruitless for salvation unless the Divine Mother, whose writ runs on the material plane, wills otherwise. She must bless the seeker, open the door to the other realm to which only Mother holds the key. It is not for nothing that perfect non-dualistic Masters, such as Adi Shankaracharya, worshipped the Divine Mother in various forms.

Godmother possesses the splendour of the Divine and yet her majesty leaves untouched the sweet, saintly energy that lies at the heart of this incarnation. The multitude of devotees at her lotus feet tend to distract with experiences of benediction, her benevolent might and unfathomable feats and miracles.

She is free from *vruttis*,<sup>lxviii</sup> she is ever in bliss, unperturbed and undisturbed by the outside. Godmother cares only for devotion. The other attributes of a devotee bear no significance. Hers is a love of the universal kind, like gentle rain from heaven.

It is not wrong to recount the miracles and materialistic blessings of saints. For one, they serve a definite purpose, namely, to establish the dominion of the Spirit over Matter. Secondly, the experiences of devotees make the saint relatable. For the distressed, this is a ray of hope in their dark existence, perhaps the beginning of their own journey on the path of devotion.

The inherent risk, however, is that miracles unwittingly tend to define and delimit the incarnation and obscure its true purpose. Left unchecked, they may obtain the converse result, namely, fomenting materialism among the masses. It is, thus, critical to disengage from miracles at an appropriate juncture, lest it eclipses the fundamental purpose served by the incarnation, namely, the revival of spiritual life.

The ultimate goal of human birth is God-realization. This fundamental tenet of spirituality has been reaffirmed through the ages by the *rsis* of the *Vedas* and modern incarnations such as Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati and Ramakrishna Paramhansa alike.

Godmother leads by example and her life bears testimony to the axiom that it is not necessary to renounce the world for God-realization and offering devotion to Him. He is perfectly within the reach of *grihastas*, or householders. Her *guru*, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj, her father, Sri Kajalkar Maharaj and her mentor, Sri Datta Maharaj Kavishwar, were all *grihastas*.

A doting great-grandmother now, Godmother has fulfilled her familial responsibilities with diligence and love. In the eyes of the world, she has been an active and dutiful householder. Her inner life has been one of constant prayer and communion with the Divine. She has balanced the material and spiritual planes with perfect elegance and without a hint of contradiction.

Godmother stands as a bridge between earth and heaven, an interface between man and God. She represents the protective and kind energy of the Divine that nourishes the soul, that guides the spirit



towards the Supreme. Her sanctuary, *Sri Dattashram*, has issued forth from her eternal spirit. It is a part of her very Being. A home to Gods, here the seeker is inspired to attain his potential, to realize God.

An intense love for life pervades this magical haven, a sense of belonging to God and his creation, an idea both profound and abiding. The Eternal, the Absolute and the Ever-blissful are in a constant state of play here. After all, we are in the lap of the Divine Mother, the cradle of devotion.



## APPENDIX

### *Kundalini Shakti and Shaktipat Diksha*

“Kundalini Maha-yoga (Shaktipat) is a self-proven and self-perfecting spiritual practice. This means that the Kundalini power causes an initiate to perform kriyas (automatic movements) through the power of kundalini itself. Therefore, its other name is Sidha-yoga, or "the self-proven path of meditation". It may be relevant to mention that in every aspect, in body, in mind and in intellect, Shakti itself performs the meditation. An initiate must not make any effort at all; one's duty is only to surrender. The time and characteristics of the manifestation of Shakti are solely the work of the divine power (Shakti) itself. To practice this type of meditation means that one must simply allow the divine power, the opportunity to perform the meditation by itself.

Of course, Kundalini Maha-yoga (Shaktipat) is different from other paths of meditation, because on other paths you are responsible for performing certain tasks or mastering certain techniques. In other methods of meditation, you may be responsible for performing meditation yourself or you may have to acquire a great deal of knowledge concerning spiritual matters. You may have to perform worship ceremonies, you may have to practice different asanas (Yogic postures) or you may have to constantly endeavor to eject undesirable thoughts out of your mind. However, in Maha-yoga (Shaktipat) you don't have to do all these things. You just have to sit with a total sense of surrender. Then, according to the nature and state of the spiritual consciousness of an initiate, the different meditative experiences of an emotional, intellectual or creative nature occur by themselves.”<sup>lxix</sup>

Kundalini shakti is explained thus:

“The science of Kundalini is basically tantric. In former days tantra was an extremely powerful science. There are three main disciplines in it; “divyachar” for practitioners of satva-guna, “virachar” for practitioners of rajo-guna and “pashvachar” for practitioners of tamo-guna. The activities of unqualified practitioners of “Virachar” and specially “pashvachar” have badly damaged the image of tantra and have earned bad name for it. Accordingly they have disappeared. Kundalini Yoga comes under “divyachar,” but with the association of the name of tantra with it too it is nearly disappearing gradually and is becoming distorted and ineffective.

In the scriptures of tantra Kundalini Shakti is much talked about. What is normally said about it is its form like a snake that is sitting with three-and-a-half coils, biting its own tail, and sleeping such that the entrance of sushumna nerve in the root center is enclosed by it. This is extremely powerful divine energy, on who's awakening and becoming active the closed mouth of Brahma-nerve sushumna opens up. Then this energy enters in it, pierces the six charkas known as mooladhar, swadhishtan, manipur, anahat, vishuddha and agya, reaches the sahasrar chakra, becomes one with Shiva along with jivatma upon which jivatma becomes free from the bondage and assumes the form of Paramatma itself.

Besides the tantric scriptures it has also been described in the Vedic Upanishads as the “science of Brahma” and there are several methods prescribed for its awakening. All the sciences described as “vidya sambhuti” in Ishavasya Upanishad, as “hemvati” in Ken, as “Aditi” in Katha, as “prana-vidya, para-vidya” in Prashna, as “OM-kara” in Mandukya, as “yoga-vidya” in Aitreya, as “bhargavi varuni” in Taittiriya, as “udgeeth, prana, antaraditya, gayatri, shandilya, antaryami, dahar, madhu, samvarga, panchagni, vaishvanar sciences” in Chandogya and Brahadaranyaka, as “devatma shakti, savita” in Shvetashvatara and as “balaki vidya” in Kaushitaki Upanishad are different social and customary names and forms of the same divine energy.

In this journey from mooladhara chakra to sahasrara there is a vivid and very attractive description of every different form of the chakra and its petals, syllables marked on them, devas seated in them and about the availability of transcendental divine sciences, energies and siddhis through them. This energy is capable of giving both—all kinds of grandeur (greatness) through all possible means and liberation. Nine forms of Goddess i.e. hemvati, shreevidya, brahmi, saraswati, lakshmi, navadurga and



the like are all said to be the different forms of the awakening of this energy. This is also the basis of the creation of jiva.

What this energy is in fact? We find a description of uchhisht-Brahm in the Upanishads. Uchhisht means the “remains after the use.” In the construction of all the elements of the creation only one-fourth part of Para-Brahma Paramatma has been used, its three-fourth part is yet the divine nectar in the form of the basis of the creation—“Padoasya sarva bhutani tripadsyamratam divi”—Chha. U., 3-12-6. This itself is said to be uchhisht-Brahm, which is simply actionless, without attributes and uninvolved starting basis. This only has been described in Puranas as Shesh Naag (snake) holding the Earth on its head. Just as the basic padding of a huge building always remains unseen, even so this too remains unseen; it is never seen.

In the same way the energy saved after jivatma’s own creation should be understood to be the Kundalini Shakti in the form of Shesh Naagin (snake) situated in mooladhar, which is inactive, unseen, and because of being neglected it is lying asleep. There are several methods of waking it up such as chanting of mantras, pranayama, hearing of Naad (inner divine sound), bandha (locks), mudra (gestures) and asanas (yogic postures), but these methods are likely to involve great labor and uncertain long time. At the same time uncontrolled sudden awakening like an atomic blast has the possibility of dangerous and harmful opposite results.

Capable sadgurus can effortlessly awaken the dormant Kundalini Shakti of deserving disciples simply through their sight, resolution or touch, just as a lighted lamp effortlessly lights up another lamp. This is said to be Shaktipat Initiation.”<sup>lx</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> “*Udyad bhanu sahasra kantim*”;  
*Sri Devi Mahatmyam, Madhyama Charitrasya, dhyanam* at the start of Chapter 3.
- <sup>ii</sup> *Sri Bhramarambashtakam*, an octet in the praise of the Divine Mother in her manifestation as *Sri Bhramaramba* of Shrishailam, by Adi Shankaracharya (Eighth verse).
- <sup>iii</sup> “Mastake Ya Lipih Ken Likhita Hyapi Tvam Tadantarmuhurlikhasi Saapi |  
Brahmana Varyate Naiv Tadharyate Vadvacho Mastake Naiv Dhanye ||3||”  
Translation: The lines of fate are etched on a man’s forehead. But you, O Goddess, (have the power to) write different letters inside of the ones etched. Even Lord Brahma, the Creator, cannot change what you have written thus, and these new letters, embodying your command, are abided by him.
- <sup>iv</sup> ‘*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*’ by Mahendranath Gupta (M.), Chapter 16. The Master related this vision to the author on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1883 (Sunday).
- <sup>v</sup> “Kajalkar” translates to ‘of Kajla’.
- <sup>vi</sup> He was married to Bhagirathi, the daughter of Mrs. Vatsala and Mr. Gopal Kapse of Chikhalhana in the district of Aurangabad. Mr. Uttamrao Renghe was the brother of Mrs. Vatsala Kapse, Sri Maharaj’s mother-in-law. We shall learn of Mr. Renghe’s role in this work in time.
- <sup>vii</sup> ‘*Tale*’ is Marathi for lake.
- <sup>viii</sup> This distinctive Marathi version of the turban is called *pheta*.
- <sup>ix</sup> ‘*Amongst these, sattva guna, the mode of goodness, being purer than the others, is illuminating and full of well-being. O sinless one, it binds the soul by creating attachment for a sense of happiness and knowledge.*’ (*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 14: Verse 6).
- <sup>x</sup> Deulgaonraja, sometimes written Deulgaon Raja, was a town (now a city) in the Buldhana district in Maharashtra, about 42-45 km. from the village Kajla.
- <sup>xi</sup> These books containing the holy name in Sri Maharaj’s handwriting have been preserved by his daughter, Sri Tai Maharaj, referred to as Godmother in this work.
- <sup>xii</sup> An informal name of Lord Dattatreya in the devotional tradition, used to express love for the Deity.
- <sup>xiii</sup> A great deal of such travel was undertaken during and after his career in the police department, which gave him a good excuse to travel.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Indian in its origin but popularized by the Arab world, this dice-based practice is chiefly used for making predictions about the future.
- <sup>xv</sup> Sri Tai Maharaj’s given name is *Shashikala*. Sri Maharaj fondly addressed her as “*Shesha*”, or even “*Sheshabai*” at times.
- <sup>xvi</sup> These words came true. Madhukarrao performed the worship of Sri Maharaj’s photograph in the old *ashram* with great devotion for twelve years after Maharaj’s *samadhi*.
- <sup>xvii</sup> This translates as: “How am I standing? That’s the thing! It is only the name of Sri Ram that is sustaining me!”.
- <sup>xviii</sup> New moon day is considered inauspicious.
- <sup>xix</sup> A traditional sweet-dish.
- <sup>xx</sup> Godavari river, which flows through Nanded, is called Ganga of the South.
- <sup>xxi</sup> His *guru*, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar, was informed of the passing. Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj sent a prompt response to Madhukarrao, “You are now in charge of Sri Kajalkar Maharaj’s entire family. So, take care of everyone!”
- <sup>xxii</sup> The manor belonged to Uttamrao Renghe, his wife’s maternal uncle.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> This *Shesha* (serpent) deity is none other than the *Shesha* or *Sheshnaag*, the Lord of Serpents on whom Lord Vishnu rests. He is an embodiment of the Supreme Lord himself. Lakshaman in the *treta yug* and Balaram in *dwapar yug* were manifestations or incarnations of the *Shesha*, who accompanied Lord Ram and Lord Krishna, who were incarnations of Lord Vishnu, to help them in their work on earth. Sri Chandan Shesh Narayan is an ancestral deity (*kuldevata*) of several people.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Referring to his devotee and friend, Anna Patil of Shivangaon.

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<sup>xxv</sup> Manwath town is situated in the Parbhani district of Maharashtra, nearly hundred kilometres from Jalna.

<sup>xxvi</sup> This is *sanjeevani vidya*, the revival of the dead back to life.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Meaning: carriage driver.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The woman was the sister of Appa Waghmare, a devotee of Sri Maharaj.

<sup>xxix</sup> Partur is a town located about fifty-five kilometres from Jalna.

<sup>xxx</sup> *Pithla-bhakar* is a popular regional dish in Maharashtra, comprising gram flour curry (*pithla*) and Indian flatbread made from sorghum or millet (*bhakar* or *bhakri*).

<sup>xxxi</sup> Loose trouser-like garment for the legs.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Long loose shirt.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> A refreshing roll consisting betel-leaf, betel-nut, with a clove on top.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> A sanctified plantation of holy basil found in courtyards of traditional homes in India.

<sup>xxxv</sup> A sweet made from milk and sugar.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> A holy name blessed by a spiritual authority.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> This is the fig tree, whose botanical name is *Ficus racemosa*. The tree is sacred to Lord Dattatreya, the presiding deity of *Sri Datta Sampradaya*, the spiritual lineage and tradition to which Sri Kajalkar Maharaj and his Master, Sri Dhundiraj Maharaj Kavishwar belonged.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Sri Saraswati was a devout and pious lady, a perfect match for the saint. She was also known variously, as “Aaisaheb” or “Saraswati Aaisaheb”.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Sri Haripath* is a collection of *abhangas*, devotional hymns, composed by saints of Maharashtra, Sri Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, Sri Namdev Maharaj, Sri Eknath Maharaj, Sri Tukaram Maharaj and Sri Nivruttinath Maharaj.

<sup>xl</sup> A sanctified plantation of holy basil found in courtyards of traditional homes in India.

<sup>xli</sup> Asseveration or *vak siddhi* denotes the mystic power where the words uttered by the person come true.

<sup>xlii</sup> A mark of respect in Indian culture.

<sup>xliii</sup> *Sri Dyaneshwari*, authored by the great thirteenth century Marathi saint, *Sri Dnyaneshwar*, is an authoritative spiritual text in the commentary on *Sri Bhagvat Gita*, one of the foundational texts of *Sanatan Dharma*.

<sup>xliv</sup> Source: The website of the Devatma Shakti Society, a spiritual organization: <http://devatmashakti.in>.

A detailed account is found in the Appendix.

<sup>xlv</sup> The importance of the moment or timing of the initiation process cannot be overstated. The instructions given by the Master are extremely critical and mandatory, they must be followed to the tee. If the prospective disciple misses the time, or leaves the initiation midway, then he may have to forgo the opportunity of initiation in this life. Second chances are extremely bleak.

<sup>xlvi</sup> This is popularly known as *akhand naam-japa*.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Godmother would observe a week-long remembrance, *punya-smaran saptah*, in the holy memory of Sri Kajalkar Maharaj. The devotees engaged in the holy reminiscence of the revered saint and recite hymns in his honour.

<sup>xlvi</sup> The mother-goddess of a clan or family. Every clan or family has a dedicated deity or set of deities called kul-devata (male deity) and kul-devi (female deity).

<sup>xlvi</sup> Here, the reference is to Goddess Sri Renuka at Mahur-fort.

<sup>i</sup> The reference is to a verse from the *abhang*, unbroken and eternal verse in praise of the Lord, by Saint Tukaram, the 17th Century Marathi poet-saint, where the saint expresses his state after enlightenment.

<sup>li</sup> The Indian gooseberry, popularly called *amla* (Hindi) or *awla* (Marathi), is treated as an auspicious tree, being sacred to Lord Vishnu. It is believed that dieties and sages reside on this tree on the ninth day in the bright fortnight of *kartika* month, the day is called *Amla Navami*.

<sup>lii</sup> The inauguration of the work was done on 22nd October 1985, Tuesday, *Vijayadashmi* day.

<sup>liii</sup> Another name for ‘*Shaktipaata Diksha*’.

<sup>liv</sup> In the ether around us, ten types of *nadas*, *dashavidh naad*, sacred melodies, have been identified by spiritual masters.



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- <sup>lv</sup> These photographs are presently placed at the altar in 'Sant Dham' at Sri Dattashram.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Godmother has on several occasions distributed clothes, blankets, footwear and other items of necessity to the *warkaris* who undertake the annual pilgrimage to the holy town of Pandharpur to offer worship to Lord Vishnu in his form of the beloved *Vitthal* on the auspicious occasion of *ekadashi* (the eleventh day of the bright fortnight) in *Ashadha* month.
- <sup>lvii</sup> The *bhoomipujan* ceremony at the inauguration of the works, was performed by Gopal, a devotee of Sri Datta Maharaj and Godmother.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Godmother instructed Vinit who helped her organize the expansion of the cattle-shed: "Do not request any specific contribution from anyone. Do not even use your contacts. We must accept contributions only from those who genuinely feel for the cause, no matter how humble the amount. Invite the prospective donors here and let them see for themselves the work we do."
- <sup>lix</sup> The reader will find several such wondrous incidents in Segment IV of this work.
- <sup>lx</sup> Sri Gurudev Ranade's given name was Ramchandra.
- <sup>lxi</sup> These invaluable discourses, about forty hours in length (thirty videos of an hour and a quarter), on the holy *Srimad Bhagwat* are available on YouTube and may be accessed at <https://youtu.be/ePbbixuQoaQ>. These were recorded at Sri Maharaj's residence at Sri Renuka Niwas, Pune, in 1990. It is really commendable of Sri Datta Maharaj's family to have made available the discourses. It is a rare privilege to be in the company of this exalted spiritual master, to be able to adore the loving saint, to listen and learn from him.
- <sup>lxii</sup> The above are but a few illustrative instances of her philanthropic work.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> The true names of the devotees and other characters have been altered to protect their privacy. This caveat applies to the biographical work, Segment III.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> The reference is to the birth of the Goddess Sri Mahalaxmi in *Sri Durga Saptashati*, the sacred text dedicated to the Goddess, in Chapters 2 to 4. Of course, the primeval Mother exists independent of this manifestation as well, as noted by Sri Datta Maharaj Kavishwar, in his discourses on *Sri Devi Bhagwat*, a spiritual text.
- <sup>lxv</sup> *Pedhas*, a traditional Indian sweetmeat, mark the celebration of birth of a male child.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Clarified butter.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Indian flatbread filled with *puran*, a sweet made from Bengal gram and jaggery, or sugar.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> The different thought impulses, mind-waves and tendencies experienced by human beings. These may be described as mind waves, or fluctuations in the mind, which are often disruptive in nature.
- <sup>lxix</sup> Source: The website of the Devatma Shakti Society, a spiritual organization: <http://devatmashakti.in/html/page2.html>.
- <sup>lxx</sup> Source: <http://devatmashakti.in/html/page8.html>
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