

# SHRI KRISHNA SARASWATI SWAMI

Divinity on the Earth: A Short Biography Of SHRI KRISHNA SARASWATI SWAMI  
by : Prof. Dinkar D. Deshpande and Ms. Jeroo Bharucha [dinkar\\_deshpa30@hotmail.com](mailto:dinkar_deshpa30@hotmail.com)



In Maharashtra and Karnataka and partly in Gujarat and Andhra states, Lord Dattatreya is being worshipped very widely. The Lord has taken many incarnations as human forms in order to uplift and help people on spiritual path. The incarnations are - Shripada SriVallabha, Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Shri Manikprabhu at Maniknagar, Shri Swami Samartha at Akkalkot, Swami Shri Krishna Saraswati at Kolhapur, Shri Saibaba at Shirdi, Annabua at Miraj and Dhondibua Paluskar.

Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami of Kolhapur is also known widely as Dattaswami as he is incarnation of Lord Dattatreya. He stayed at Kolhapur in Kumbhar Lane (Potters Lane) and hence he was called as Kumbharswami. Swami had initiated many followers in spiritual path of which Namdev Maharaj became very much famous in Kolhapur after Swami. Namdev Maharaj left his body at the age of 130 years in 1970AD. Meanwhile our Master- Guruvarya Appa (Shrisadguru Madhavrao Tikekar, Mumbai, born 13th June 1929) got a directive from Swami in 1970AD, to give spiritual initiation to deserving persons and as such Guruvarya Appa has initiated more than 2500 people. Namdev Maharaj had initiated many, of whom Shri Nanasahem Gadre from Pune carried the path forward.

Charitra of Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami of Kolhapur

## **PART - 1 Childhood And Arrival At Kolhapur Introduction << GO TO >> Page 2**

### **The divine parents**

In India, in the state of Maharashtra, there is a small village Nandani situated in Shirol hamlet in the Kolhapur district. In the 19th century, there lived Appa Joshi, a very pious priest. He was always engrossed in conducting his daily religious rituals and was very helpful and hospitable by nature. He would receive with open arms everyone who needed food and shelter. He was a practicing priest and conducted religious ceremonies and rituals for the people of Nandani as well as for those in the neighboring villages.

Appa was a great devotee of Shri Narasimha Saraswati - the second avatar (incarnation) of Lord Dattatreya (the holy trinity - Lord Brahma, the creator; Lord Vishnu, the preserver; Lord Shiva, the redeemer - in one form). On every Saturday and on every full moon day, Appa would visit Wadi - a place where Shri Narasimha Saraswati stayed twelve long years during his lifetime. To date, his wooden padukas (feet impression / footwear) are symbolically worshipped. On every visit, Appa would ritualistically attend to his divine service and then feed the priests and the poor.

### **Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami of Kolhapur.**

Appa had a wife named Annapurna. Her prime cause of unhappiness was that the couple unfortunately did not have any children. She would often request her husband to pray Shri Narasimha Saraswati to grant them a son, as a boon. However, Appa would disregard her wish, as his standpoint was that Shri Narasimha Saraswati who can bestow Mush (ultimate merging with God), should not be troubled with trivial requests. It was like asking peanuts from an emperor who could give gold and diamonds.

Once on his regular pilgrimage to Wadi, Appa performed his usual rituals and works. When it was time to return home, there was an extremely heavy rainfall causing the river Krishna to flood. Appa was stranded at Wadi for the night. Whilst sleeping there, he had a dream in which Shri Narasimha Saraswati appeared and promised him that he, Shri Narasimha Saraswati himself, would take birth as his son. On his return home the next day, he revealed his dream to an ecstatic Annapurna.

Soon, Annapurna was pregnant. During pregnancy, she would crave for solitude and peace. She would be most happy in secluded places. Often she would go and sit for long in the temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman.

On Sunday, February 7, 1836, [in the month of Magha, 5th day after full moon, according to Hindu calendar], she gave birth to a healthy, radiant child - a son. A group of astrologers predicted that this divine child would remain a celibate and guide thousands on the spiritual path. Appa Joshi and Annapurna named their son Shrikrishna because of his attractiveness and allure which was similar to that of Lord Krishna (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu). Unlike normal babies, Shrikrishna disliked being confined to the cradle or being supported on the lap. He

would, instead, be constantly crawling on the floor. Annapurna tried to breast-feed him but he would drink very little. Surprisingly, he was yet very healthy. But even at the age of three years, his mother had to forcibly feed him the small amount of rice and milk.

To the despair of his anxious mother, Shrikrishna would not speak even at the age of five years. Her friends and neighbors would advise her to perform certain rituals like worshipping the peepal (betel tree) tree and feeding the priests and the poor. Annapurna would abide by all their advice. As time passed by, Shrikrishna started speaking but no one could comprehend what he was saying. This disturbed Annapurna.

Shrikrishna reached the age of seven years. His parents decided to arrange for his Upanayana ceremony (thread ceremony - a spiritual initiation conducted by the Hindu Brahmins for their children at the age of seven years). During the ceremony, the sacred Gayatri Mantra (chant to Goddess Gayatri) was recited in Shrikrishna's ears. All that he could repeat were the first two words of the mantra twice, "OM BHURRA, OM BHURRA", causing a peal of laughter from all those present. Appa Joshi was calm and unperturbed, as he was aware that the life of a divine child had to be different from an ordinary child's growing up stages.

Shrikrishna started to play with the children of his neighborhood. He would mount a high rock and sit on it as if seated on a throne. He would call on his friends saying, "Come to me! Surrender to me! Take this holy water and holy ash. These will ward off evil and save you." The ignorant children and their equally ignorant parents could not grasp the meaning of the gems uttered by this divine child. Instead they thought he was a fool. Shrikrishna's words are similar to those described by his namesake Lord Krishna in the Bhagawat Geeta (holy text) instructing his devotees thus, "Leave all your rituals and surrender to me! Only I can save you from your sins and bless you with Moksha."

### **Pilgrimage**

One day Shrikrishna asked his mother's permission to go to a nearby village Mangasoli to visit the temple dedicated to Lord Khanderaya (another name for Lord Shiva). Annapurna was greatly worried about her son going anywhere alone. She worried as any doting mother would worry about their seemingly helpless child - how would he find his way, who would feed him as he still had to be forcibly fed and so on. Overhearing their conversation, Appa Joshi interrupted them. He readily allowed Shrikrishna to go for the pilgrimage. The anxious but helpless Annapurna packed a few snacks for her son and instructed him to return at the earliest. Shrikrishna started his journey. On the way, he came across a village - Bedagagram. On its outskirts was a well. Shrikrishna decided to take a bath in it. He kept his clothes and the bag of snacks on the wall of the well, and jumped in the well. No sooner had he soaked himself in the water, a dog ran away with his bag of snacks. A little while later, a lady came to fetch water from the well. Hurriedly Shrikrishna came out and found his bag missing.

Naturally, he questioned the lady about his bag of snacks and accused her of stealing it. He directly asked her, "Would you do such a thing to your own child?" The woman was understandably upset, as she did not have any children of her own. She told the divine child, "I

have not seen your bag nor taken it. Come to my house and I shall feed you." Shrikrishna readily went with her. She laid in front of him a feast of rice and milk. However, he did not touch it. The lady, therefore, sat next to him and with lots of love started feeding him with her own hands. Shrikrishna ate all the food without making any fuss. Whilst eating, he thought, "By feeding me, all her sins have been washed away. She will be blessed with a son." After finishing the meal, he verbally blessed the lady and told her she will bear a son. Then he started to leave. She repeatedly pleaded with him to stay overnight. He adamantly refused. She gave him some fruits to carry with him for the journey. Shrikrishna started on his onwards journey. In time, his blessings fructified. The lady bore a son. Throughout life she remembered Shrikrishna. She, later, attained Moksha.

### **Temple of Lord Khanderaya**

Upon reaching Mangasoli, Shrikrishna went to the temple of Lord Khanderaya. He paid his obeisance and prayed, "O God, I am so happy to visit this place, to see you. You are Shiva! But, alas where is Goddess Parvati (name of Lord Shiva's consort)? Where is Nandi (name of the bull that is Lord Shiva's vehicle)? You are fond of bhasma (holy ash) but here, there is only bhandara [turmeric powder]. O Lord, you killed the demon Malhara, hence here you are also named Malhari, the enemy of Malhara. O Lord, I pray to you to appear before me. Till you appear, I shall sit here without taking in food and water."

No sooner had he prayed and made his petition, an old Brahmin appeared before him and said, "O child, do not be so adamant, sitting here without food and water. In these days, God does not appear before human beings by praying thus. Please take the holy prasad (eatables offered first to God) and go home." Immediately, Shrikrishna retorted, "how could you read my mind and know my plan? Anyway, it's only been a few years since Lord Vithoba (Lord Vishnu is known in Maharashtra state by this name) appeared before Namdeva (saint of Maharashtra, contemporary of Shrikrishna)". Hearing this, the old man disappeared. Suddenly, Lord Shiva along with Goddess Parvati and Nandi appeared before Shrikrishna. Lord Shiva said to Shrikrishna, "You are a part of me. Now, go home. Later, meet Shri Swami Samartha at Akkalkot. You are born to help people and take them onto the spiritual path." Saying thus, Lord Shiva and his entourage disappeared. An exuberant Shrikrishna happily started on his journey home.

### **Home again**

A week had passed since Shrikrishna had started his journey. His mother Annapurna was worried and anxiously awaiting his return. So, when he came back home, she was happy to see him. Shrikrishna looked more radiant, glowing, illuminating with spiritual enlightenment. Annapurna did wonder as to "who would have fed him or if he was really a yogi (ascetic)?"

Since Appa Joshi was a practicing priest for Nandani and its neighboring villages, the villagers often called upon him to perform the requisite rituals. Once when he was invited to the Jambhali village to perform some rituals, Shrikrishna accompanied him.

After the religious ceremony got over, one of the guests - an old lady started to complain that this year she had lost the chance of going to Pandharpur (place of pilgrimage) to see Lord Vithoba. People consoled her that she could take the pilgrimage next year instead. This made her cry inconsolably, "I am over sixty years of age. I do not know whether I'll be alive next year to make my visit." Hearing her predicament and finding her sincere in her urge to visit Lord Vithoba, Shrikrishna told her, "Don't worry, you need not travel all the way to Pandharpur, instead I shall give you the prasad here." He went out and returned immediately with two packets of prasad and gave them to the old lady. Everyone started laughing at this act of a "foolish child". The old lady opened the packets. Suddenly, there was a stunned silence - for one packet contained churmure ( rice popcorn) and the other contained bukka (perfumed black powder applied on the forehead) - these are offered as prasad of Lord Vithoba, available only at Pandharpur.

Hereafter, people started viewing Shrikrishna differently. Their attitude towards him became more reverential. Many started often visiting him. They found his irrelevant uttering contained answers to their questions, solving many of their problems.

### **Shrikrishna leaves home**

After two years, when Shrikrishna was twelve years old, he felt it was time to leave his household in Nandani for good, to go to Akkalkot. He, therefore, asked his mother's permission. Annapurna was shocked! She pleaded with him to stay, not to leave them alone. When Appa Joshi became aware of Shrikrishna's intent, he resolutely told his wife, "Do not stop him. Let him do what he wants to do. The very purpose of his birth is to help people on their spiritual journey. We do not have the strength nor the power to stop him." With heavy hearts, Appa Joshi and Annapurna bade adieu to their son Shrikrishna. On his part Shrikrishna assured his sorrowful parents that he would appear to them whenever they remembered him. Thus, Shrikrishna left his family and home in Nandani.

Mere words cannot describe the grief of the distraught parents. It was similar to the great sorrow suffered by Nanda and Yashoda, when Kanhaiya (Lord Krishna's childhood name), their foster son, left Gokul and went to Mathura. Likewise, Appa Joshi and Annapurna constantly remembered their son Shrikrishna and repeated his name like a mantra. After a short period, his unhappy parents passed away. They attained Moksha.

### **Shri Swami Samartha of Akkalkot**

Shrikrishna traveled on foot towards Akkalkot where Shri Swami Samartha - the third known incarnation of Lord Dattatreya - was staying. Days before Shrikrishna's arrival at Akkalkot, Shri Swami Samartha had been restless. He was constantly heard excitedly muttering, "Krishna's coming, Krishna's coming". As Shrikrishna approached the boundary of Akkalkot, Shri Swami Samartha speedily came out of his math (ashram or abode of a holy sage), his disciples and devotees followed suit. As soon as Shri Swami Samarth saw Shrikrishna, he held his hand and rushed him to a nearby forest so fast, that those who were following them, could not locate them. Shrikrishna and Shri Swami Samartha remained at an unknown place in the forest for

seven days. What divine play was enacted in isolation is not known. Perhaps the elderly Shri Swami Samartha charted the divine course of future action for the young Shrikrishna to undertake. Since they were both incarnations of Lord Dattatreya in manifestation at the same time, it is very unlikely that Shri Swami Samartha gave any spiritual initiation to Shrikrishna. Perhaps because of the age difference, people inferred that Shri Swami Samartha was Shrikrishna's Guru (Spiritual Master who leads us from darkness to GOD). It is, though, well known that Shrikrishna had great love and respect for Shri Swami Samartha, whom he held in extremely high esteem and which was equally reciprocated.

### **Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami of Kolhapur.**

Whilst Shri Swami Samartha was away, a gloom had descended on his devotees and disciples. Finally after week, Shri Swami Samartha returned to Akkalkot along with Shrikrishna. People were delighted to see their Guru - their God again and hastened to get food for him. Shri Swami Samartha called out to them, "Shrikrishna is hungry, get laddus (Indian sweetmeat) for him." Shrikrishna stayed on for some time at Akkalkot with the elderly sage. Shri Swami Samartha renamed Shrikrishna as Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. As we unfold the life story of Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami, we will henceforth refer to him as Swami, as his devotees popularly addressed him during his lifetime.

The leper Brahmin One day, a Brahmin suffering from leprosy came to solicit Shri Swami Samartha's favor to cure his disease. He related that for the past three years he had been worshipping Lord Dattatreya at Ganagapur (place of pilgrimage), desperately begging God to cure him. There one night, he was directed in a dream to proceed to meet Shri Swami Samartha at Akkalkot for his cure. Therefore with great hope in his heart he had arrived at the great sage's door. Shri Swami Samartha pointed out to Swami and said, "This is Guru Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. Go with him to Kolhapur, serve him well and you will be alright." Dejected at not receiving grace from the sage, the desperate Brahmin moaned, "O Lord, I have been sent to you by the Lord of Ganagapur and now you are sending me elsewhere. Cure me, if not kill me, for I am not going any where else." This infuriated Shri Swami Samartha. Notwithstanding the sage's anger and scared lest he would curse him, the Brahmin started to tremble. He begged for forgiveness for his ignorance and agreed to go with Swami to serve him.

### **Doubts disappear**

The next day, Swami started walking towards Kolhapur with the Brahmin in tow. At dusk, they reached a small village. At the outskirts of this village was a temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman. Swami decided to stay there overnight. The only thought the Brahmin had was doubts of whether he would be cured. Swami decided to put his faith to test and at rest. He said to the Brahmin, "I am very hungry. Go and get some milk from the village." The Brahmin took a pot and went in search for milk. By then, it was pitch dark. The entire village had gone to sleep. Nevertheless, the Brahmin kept on walking through the village, searching lest someone in the village was awake to spare some milk for Swami. He suddenly came upon a place, which was crowded. Wondering why a crowd had collected at such a late hour, he inquired with the

people standing around. He was told that the daughter-in-law of the house was having difficulty in delivering her baby. In fact, she was undergoing severe labor pains for the past three days. The Brahmin, as a matter of fact, informed them that "A sanyasi (ascetic) is living at the temple. He needs milk. If you give some, he might confer a favor." The helpless husband of the woman immediately filled milk in the pot and accompanied the Brahmin to the temple. As they reached the temple door, Swami yelled from inside, "Govinda, go home. A son has been born to you." The man was flabbergasted that the ascetic knew his name and his problem. He went inside and reverentially offered the milk to Swami. Filled with gratitude, he humbly requested Swami to visit his house. Swami politely refused saying, "We have work to do." Govinda went home and found his wife had delivered a baby boy. Both were safe and well. Seeing this miracle, the Brahmin had a change of heart. He started doing his work with a renewed sense of devotion and his faith immensely increased. He thought to himself, "Immaterial of whether my disease is cured or not, I am certainly fortunate to serve this holy man." Reading his mind, Swami laughed and said to himself, "At least his doubts have disappeared. Once his past sins are washed away by his dedicated services, I shall cure him."

### **Goddess Amba's Temple**

The next morning, Swami and the Brahmin resumed their walk. By evening, they reached Kolhapur. At Kolhapur, there is a famous temple dedicated to Goddess Amba (another name of Goddess Parvati, consort of Lord Shiva). This ancient temple has a beautiful architecture. The main hall and the inner sanctum sanctorum have been carved in stone, in the Hemadpanthi style. There are also other numerous smaller temples in its courtyard dedicated to other deities, namely, Lord Shri Ram (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu), Lord Dattatreya, Lord Ganapati (God with elephant-head, son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati), Lord Shani (Ruler of the planet Saturn, son of the Sun God) and many others. Swami and the Brahmin arrived. Swami decided that they would stay in the corner of the hall of the temple dedicated to Lord Shri Ram.

### **Exorcising the Ghost**

One day, a woman accompanied by her friends came to worship at Lord Shri Ram's temple. As soon as her eyes met Swami's, she cried out, "O Lord Datta! I beg you to help me. Please be kind enough to bequeath Moksha on me." So saying, she collapsed and fainted. A few of her friends ran to fetch her husband while the others tended to her and sprinkled water on her. After some time, she regained consciousness. In the meantime, her husband arrived and was updated on what had occurred. He at once rushed towards Swami and disclosed, "My wife has been possessed by a ghost these past twelve years. We went to many places and people to seek help, but no one could help her. But today, by exorcising the ghost, you have bestowed a great favor on us, for which we are indebted to you forever." He, then, invited Swami to his home to bless his family and home. Swami did not utter a word. The blessed couple reverentially bowed to Swami and happily went home. The news of this incident spread throughout the city. Scores of people flocked to the temple to seek the holy man's blessings.

### **Phadnis**

Two of the spectators of the above happening were Phadnis and Krishna Lad who started visiting Swami regularly. Phadnis was a wealthy and pious man. He visited Swami daily and

requested him to come and stay with him. Swami would say, "I will come to stay at your home when the time is right".

### **Cured atlas!**

The Brahmin carried on his daily chores diligently. He worked hard for Swami - giving him a bath, washing his clothes, procuring food, running errands and performing any and every work Swami requested him to do.

One day, Swami decided that because of his dedicated services to him, the Brahmin had washed away his past bad karma (actions) and it was time to cure him. He called the Brahmin and said to him, "Go to the river Ganges and bathe in it. Today, you will be completely cured". The Brahmin rushed to the river immediately and plunged into it with glee. This bathing experience must have been his best throughout life. When he came out of the water, his disease had disappeared. His skin gleamed of vitality and good health. Overjoyed and grateful, he ran back to show it to Swami.

While the Brahmin was bathing, Phadnis visited Swami at the temple and again invited him to stay at his house. That very moment, Swami stood up and accompanied Phadnis to his home. So, when the Brahmin returned excitedly to the temple, he was dejected that Swami had disappeared without a trace. He had no clue as to where he would find Swami to show his eternal gratitude and reverence. He sat gloomily, totally in despair. Neither food nor water would go down his throat. By night, he was so distraught that he went to sleep thoroughly exhausted. Swami appeared in his dream and said, "Son, you will not see me ever again. But, you do not have to worry. Now, go back home. Always remember me. I promise you a prosperous and peaceful life".

### **Swami's stay at Phadnis' home**

Meanwhile, Swami reached Phadnis' home. His family comprised of his wife and his child. Phadnis was exceptionally devoted to Swami. His wife did not share his belief and disapproved of Swami living in their house. Swami's every need was met by Phadnis. Despite this his wife would constantly pick fights with him, nagging, grumbling and picking faults with Swami's behavior.

One day, Swami predicted that "Bad days are here". After a couple of days, Phadnis' child fell ill and died. Phadnis' distraught wife accused Swami for their misfortune and created a rumpus. She would tell everyone who came to offer their condolences that "My child has died because of this visitor. He stays with us, eats our food and we look after his every need. In return, we lose our child. If he was a real sage, our child would have been alive today." Thus, she insinuated that Swami was a fake. Phadnis tried to console her, but in vain. To add fuel to fire, Swami affirmed, "You reap what you sow". One day, Swami took Phadnis to his neighbor's house. Standing in their doorway, he called out, "I am shivering with cold. Please give me a blanket". The neighbor came out but could not fathom what Swami was hinting. Just then the neighbor's mother hurriedly came out and said, "Swami, please forgive my lapse. Please wait. I



will fetch the shawl at once". She went in and brought back a beautiful shawl and put it around Swami, saying to the amazed onlookers, "A few days ago, my son had extremely high fever. He was shivering with cold. I mentally prayed to Swami to bring down his fever, keep him warm and speed up his recovery. In return, I promised to gift him a shawl. He recovered, but I forgot to keep my promise. Nobody in the house knows about it, as I had not told anyone. Today, Swami in his kindness came to me, to remind me of my promise". Once again she begged for Swami's forgiveness and expressed her gratitude and reverence. As a token of his blessing and protection to a fervent devotee, Swami gifted the shawl back to her. News of this occurrence soon spread. More and more devotees flocked to Phadnis' house to seek Swami's blessings.

### **Mahisalkar**

Amongst the many who visited Swami was Mahisalkar, a landlord of Mahisal, a neighboring village. He had a spiritual bent of mind. He requested Swami to come and stay with him. One day, Swami agreed. When Phadnis heard this, he was very upset. In his depressed state, he questioned Swami, "What is my fault that you are leaving me? Have I made lapses that I need to rectify? Only if you tell me, I'll know. Please stay". Swami looked lovingly at his devotee whose faith stood firm like a rock despite tremulous circumstances and said, "Son, do not worry. I am going to stay at Kolhapur. Visit me regularly. You have a prosperous future. In due time, you will be blessed with four children. They will all have long lives".

### **Tarabai**

Before departing for Mahisal, Swami told Mahisalkar that he had an incomplete job to finish. At noon, Swami accompanied by Mahisalkar walked towards a small lane named Kumbhar Galli (Potter's Lane) in Kolhapur. He stopped at a house and called aloud, "Mother, please give me some food to eat". Hearing this, the woman of the house came out. She looked at Swami and said, "You seem to be a Brahmin, so how can I give you food cooked by me. Instead I shall give you some raw grains. Please wait". She went inside the house to fetch the food articles. Swami walked off grumbling, "The woman still has doubts. She has not yet chased away caste differences from her mind". He returned to Phadnis' house for his meal before setting out for Mahisal with Mahisalkar.

Have you wondered about the identity of the fortunate woman Swami detoured specially to visit? She was Tarabai, the famous prostitute of Kolhapur. She earned extremely well and had amassed a good fortune. Since many years she suffered from severe stomach pains. The best medicines available could not cure her. Despite her shameful occupation, she was a good human being, a pious soul and a humble devotee of Lord Dattatreya. She visited the Wadi on every full moon day to pray to Lord Narsimha Saraswati. After completing her routine rituals, she would distribute food grains to the priests and feed the poor. This brought about slight relief to her stomachache. A couple of days after Swami returned without any alms from her house, Tarabai set out for her fortnightly visit to Wadi. She finished her prayers and works, and decided to spend the night there. Lord Narasimha Saraswati appeared in her dream and said, "I came to you begging for food. You sent me back hungry. I have taken birth in the present age and am known now as Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. At present, I am staying at Mahisal at

Mahisalkar's home. Come to fetch me. Take me to your house. Serve me and I promise to cure you of your pains." Tarabai's happiness was beyond measure. She immediately returned to Kolhapur. From there onwards, she took a horse carriage to Mahisal, to fetch Swami.

### **SWAMI'S STAY AT KUMBHAR LANE**

Tarabai reached Mahisalkar's home at Mahisal. The moment she saw Swami, she fell at his feet begging for mercy for not recognizing him and sending him hungry from her house. Humbly, she requested him to come and stay at her home. Swami said, "I was expecting you. In fact, I was awaiting your arrival. Let us go." Mahisalkar was understandably upset and moaned that his holy guest should depart so soon. Swami consoled him, "Kolhapur is not far away. Keep visiting me regularly". Thus Swami left for Kolhapur with Tarabai.

Due to Tarabai's heartfelt devotion, Swami in this incarnation stayed with her throughout his sojourn on earth. Tarabai was not receiving grace for nothing. She had undergone intense sadhana (meditation) in her previous life that was now bearing fruits. The story of this blessed soul Tarabai's spiritual journey will be narrated later as Swami's story unfolds.

For almost forty-five years, Swami stayed at Tarabai's home in Kumbhar Galli that was situated near the earlier mentioned temple of Goddess Amba. Perhaps that is the reason he is also known as Kumbhar Swami. He is also known as Datta Swami as he is the incarnation of Lord Dattatreya.

Tarabai's family comprised of her mother Bhimabai and her son. Tarabai personally looked after Swami - she bathed him, washed his clothes, fed him. This completely altered the atmosphere in her house. Day and night visitors would come regularly to seek Swami's help.

Bhimabai disapproved of this change. She would often grumble that due to the sanyasi residing at their residence, the "business" had stopped completely, there was no income coming in and there was no privacy in the house as people kept on coming, crowding their small house. Slowly, Bhimabai's irritation and dislike changed to hate for the Swami.

In the evenings usually there would be more visitors to see Swami. One day in the crowd, a visitor lost his gold chain. Everyone suspected Bhimabai. The police was called in. They would not allow any visitor to leave till they completed their search. Understandably, Bhimabai was upset that all were suspicious of her. She was intelligent enough to understand that this was her retribution for ill-treating the holy sage. Remorse took over. Silently, she begged Swami to forgive her trespasses and prayed to be proved innocent. Soon, the real culprit was caught. This incidence changed Bhimabai's adverse attitude towards Swami. Then onwards, she started to respect Swami.

One afternoon, Tarabai, Bhimabai and a few others were playing a game of saripat (an Indian game, similar to chess but its moves depended on points made by throwing 2 or 4 dices). Swami came in. He made a move in the game and said, "Be careful how you make every move. In life,

one wrong move (read "wrong deed") can take you to the path of hell". This is an appropriate advice to every human being, especially disciples on the spiritual path. Perhaps Bhimabai thought that Swami was taunting her. Her suppressed evil nature came to the fore. She got up and firmly held Swami's hand and dragged him to another room. The room had no ventilation. Except one door, it had no other windows or doors. Bhimabai locked Swami in this room. She was satisfied that there was no way Swami could escape and disturb the game. But, she forgot one thing. Who could lock up God, he who pervades everything, everywhere? The Omnipresent One - Swami.

Unknown to Bhimabai's mischief, Tarabai and the others played on with Bhimabai till dusk. They stopped as it was getting dark. Tarabai got up. She went to the backyard of the house. She was perturbed to see Swami perched atop the audambar (- a very favorite tree of Lord Dattatreya) tree. She screeched aloud, "Mom! Come and see where Swami is". Hearing her daughter's scream, Bhimabai, thinking that her daughter was perhaps searching for Swami, replied, "Do not worry Tara. He will soon be out". Hurriedly she opened the lock, lest the others realize her mischief. But alas! The room was empty. Shocked, she almost collapsed. Wondering where Swami had disappeared, she rushed towards Tarabai whose sight was fixed on top of the tree. Bhimabai looked up and was aghast to see Swami perched merrily on the tree. Bhimabai felt disgusted and ashamed at her bad behavior towards the God-incarnated Swami. This incident transformed Bhimabai completely. She started chanting Swami's name and devotedly served Swami for the rest of her life. She died at an old age. Swami's grace ensured that she attained Moksha.

### **Krishna Lad**

If you recall an earlier incident at Lord Shri Ram's temple where Swami exorcised a ghost from a lady devotee, you will recollect that a gentleman by the name of Krishna Lad had witnessed this incident. Krishna Lad had a spiritual bent of mind and would often visit temples and dargahs (tombs of Muslim saints). After witnessing the above incident, once in a while he started visiting Swami. Krishna Lad was an athlete. Daily at dawn he would exercise and then go to bathe in the river. Near the riverbank was a dargah of a well-known Muslim saint Babu Jamal. Krishna Lad's daily routine was to exercise, take his bath, go and pay his respects at the dargah and then go to work. One day, when he reached the dargah, a fakir (ascetic) came out from the dargah, saying, and "Don't come here anymore. Go to Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami". Stating this, the fakir disappeared. Krishna Lad was stunned. He thought he was hallucinating. He went through his daily work routine and forgot all about the morning incident.

The next morning Krishna Lad finished his exercise and bath, and proceeded to the dargah to pay his respects. The moment he entered the dargah, he started shivering and caught fever. Frightened and at his wit's end, he rushed to Swami at Kumbhar Galli. The moment Swami sighted Krishna Lad, he said, "Babu Jamal is my friend. Do not worry, your fever will descend". Krishna Lad was flabbergasted for he had not even pleaded his plight. From that day onwards, he became Swami's ardent devotee.

## **Vasu Dalvi**

Vasu Dalvi, a resident of Kumbhar Galli started visiting Swami regularly. In every visit, Swami would tell him, "Give me your shendi" (tuft of hair). Vasu could not comprehend the meaning of Swami's regular utterance. Vasu was a good man in every way but he had one vice - he was hot tempered and quarrelsome. He would pick fights on small issues with almost everyone - his family members, neighbors, colleagues at work. His wife was an easy target for his bad temper. One day he had a serious altercation with his wife. When the heated argument reached its crescendo, Vasu decided to leave home for good. He revealed his decision to his emotionally battered wife and left home. In despair, he rushed to Swami's residence. Swami hugged the distraught man and said, "At least now give me your shendi". The veil which had clouded Vasu's mind till now lifted. Now, he understood Swami's injunction. At once he rushed out and went straight to the barber. He had his head completely shaven. He went and bought saffron robes and returned to Swami. With Swami's blessings, he became a sanyasi (ascetic). He stayed with Swami.

Krishna Lad had been observing these happenings. He requested Swami's permission to take up sanyas. Swami consented. Both these sanyasis Vasu Dalvi and Krishna Lad stayed with Swami all their lives. With great reverence and devotion, they served him. In fact their devotion has been compared to that of Jaya and Vijaya, the faithful guards of Lord Vishnu's palace at Vaikunth (heavenly abode of Vishnu). However they begged for their food from householders in Kolhapur and did not impose on Tarabai's depleting resources.

## **Ramdasbua**

Ganagapur is a place made holy by Shri Narasimha Saraswati's stay for two decades. A brahmin Ramdasbua stayed there, worshipping Shri Narasimha Saraswati by continuously reading the sacred book

Shri Guruchatritra. This sacred book narrates the life stories of various incarnations of God - Lord Dattatreya, Shri Shripad Vallabh, Shri Narasimha Saraswati - and their sojourn on earth. Ramdasbua lived without eating food and only ate neem leaves. He did this for three years. One night, Shri Narasimha Saraswati appeared in his dream and said, "In my present incarnation, I am living at Kolhapur as Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. Come to me and offer your services. Your vigorous fasting has made you very weak. Travel by bullock cart. I am giving you rupees five for the fare". When Ramdasbua woke up, he cried with joy at finding rupees five by his pillow. This indicated that his dream was indeed true. He came to Kolhapur and resided with Swami throughout life.

## **Inner Circle**

Almost at the same time, a saraswat brahmin Ramkrishna Farrukh and a weaver Mahadba joined the other three disciple - Krishna Lad, Vasu Dalvi and Ramdasbua. This group of five lived with Swami throughout their lives. They gave their dedicated services to Swami doing menial work like sweeping, cleaning utensils, fetching river water, washing clothes and abiding by every wish of Swami. Rest of their time was devoted in singing bhajans (devotional songs) and

doing japa (chanting Swami's name). Whenever and wherever Swami went out, he was always accompanied by Krishna Lad and Vasu Dalvi.

Many devotees visited Swami daily. They would crowd around him. Most times, it would appear as if Swami was talking to himself or muttering something incomprehensible. However this was not true. It would inevitably be an answer to a question posed silently by a devotee or an advice to someone who needed it. Only the person concerned could fathom what Swami said. With more and more devotees experiencing divine help, slowly most devotees realized that the person they had in their midst was indeed God incarnated. They started worshipping Swami with rituals. Three times everyday, they would conduct Swami's aarti (act of worship by waving lamps lit with ghee, incense and camphor, simultaneously singing devotional songs and prayers).

Swami expected his disciples and devotees to be well behaved and disciplined. He encouraged them to treat all human beings as equal, no matter what caste or status they belonged to. Many a times he arranged situations to rectify the behavior of his devotees and transformed them totally.

### **Goddess Amba complains about Swami's devotees**

One morning, a young lady hurriedly walked in to meet Swami. In a high pitched tone, she angrily told Swami, "Keep a check on your children. They misbehave and talk in abusive language. This causes trouble to others. I will not tolerate such behavior anymore". Swami lovingly caressed her chin and consoled her, "Mother, please forgive them for they are our children." Hearing this, the lady collapsed. After a short while she got up and left. The devotees who had witnessed this scene were naturally curious. One devotee mustered up the courage to question Swami. Swami explained, "She was Goddess Amba who had come to complain about you all".

### **Taming of Vasu Dalvi's temper**

One does not become a sanyasi by wearing saffron robes. He should forsake worldly affairs, passions and be free of desires. He should have full control over the six entities viz., sex-urge, anger, lust, temptations, ego, and hatred . What had occurred was that Vasu Dalvi, the sanyasi, had been boiling with anger over some petty matter. So, the Mother Goddess had come to complain about him. Our nature is governed by the food we eat. Therefore, to correct the volcanic side of his nature, Swami ordered him to hereafter eat only soaked channadal (grams). For several years thereon Vasu adhered to the simple meal. One day, Swami found Vasu craving to eat his meal. Swami said to him, "So, are you still desperate to eat channa dal?". Hence for three years by Swami's grace, Vasu lived without a morsel of food. When Swami felt that his mind was completely purified, he allowed Vasu to eat normal food. Thereafter, Vasu would go to beg for food. Whatever he received he would first offer to Swami. He would eat only as much as Swami would place on his palms. Thus Swami tamed Vasu's temper.

## **Haripant Shidnorlikar**

Haripant Shidnorlikar, a brahmin, used to frequently visit Swami. One day, it occurred to him that he should invite Swami to grace his home. Accordingly, one morning he went to Swami to invite Swami for lunch. Although Krishna Lad and Vasu Dalvi were present, Haripant did not extend the invitation to them. This he did purposely as they were non- Brahmins. Swami said he would come to his home provided the food was good. Haripant was so excited that he did not bother to decipher the real meaning behind Swami's words. He went home and had the most tasty delicacies and sweetmeats prepared. When the lunch was prepared, he set out to fetch Swami.

Before his arrival, Krishna Lad and Vasu Dalvi had just returned after begging alms. Swami called out to them, "Boys, what food have you received today? Come and share it with me for I am hungry". He, then, sat and ate with relish the rotis (chapattis) and the chutney (condiment) that they had received as alms. He finished his meal and got up to wash his hands. Just then Haripant arrived to fetch him. Swami told him bluntly, "I have just finished my lunch". Haripant realized his folly. He felt ashamed of looking down on people of lower castes. After this incidence, he never let his upper caste ego come in the way of treating people. Swami had taught him a lesson of his life - that when all are one in the eyes of God, who is he to differentiate?

Thereafter, Haripant decided to progress spiritually. He took upon himself the task of reading the Shri Gurucharitra daily and continuously chanted Swami's name. He did this sitting in a nearby temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Daily, at the same time, a cat would enter and sit on the windowsill. The temple was dark with only a dim light peeping through the window. The cat seated there, therefore, blocked the little sunlight that penetrated through. This caused difficulty in the reading of the sacred book. One day, Haripant got irritated by this daily interruption and lost his temper. He threw a utensil at hand at the cat to drive it out. The utensil landed bang on the cat's face and hit its mouth. After finishing his morning rituals he went to pay his respects to Swami. Haripant was aghast to see Swami's face swollen. Swami said aloud to the devotees present, "I went to hear Haripant read the sacred text. He hit me instead". Ashamed at what he had done, Haripant repeatedly apologized. Once again, Swami humbled him and taught him a lesson that all creatures are after all one.

What are the lessons learnt in Swami's stories? Swami is God incarnated on earth to help people and show them the path to him. Since he is the Creator and the Creation, he pervades everyone, everything, everywhere, at all times. He assumes all forms, therefore, one should be good to everyone and everything.

## **Krishna Lad's mother**

Krishna Lad's mother was ill due to old age. Naturally Krishna Lad requested Swami to release his mother from the bondage of the cycle of life and death. Swami refused. He said she had to atone for a lot of past sins before she could be freed. He, however, promised that she would

stay near him in her next birth and at the end, she would attain Moksha. After a few days, Krishna Lad's mother started to cry. She was very frightened. She said four demons were advancing towards her and they wanted to kill her. Krishna Lad always wore Swami's padukas around his neck, he put the same around his mother's neck. Immediately, the mother's face turned serene. She said, "The demons have vanished. Four priests are reciting holy chants". Krishna Lad realized the efficacy of his Guru's padukas. Soon after, his mother died in peace.

After a short period, in the same vicinity where Swami lived, a bitch gave birth to four puppies. On seeing the new born litter, Swami called out to Krishna Lad. Picking up one puppy, he said, "Recognize her. This was your mother". Swami named her Kusari. The puppy stayed on with Swami. She grew up. Unlike most dogs, Kusari was much disciplined. She would not touch anything in the house or mess it up. She would only eat what Swami gave her with his own hands. Many a times, Tarabai tried to feed Kusari some rice and milk, but Kusari would not even touch it, let alone eat it. This annoyed Tarabai. She even tried bribing Kusari with laddus and pedas (types of Indian sweetmeats), but Kusari would not touch them.

### **Swami's throne**

Since Swami came to stay at Tarabai's house, the visitors who flocked here to get his grace increased many folds. A gentleman whose name was Vishnupant was one of the regular visitors. Usually, his sister Annapurna accompanied him. One day, Swami told her to fetch him a 'Meghdumbari' (a seat and a canopy held by four pillars covering it). Annapurna could not fathom exactly what Swami wanted. Nevertheless, after consulting her brother, relatives and Swami's other devotees, Annapurna had a carved and embellished wooden chair made for Swami. It almost resembled a king's throne. Swami, the Emperor of all emperors would thereon sit on the throne in his court and give audience to the suffering humanity that came in droves to seek his grace and help. Krishna Lad and Vasu Dalvi like the legendary Jaya and Vijaya stood on Swami's two sides as he sat on his throne. Now, aarti was conducted five times a day. Many devotees would sit the entire day chanting devotional songs. The entire atmosphere of Tarabai's house and at Kumbhar Galli had totally changed. Tarabai's house was now called 'Vairagya Mathi'. Vairagya means dispassion towards the material world that leads one to God-realization. Mathi means abode of a holy sage.

## **PART - 2 SOME RENOWNED DISCIPLES,**

### **Balakoo**

Balkrishna Rashivadekar, a youth of seventeen years of age, was informed by an astrologer that according to his horoscope he had a short life span of twenty-two years. Nevertheless, the astrologer advised that if he sought the grace of a godly personage, his lease of life might be increased. Obviously, Balkrishna was worried. He was frantically in search of a spiritual sage who could bless him with longevity. When he heard about Swami, he rushed to him and bowed. Before Balkrishna could open his mouth, Swami said to him, "Some time or another, everyone has to leave their physical body. Then, why should one fear death? Come, we shall remove your

fears". Balkrishna was astounded! That moment onwards, he became Swami's ardent devotee. Throughout the day, he would chant Swami's name. Twice a day, he would come to pay respects to Swami. However, his parents disapproved vehemently. To add to their indignation, after a few days, he left his job. Throughout the day, he would stay with Swami. Annoyed with his behavior, his parents started ill-treating Balakrishna. Due to his good behavior and devotional nature, Balakrishna made deep impression on Swami. Fondly, Swami would address him as Balakoo.

Balakoo was strong and well built. Whenever Swami went out, he would carry Swami on his shoulders. One afternoon, as Balakoo carried Swami on his shoulder, accompanied by other devotees, they passed Balakoo's house. Swami urged Balakoo to take him to his home. Balakoo was in a dilemma. He could not say no to Swami and at the same time, he was apprehensive that his parents would insult his beloved Guru. Nevertheless, he took Swami to his home. As they reached the entrance, Balakoo's mother came out. She was enthralled by the sight of a short man with a fair complexion, with warm and kind twinkling eyes with a beautiful smile that brought radiance to his face. He exuded the glory of divinity. The moment her eyes fell on Swami, a gamut of emotions ran through her. But, her inner spirituality surfaced. She fell at Swami's feet and surrendered to him. With tears trickling down her face, she said, "O Lord! Please forgive me. It was erroneous on my part to talk ill of you. You are kind hearted, please forgive me. Please accept my son Balakoo as your child". At once, Swami retorted, "Do not worry, Balakoo is my child".

Balakoo's mother invited Swami and the other devotees into her house and made them comfortable. She requested Swami to stay and have lunch with them. Swami replied, "If your offer of lunch is for everyone present, then only shall I accept your invitation". Balakoo's mother sincerely answered, "Whatever I have cooked, I will offer it to all". Swami and the accompanying devotees partook of the lunch offered with plenty of love by the gracious lady. While Tarabai had to forcibly feed Swami, here he ate with his own hands and relished every morsel. This shows that God is ever hungry for true love and devotion. From that day onwards, at noon, Swami and his devotees would go to Balakoo's home for lunch. With Swami's permission and blessings, Balakoo made marble padukas. Swami showered his blessings and empowered the padukas. He promised that "Whosoever worships my padukas; I shall give that person audience and fulfill his wishes". Throughout his life, Balakoo worshipped Swami's padukas. After his demise, they were passed on to Krishna Lad. Later, they were given to Vyas. Vyas built a small mathi at a place known as Gangaves at Kolhapur. In approximately 1902A.D. the padukas were installed there. From that day to date, at this very place, there is a non-stop chanting of Swami's sacred name and continuous singing of devotional songs. When Balakoo died due to a minor illness, he was chanting Swami's name. He was fretful that he should have got more time to serve Swami. The wish one makes at the end of one's life is always fulfilled.

A few months after Balakoo's death, his sister became pregnant. In a dream, Swami said to her, "Balakoo is coming back as your son. Take good care of him". Balakoo's sister delivered a baby boy. The moment the news reached Swami's ears, he rushed to her home. He took the infant on his lap; oil massaged him and gave him a bath with warm water. Swami clothed him in the



new clothes he had brought and named him "Na". Swami put Na in a cradle and started singing a song to him. Though one cannot fully understand the deeper esoteric meaning of the song Swami sang, the literal meaning is as follows: "Son, one gets a rebirth as per your desire at the last moments and thus he gets involved in this cycle of birth and death again and again. He is awfully disturbed by shadripus like sex and anger. Do not worry; they will not trouble you due to meeting with Shrikrishna. You would be having control on your sensing organs. Your mind would be Thoughtless. Na, have a peaceful sleep I am keeping here two guards- peace and forgiveness for your protection. Egoism would not show you fear and urges would not make noise to disturb you. They would run away by seeing Shrikrishna. I have shown you a secret fine path to go to the citadel of peace . Go to the ultimate destination. On reaching there, your joy will have no bounds. Na, now sleep peacefully." Swami, then, kissed the child several times. He said to the people present, "Na is my good child". Everyday after kakad aarti (the first worship of the day before sunrise), Swami would rush to Na's house. Swami would get him new clothes, sing songs to him, carry him around while going for walks or take him to a corner shop. Swami would whisper in Na's ears and this baby of less than a fortnight old would answer him saying, "Hum", as if he understood all that Swami said to him. Na became more attached to Swami than his own mother.

Three years passed thus. One day, Na had fever. After a couple of days, he breathed his last on Swami's lap. Hugging and kissing him, Swami wept like a common man. After the funeral, Swami told the mourners, "Na is sitting here in the dark. Please light a ghee lamp here". In India, it is a custom to keep a lit lamp for ten days at the spot where death occurred in the house. The same night, Swami appeared in the dream of Na's mother. He consoled her by saying, "Do not be sad. Na has attained Moksha. Who survives on earth forever? When God incarnated on earth in the form of Lord Ram and Lord Krishna, even they had to go. Where are your beloved ones - your father, your uncle, your grandmother? Are they alive? Henceforth, you concentrate on your own life. Lead it as well as you can". With this divine dream, Na's mother felt at peace. She, too, became an ardent devotee of Swami's and started worshipping him.

## **Madhava**

A Brahmin couple of Vene village, which is situated near the city of Ratnagiri, were very worried as all the children born to them would die at birth. They went to several temples to seek divine intervention. One day, they came to Lord Shiva's famous temple at Ratnagiri. Here, Lord Shiva is commonly known as Lord Kedarnath or Lord Revananath. The couple prayed ardently to the Lord to give them children with long life. In return they pledged that they would gift their first born to him. Soon, God granted them their wish. They named their first born Madhava.

When Madhava became seven years old, his upanayana ceremony was performed. With a heavy heart, the Brahmin couple decided to fulfill their vow. The Brahmin brought Madhava to the temple of Lord Kedarnath and left him there alone. The child was confused, sad and scared. With no one to look after his needs, he started begging for alms. Rest of the time, he would

stay at the temple and chant Lord Shiva's name. Whatever he received as alms, he would first offer to Lord Shiva, then take the rest.

In the short period he had spent with his family, his father had educated him in the performance of rituals and how to read the panchanga (Hindu calendar signifying the auspicious and malefic days) and interpreting it. Slowly, he started performing rituals and interpreting the panchanga to the devotees. People started seeking his help and posed questions. He, in turn, would pray to Lord Shiva and happily dispense advice to them, which was usually the very first thought that occurred in his mind. People soon realized that the little bhatji's (priest) words were efficacious. Soon, little Madhava started earning well. He did not have to beg for alms anymore. From his daily earnings, he would conduct rituals to worship Lord Kedarnath and offer him food. Thus, three years passed. One night, Lord Shiva appeared in his dream and instructed him, "Life is useless without a Guru (spiritual master who guides you from darkness to God). Go to Kolhapur and offer your services to Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami". The next day, the exuberant Madhava quickly finished his daily work and rituals, bowed to Lord Kedarnath and proceeded to Kolhapur.

He reached Kolhapur. He started to wonder where to search for his Guru. Just then, Swami who was taking a walk along with his other devotees saw this ten-year old boy wandering about. He stopped him saying, "Bhatji, are you searching for a Guru?" Madhava immediately understood the identity of this divine personage. He, at once, bowed and surrendered at his feet on the road itself. Swami lovingly said, "I have to help you as Lord Shiva has sent you into my care".

Madhava stayed with Swami. His charming manners endeared him to Swami and all those lived at the mathi. Swami addressed him by several names - Venimadhava, Veni, and Venkarbhatji. After a few days, Swami instructed him to return to Ratnagiri to serve Lord Kedarnath.

So, Venimadhava returned to Ratnagiri and commenced his daily routine. Within a few days of his return, Lord Kedarnath re-appeared in his dream and instructed him to return to Swami. This confused Venimadhava and put him in a dilemma. He was fed up of being shoved to and fro. He wondered why he should keep shuttling between Ratnagiri and Kolhapur. Like any irritated ten-year-old, he decided not to stay at either place. He decided to move to yet another place.

He left Ratnagiri and started walking towards the forest. He moved on and on, climbing a mountain to find a lonely place for him to stay. On top of the mountain, he came across a small temple dedicated to the Mother Goddess. He decided to stay put at the temple. The whole day he chanted Swami's name. Tired, he fell asleep. When he woke up in the morning, he found that someone had left food articles, viz., rice, lentils, wheat flour, oil, vegetables, utensils, wooden logs for fire and everything else that is required for cooking a meal. Venimadhava's joy knew no bounds. He went to a water stream nearby, had a bath, carried some water back with him and cooked a meal. He carried out rituals to worship the Mother Goddess in the temple, offered food to her and then, sat down to eat. Since his needs had been met without any effort on his part, he spent rest of his time chanting Swami's name.

A week passed. Everyday food articles were present when Venimadhava woke up in the morning. Venimadhava thought, "Whoever is supplying these food articles, if only they would serve me cooked food". When he woke up the next morning, he was dumbstruck to find food lay out on a plate - hot steamed rice, chapattis (Indian bread), cooked vegetables and lentils. It suddenly dawned on him that it was indeed Swami who was taking care of him even deep in this dense forest. His throat choked as he remembered Swami and the love he had showered on him during his stay with him. He had a quick bath, performed the rituals and rushed hastily to Kolhapur.

Venimadhava reached Kolhapur, went straight to the mathi and entered in. He bowed to Swami. Swami was exuberant to receive his prodigal child back. He pulled him and sat him onto his lap and affectionately kissed him. He said to his devotees present, "Look at this brave ten-year-old. He stayed alone in the forest. He had no fear of tigers, lions or snakes. For a week, Goddess Annapurna (another name of Goddess Parvati, provider of food) fed him". Swami, then, showered his blessings on Venimadhava and gave him a spiritual initiation through a secret yogic (state of union of man and God) process. With this, the little boy went into a meditative trance. For quite some time Venimadhava stayed on with Swami. One day, Swami reluctantly called him and told him that Lord Kedarnath was calling him back to Ratnagiri. Venimadhava felt very sad at leaving his beloved Guru. But since that was his Guru's order, he decided to abide by it. At the time of departure, he could not control his emotions and started crying. Swami consoled him with a promise that he would always be present by Venimadhava's side throughout life. Reluctantly, with a heavy heart, Venimadhava trudged towards Ratnagiri.

On reaching the temple, Venimadhava surrendered himself before Lord Kedarnath. He put his head down on the Shivalinga and sobbed like a baby. It was a heart-wrenching scene. Even God must have been moved by the plight of this child. A few minutes passed thus. Absorbed in his own sorrow, Venimadhava was suddenly brought out of his despondency by a solemn voice that said, "I reside everywhere in the cosmos. I observe everything at all times. And I personally promised you that I would always be with you. Then my son, why are you so sad? Why are you weeping?" Wondering as to who was talking to him thus, Venimadhava lifted his head and opened his eyes. Lo behold! He was shocked to see Swami smiling and lovingly looking at him in place of the Shivalinga. The very next moment the scene changed. Swami disappeared. In place was the Shivalinga covered with flowers which were only available at Kolhapur and used at the rituals conducted at the mathi. These flowers were not available at Ratnagiri at all. This divine experience acted as a balm to the sad boy. He started to carry on his duties at the temple. The devotees at the temple who revered him for his accurate predictions saw a new side. He had become more disciplined. Material objects no more attracted him. People now started giving him the respect and devotion that a divine sage commands and deserves.

## **Childless couple**

A childless Brahmin couple was visiting temples and holy shrines all over Maharashtra. They were on the look out for blessings by which they could have children. They came to Kolhapur to pay their respects to Swami. Swami explicitly told them, "Due to very serious sins in your past life, you will not have any children". Disappointed, but not disheartened, the couple started visiting other holy places, meeting other holy people. They finally reached Ratnagiri. The people there directed them to Venimadhava. Venimadhava blessed them. He promised them a son within a year. Gently he said to them, "My Swami is very kind. He can do and undo anything and everything on this earth. With his divine powers and blessings, your wish will be fulfilled. Go to Kolhapur and serve him". With hopes raised, the couple went back to Kolhapur to meet Swami. Before the couple could restate their case, Swami said, "I give you what he has promised". Within a year, a bonny baby boy was born to the now joyous couple. Thus Swami altered the course of destiny of the couple to fulfill the promise made by one of his dearest disciples.

## **Scholar of Vedanta**

At Kolhapur there was a famous Brahmin scholar of Vedanta (interpretation of philosophy revealed in the Vedas). He had a young son whose name was Vyas. Vyas had learned Vedanta from his father and had in fact mastered it. He was so well versed on the subject and was such a beautiful orator that he was invited to give discourses at various religious meetings. He would usually talk of the relationship of the Atman (soul) with the Parmatama (God), their main characteristics being nirakara (without form) and niraguna (without criterion), and how they pervade the entire creation. Since Vyas had no spiritual experiences, after a while he got bored preaching the same old sermons.

Vyas happened to meet an illiterate man in his neighborhood who often visited Alandi, the shrine of the famous Saint Dnyaneshwar who lived in the 11th century and wrote Dnyaneshwari - the poetical interpretation of the Bhagwat Geeta in the Marathi language. In a casual conversation, the man described that on sincere prayers the saint would appear before him and guide him on the spiritual path. This advice perplexed Vyas as it was six hundred years since Dnyaneshwar had taken live Samadhi. He wondered how the saint could give him an audience or dispense advice to him - impossible, unimaginable. Vyas then asked other people for advice but was not satisfied. He, therefore, decided that if someone else directs him to Alandi, he would take it as a hint for him to visit the shrine of Saint Dnyaneshwar.

Yet somebody else guided him to meet Swami. As he entered the mathi, Swami said to him, "You must visit Alandi". This left Vyas astounded as he had not even asked Swami for his advice, but had already received it.

The young man immediately went to Alandi. He sat under the sacred Ajanavriksha (tree) and started reading the Dnyaneshwari religiously. A month passed thus. Nothing happened - no dream, no spiritual experience, saint Dnyaneshwar did not appear.

One day, a devotee approached Vyas and requested him for some spiritual guidance. He said, "Sir, you seem to be a devout and learned man. I see that you are undergoing hard penance. For the past twelve years, I have been praying to Saint Dnyaneshwar. I regularly visit his shrine. Please guide me so that he may give me an audience". Immediately Vyas retorted, "Visualize saint Dnyaneshwar's image in front of your eyes and chant his name with full devotion. He will definitely appear before you". The next morning, the grateful and exuberant devotee came running to him. He said, "Sir, I am deeply grateful for your advice. I obeyed your instructions. At night, saint Dnyaneshwar appeared in my dream along with his brothers Nivruti and Sopan, and his sister Mukta". You can well imagine the state of Vyas' mind. He was shell-shocked. He had given the advice only to get rid of the devotee who was wasting his valuable time. And on his advice, he had already had a spiritual experience! Perhaps his devotion was more sincere.

Vyas then thought that perhaps he needed to go inside the shrine and pray. Thus he started walking towards the shrine temple. While walking, he started to think that "God is everywhere and so is Dnyaneshwar. Thus, he is right besides me. So, is it really necessary to go inside?" As he walked to the entrance, the doorkeeper stopped him and said, "Why do you need to go inside. You can as well see it from outside". Vyas started to think, "Although I have had no spiritual experience, yet I simply know that God is everywhere. Henceforth, I shall chant saint Dnyaneshwar's name with full devotion. Today onwards, I shall stop eating and drinking till the saint guides me onto the spiritual path". A week passed thus. Saint Dnyaneshwar appeared in his dream and said, "Now wind up your penance. Go to Kolhapur and serve Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. He is Hanuman himself".

Vyas' joy knew no bounds. It was noon when he returned to Kolhapur and entered the mathi. Swami embraced him, "Come my son. Since Saint Dnyaneshwar has sent you, I must do your work". Swami sat besides Vyas and lovingly fed him lunch with his own hands. Vyas was very dear to Swami who lovingly called him shendephthal (an endearing term used to address the youngest child of a family).

### **A devotee of Shri Samartha Ramdas**

A resident of Kolhapur was Swami's devotee. He regularly visited the mathi. One day, he had a guest - a priest who was the devotee of Shri Samartha Ramdas. The priest was also a scholar and gave religious discourses. When the host prepared to set out for his daily visit to the mathi, the guest inquired where he was going. The host told his guest about Swami. The guest immediately said, "There cannot be anybody like Shri Samartha Ramdas, but nevertheless I shall come with you". On the way he purchased a coconut to offer to Swami but mentally he thought, "What a waste!"

They entered the mathi. The priest offered the coconut to Swami who immediately retorted, "Your coconut is wasted. Alas! I am not Shri Samartha Ramdas". The priest was rendered dumbstruck. He apologized profusely to Swami who smiled mischievously and said, "It is true I am not Ramdas. But Ramdas was an incarnation of Lord Hanuman. And I am Hanuman! See my

tail". Swami turned around and showed his tail. He turned around again and lo behold! All present at the mathi saw a giant monkey - Lord Hanuman - sitting on the 'throne'. He exuded an extremely bright divine glow of light. All present were not only stunned but also trembling at this divine sight. Within a moment, the scene resumed normalcy and all present were relieved. The priest was deeply satisfied. He bowed to Swami with a newfound reverence and with full devotion offered him the coconut.

### **Swami's Rudra Abhisheka**

'Rudra Abhisheka' is a ritual wherein water, milk or sugarcane juice is poured continuously on the Shiva Linga while the priests chant the Rudra mantra. During this process, the number of priests who chant the sacred mantras is in the multiple of eleven.

One day, a devotee invited eleven learned priests to the mathi to conduct the ritual of 'rudra abhisheka' on Swami's feet. The priests who came started grumbling for various reasons. One priest said it was wrong to conduct such a high ritual at a mere mortal's feet. Another priest was furious that he had been invited to perform such a high liturgical ritual at a prostitute's house. Yet another priest remarked that they should ignore such petty matters as long as they were paid their fees.

The priests started the ritual ceremony. Swami, who could not recite the simple 'Gayatri' mantra at his thread ceremony, now started chanting the difficult 'Rudra' mantra. To the astonishment of the priests, Swami pronounced each word correctly with scientific notations.

At the end of this ceremony, all the priests surrendered to Swami who revealed, "Your abhisheka has reached the feet of Lord Panduranga. Since Lord Shiva lies on his head, it has reached him too". This left the priests amazed as Swami was referring to the crown of Lord Panduranga at Pandharpur that has the shape of a shivalinga.

### **Jatarat**

A sanyasi from North India came to Kolhapur. Here, he lived at the temple dedicated to Goddess Amba. He remained naked. He never asked for alms. He came to be known as Jatarat.

On the request of the local people, Jatarat started to cover his loins with a cloth. When devotees offered him milk, he would drink a drop and distribute the rest to the needy children. He never accepted eatables. Nevertheless, if someone offered eatables, he would immediately give it away to the beggars. If devotees forced him to eat, he would not be able to retain the food in his body. He would immediately vomit it out. He was evolved in many yoga techniques. He could even take his organs such as the liver, intestines and other parts out of his body wash them and place them again in their place.

People were highly impressed with this young yogi. Soon he had a large following of devotees who would gather around him and listen to his advice. One evening, a very excited Jatarat

asked his devotees seated around him, "Do you all want to meet a yogi who is a Paramahansa?" Literally the word 'paramahansa' means the supreme swan (a symbol of spiritual discrimination). The title signifies one who manifests the supreme state of unbroken communion with God. Everyone present replied an equally excited "Yes". Jatarat at once got up and started walking. His devotees followed suit. Jatarat must have covered a small distance when he saw Swami with his devotees coming towards him. Jatarat rushed towards Swami and bowed reverentially to him. When he got up, he whispered something to Swami who whispered a reply to him. Jatarat was heard saying to Swami, "Thanks! This was the exact point where I was stuck in my yogic progress". Jatarat was tall and strong, Swami was short and frail. Jatarat and Swami embraced each other. In all the excitement, Jatarat picked up Swami joyously. Then both parted ways.

The moment Swami departed from the scene, chaos and confusion prevailed amongst Jatarat's devotees. They bombarded him with angry questions, "You are a pious sanyasi, while he is a fool. Why did you bow to him?" "He stays with a prostitute". "Only stupid people visit him". "You promised to show us a paramahansa".

Jatarat placed his hands on his ears and shut them. He could not bear to hear blasphemous statements darted towards Swami. When he could not bear any longer, he yelled, "Shiva! Shiva! You all are criticizing a great man. He is God himself staying in your city in human disguise. And all of you are ignorant of the fact. Fools, you all are so ignorant! Surrender to him! Get your life's dreams fulfilled by him".

### **Lord Vithoba visits Swami**

A sanyasi, presumably from the Himalayas, visited the mathi in the early morning hours. He was young and handsome. He entered, went straight to where Swami was seated and stood in front of him. He asked Swami a question in Sanskrit. Swami replied back in Sanskrit. He then lay down in front of Swami, turning on the side, facing Swami and then using his hand as a headrest propped himself up. He kept on staring straight at Swami without so much as blinking his eyelids. Evening set in, he did not stir from that place. The other devotees irritated at this behavior asked Swami if they should move him to a corner. Swami would not allow them.

Three days and three nights passed thus. The young sanyasi remained in the same position. Devotees again requested Swami to allow them to move the sanyasi. Swami whispered something to the sanyasi who immediately got up and departed from the room. Swami gave a disgusted look at his devotees and said, "Pandharinath (Head of Pandharpur known by several names - Lord Vithal, Panduranga, Vithoba) was here and you all did not so much as offered him anything to eat or drink as prasad'. Devotees rushed out in different directions but he had disappeared without trace. How could he have disappeared within a couple of seconds? Seeing his devotees' crestfallen faces, Swami laughed and said, "Okay. We will bring him back". Within a fraction of a second, the young man reappeared and bowed to Swami who gave him prasad. All the devotees bowed to him and then he made his exit.

## **Swami Vivekananda**

Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Ramkrishna Paramahansa visited Swami at the mathi at Kolhapur. Swami blessed him with the boon of vacha siddhi. This boon meant that all he spoke would come true and his speech would be so impressive that the listeners would be convinced of his point of view. After receiving this blessing, Swami Vivekananda was the first Hindu monk from India to ever visit the United States of America. He addressed 'the Parliament of Religions' at Chicago on September 11, 1893. He addressed a select audience of nearly 7,000 enlightened representatives of different branches of American thought who were thrilled to hear his message and welcomed him with sustained and thunderous applause. He charmed the audiences with his magical oratory, and left an indelible mark on America's spiritual development. History has recorded Swami Vivekananda's speech for posterity.

## **Dada Pandit**

Dada Pandit was a resident of Kolhapur. He used to visit the mathi occasionally. He had however no faith in Swami and never bowed to him. He just could not fathom why ignorant people bow to a mere mortal being. Dada Pandit soon lost his wife. He then remarried. A ghost however possessed his new wife. She suffered immensely. She would often cry out and urge her husband, "Take me to Swami at Kumbhar lane". But Dada Pandit would turn a deaf ear to all her pleadings.

Dada however took his wife to Wadi. His wife's pain increased terribly. The ghost within her body told him, "Take me to the Swami at Kumbhar lane or I'll trouble her more". Dada was just not convinced. They stayed put at Wadi for three more days. On the third night, Shri Narasimha Saraswati appeared in Dada's dream and said, "Your problem will not be resolved here. Take your wife back to Kolhapur. I am living there as Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. I will only help you there".

The next morning when Dada woke up, the ghost who possessed his wife laughed hysterically and said, "Now take me to Swami or I'll trouble her more". His wife then started crying due to severe pain.

Dada was left with no choice but to return to Kolhapur and take his wife to the mathi. Ashamed of his earlier haughty behavior, he bowed humbly to Swami and said, "O Lord! Please forgive me for not recognizing you. We are ignorant beings. The veil of illusion that you draw over our eyes keeps us away from recognizing the truth for what it is. Sir, you are the ocean of kindness. Please forgive me! Please help and cure my wife. We have come to surrender at your feet. It is well known that those who surrender to you, their wishes are fulfilled". Swami looked at Dada's wife with kindness. The ghost left her immediately and she recovered fully. The couple then became ardent devotees of Swami.



It may be noted that Dada Pandit was the maternal great-grandfather of Guruvarya Shri Madhav Saraswati

### **A true devotee**

Swami had an ardent devotee who was a farmer who owned a small piece of land. Although his income from the farm produce was limited, he managed his finances very well. He had two daughters who he had married off and were well settled.

Times changed and so did the circumstances. His limited income became meagre. It became difficult for him to procure even three square meals a day. One day in a state of deep depression, he wandered to the outskirts of the city. Tired after wandering for long, he sat down under a tree. In his misery, he prayed to Swami, "O Lord! Death is a better option than these hunger pangs at noon. Please God relieve me from this sorry state". He suddenly heard a voice saying, "God creates food first. Then he creates living beings. One, who feeds an ant without fail, feeds an elephant too". The devotee looked around wondering who was speaking but found no one present.

The cool breeze brought with it a paper that floated around and dropped at his feet. On picking it up he found that it was a promissory note bearing the royal seal and signature of the King of Kolhapur ordering that the bearer of the note be given rupees ten from the royal treasury. The devotee realized that someone had lost the note. He waited till sundown lest someone comes searching for the note. But no one came. The devotee then considered the note as God-sent and encased it. In those days, this was a handsome amount of money. He invested it well and his circumstances changed for the better.

Grateful at the good tide of fortune turned his way, he increased the chanting of Swami's name. What's more, he resolved to offer all that he ate to Swami before taking the same. As years rolled by, he aged. Due to old age, he fell ill. He had to swallow several bitter medicines everyday. To the dismay of his wife, he would even offer the medicines to Swami before swallowing them. His wife would berate him, "It is alright if you offer food to your master. But it is incorrect that you should offer him the bitter medicines". The devotee begged to differ.

One day, the devotee fell unconscious and his wife administered him a medicinal dosage in that state. On regaining consciousness, he learnt what had happened. He turned miserable that his resolution had been broken. He simply stopped eating! Three days passed thus. He felt weak and drowsy. He yawned! Lo behold! Swami, the size of his thumb, came out of his mouth and stood in front of him. Swami said gently, "Son, why are you being so foolish? You have certainly not broken your resolution! Are you and I different? Look at yourself". The devotee glanced at himself. He saw Swami lay on his bed. He joined his two hands in gratitude. The thumb-size Swami laughed and vanished. What an incredible experience! He cried with joy!

## **Katonah Althea**

Kashinath Altekar was a strong, well-built, young man. He was in the service of the King of Kolhapur. He was in charge of the godown that stored goods and grain to be distributed amongst the poor. Being pious and God-fearing, he showed great generosity while distributing to the poor and the needy. He had a very clear conscience, "The goods belong to the King of Kolhapur. If he wants to give them as charity, why should I be an obstacle in distributing"? Although he never siphoned off a single grain, many detractors complained about him. The complainants could not prove any charges they made against him. What's more, the King trusted him and was very happy with his services.

Kashinath was an ardent devotee of Swami. As soon as he finished his official duty, he would rush to the mathi. He would carry the river water to wash the mathi. He spent his nights chanting Swami's name.

One evening as usual Kashinath finished his duty and rushed to the mathi. There was no one present except Swami seated on his 'throne'. The moment Kashinath entered the room, Swami got up and walked towards him. To Kashinath's great surprise, Swami embraced him. He then lifted Kashinath like a child and seated him on his 'throne'. A gamut of different emotions ran through the bewildered Kashinath. One moment he was shocked, the next moment he was frightened and at his wits end. Swami stood in front. Soon Kashinath fell into a trance. Now he saw Swami in front of him, Swami behind him and Swami all around him. He looked at himself and to his surprise he saw Swami seated on the 'throne'. Swami simply pervaded the entire place. Extremely puzzled and amazed, Kashinath even wondered as to who was seeing and experiencing all this. As suddenly as he went into trance, as quickly he came back to his senses. Seeing Swami standing before him, he fell at his feet and cried out, "O Lord! Why did you do this?" Swami patted him gently and answered, "Are we both different? The master and his devotees are one. You deserved to experience the knowledge of Advaita, to know that God is one and He pervades everyone and everything, everywhere, at all times".

The above two stories reveal the firm faith and devotion these devotees had for their master, which was amply reciprocated by their master.

## **Devdhar**

There was a scholar named Devdhar who was well versed in the philosophy of the Vedas. He had the rare privilege to study under the great scholars at Varanasi. This is a pilgrimage town with many ancient temples located here as well as a center of learning. Devdhar was an orator par excellence in the various Vedic philosophies. Time passed. He became bored juggling with words, propounding dry philosophies without having any spiritual experience. Dissatisfaction drove him to become an ascetic. He went for pilgrimage to Badrikedar eight times. Still discontented, he settled down in Kolhapur. Devdhar was a thorough gentleman, soft spoken and well behaved. Even at philosophical debates, he would not annoy or criticize anyone. His knowledge was so extensive that even the Shankaracharya (the religious head of the Hindu

religion) of Karavir (ancient name of Kolhapur) would ask him doubts on any the Vedic philosophy.

Devdhar learnt of Swami's existence and started visiting the mathi. Everyday without fail he would come to seek Swami's blessings before going to give discourses. At the mathi, Devdhar would sit gazing lovingly at Swami's face, losing complete track of time. One day he requested Swami to show him the path to progress on the spiritual journey. Swami said, "It is not easy. A lot of hard penance is required". Thereafter Devdhar started practicing various methods of fasting. He stopped consuming salt and chillies in his diet. Thereafter he subsisted only on milk, later only on oil and so on. People criticized him that since he was a sanyasi, he should not resort to such methods. But Devdhar was keen to cleanse and purify his mind. He wanted to go to any length to please Swami. Finally it dawned on him that bhakti or devotion is the only way to understand God and get close to him.

With realization, Devdhar gave philosophical discourses with a new insight. Large number of interested students studied Vedic literature under him. Devdhar lived to the ripe age of ninety-three years. Even on the last day of his life, he had given a discourse in a temple.

### **Basavappa**

Basavappa was a Telugu Brahmin youth from a small village of Andhra state. His uncle was a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva and had remained a bachelor all his life. Throughout life his uncle stayed at the temple dedicated to Lord Shiva which was adjacent to Basavappa's residence. From childhood, Basavappa observed the way his uncle conducted his life. Since his uncle was as good as his father, he treated him as a Guru. With this in mind, he offered his services to him. Daily he would fetch the river water, clean the temple, wash the utensils used for rituals, make sandalwood paste and pluck flowers.

Impressed by the selfless services rendered, the uncle called Basavappa and said, "Child, life is useless if you do not have a spiritual Guru. Go to Kolhapur and offer your services to Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. He is Lord Dattatreya himself". Basavappa was dejected. He nevertheless told his uncle, "Why should I go to anyone else when you are my Guru? However I shall abide by your instructions". Thus he informed his parents and his wife that he was going to Kolhapur to meet Swami and he would soon be back.

Basavappa walked to Kolhapur wondering what Swami would look like. He wondered if he would be loving and gentle like his uncle. He entered the mathi and bowed to Swami. To Basavappa's surprise and delight, Swami asked him to stay at the mathi. Here he did various odd jobs and spent rest of his time chanting Swami's name. He got so involved with the life at the mathi that he completely forgot about his home and family. He did not even send a single postcard to his family informing them about his well being.

Since Basavappa had not returned as promised nor sent a word about how he was faring, his wife was naturally worried. His wife was so upset that she inquired with his uncle, "If anything

has happened to him, tell me so honestly. He has not come back as promised". The uncle assured her that he was faring well and narrated stories of Swami's greatness. Basavappa's wife then started praying to Swami, "Call me to Kolhapur. It is my duty to serve my husband. So I have to stay wherever he stays". Swami could not turn a deaf ear to a sincere prayer. He called Basavappa and asked him to fetch his wife and return to Kolhapur immediately.

Basavappa returned home. He went to the temple to narrate all that had happened to his uncle. The uncle asked him to go and freshen up first, and meet his family. He requested him to return to talk to him in the afternoon. Basavappa entered his home. On seeing him his wife implored him to take her along with him. To her joy she was astonished as well as delighted to hear him say, "Do not worry. Swami has sent me home to bring you along with me to Kolhapur".

In the afternoon, he went to meet his uncle who narrated his own life story, "From childhood I was reluctant to lead life like everybody else. I did not want to earn a living or get married. The only thing I wanted to do was to worship Lord Shiva. Hence I kept myself busy conducting rituals at the temple. One day Lord Shiva appeared in my dream and instructed me to go to Kolhapur to serve Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. I went there. Swami gave me a spiritual initiation. But after a few days he directed me to return home to serve Lord Shiva here. I was heartbroken but reluctant to disobey his orders. When I returned I came directly to the temple to bow at the Shivalinga. How long I bowed I cannot remember but when I lifted my head, the Shivalinga had disappeared. In its place was Swami smiling benevolently at me. Then I realized that Lord Shiva and Swami are one and the same. After that I worshipped Lord Shiva with full devotion. Son, you are very lucky that he has allowed you to stay with him.

After staying at home for a few days, Basavappa and his wife arrived at Kolhapur. For some time they stayed with Swami. One day Swami called Basavappa and gave him a pair of padukas made of stone. He said, "Go and install these padukas at Ganagapur and worship them there. I shall always be present with you".

Thus Basavappa and his wife arrived at Ganagapur. They searched for a house. They found one near the Kalleshwar Temple and stayed there. It is here that they installed Swami's padukas and started their worship. Basavappa continuously read the Shri Gurucharitra. He was hospitable to pilgrims. But he started to talk less even to his wife.

Years passed by. Basavappa and his wife grew old. Basavappa regretted that after coming to Ganagapur he had not had the privilege to see Swami. One night, Swami appeared in his wife's dream. He patted her and said, "Child, tell your husband that I am always with you both".

Next day, when his wife narrated her dream, Basavappa said, "You are very fortunate to have seen Swami". But nevertheless he felt miserable that Swami had not appeared to him. He stopped eating food and drinking water. Within a week Swami appeared to him and rebuked him, "Why are you so skeptical about my presence? I am always with you". The couple

worshipped the padukas throughout their lives till their very end. Even today the padukas are where they were installed.

### **Jatratkar Yogi**

GokulShirgaon is a small village twenty kilometres away from Kolhapur. Samadhibaba an old devotee of Lord Shri Ram stayed there. He had many children but only one daughter survived to adulthood. He got her married. One day he was given certain instructions in his dream, "Your grandson will become a great saint. Take proper care of him". Thus Samadhibaba went to stay with his daughter. Over a period of time she gave birth to a baby boy who was named as Jatratkar. Samadhibaba was extremely fond of this divine child. When he was eight years of age his thread ceremony was performed. When the boy grew to be fourteen years old, Samadhibaba once again received instructions in his dream to send his grandson to Kolhapur to serve Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami. Accordingly he guided Jatratkar to proceed to Kolhapur. After instructing his grandson, as if his life's work was over, he left for his heavenly abode at the ripe age of one hundred and twenty years. Jatratkar was extremely sad at his grandfather's demise, as he was very attached to him. After performing the death rituals, he commenced on his journey to Kolhapur.

Jatratkar walked to Kolhapur. He resolved not to drink water nor eat food till he met Swami. It was a great feat for a child to cover such a long distance without water and food. All the way he wondered what Swami looked like. He also wondered if he was as kind as his grandfather. Jatratkar reached the mathi late at night. The entrance door had been locked for the night. He felt sad and sat on the steps in dismay. As if to confirm that he could see Swami only in the morning, a person came out of the mathi and on seeing Jatratkar he said, "Swami retires to bed as soon as the aarti gets over. He will not see anyone till the next morning". The boy was almost in tears. Parched, hungry and tired, he prayed to Swami, "O Lord! I have come from afar with great hope and expectations. When there is no guarantee for one's life the very next minute, how can I wait to see you till the next morning?" His sincere prayers reached Swami who came out at once. The boy heard his kind words, "Son, come inside". Swami caught hold of his hand and led him inside. Swami sat on his 'throne'. Jatratkar sat down in front of him on the floor. He kept staring at Swami who lovingly asked him, "Am I like your grandfather or not?" But the boy was already in the trance-state. Swami gave him a spiritual initiation.

Jatratkar stayed with Swami only for a few days. Swami asked him to return to his village. However he regularly visited Swami. He later became a yogi. He had a large number of devotees who experienced the effect of his blessings and his mystical powers. His name and fame spread and he was well known as Jatratkar Yogi. A full book has been written on his life story.

Swami lighted many sparks, known and unknown, who treaded on their spiritual voyage. Some gained fame, others preferred to stay unknown and yet many still continue to enlighten others. The story of an ordinary 'Namya' who became 'Shri Namdev Maharaj' - the heir apparent to Shri

Krishna Saraswati Swami's spiritual legacy is very interesting and readers are requested to read the separate 'link' on "Namadev Maharaj".

### **PART - 3, Page 7, THE SUNSET**

Swami's Photograph In the late nineteenth century photography had just been developed. The common man was wary of this magic process by which one's image would be printed on paper. The British company AGFA was trying to popularize photography by encouraging their representatives to photograph Saints and Kings. Naturally people were more than eager to have these photographs in their homes, thus accepting this technology.

Same was the case with Swami's devotees, they too were keen to have Swami's photograph in their houses, especially to help them in their meditation. But Swami refused to have him photographed. Many photographers came to the mathi and tried to photograph Swami but failed. The plate would come out blank or fogged or only half an image would appear. Whatever the reasons, Swami could not be photographed. There were two friends in the photography business who failed to obtain Swami's photograph on several occasions. They understood that it was perhaps the sage's wish. Nevertheless they started visiting the mathi daily, surrendered to Swami and prayed that sometime somewhere Swami would consent to have his photograph taken, at least for the sake of his devotees.

One day at Kolhapur's royal palace, a professional photographer from Baroda, Gujarat state, had been summoned to photograph the King and the royal family. In the morning, the royal durbar (king's court) hall had been spruced up and readied for the photography session. The King's throne, regal attire, his ornaments, and the royal arms were kept ready in the royal durbar hall. The King had gone for his bath.

At that moment at the mathi, Swami suddenly got up and quickly walked out. A few devotees ran behind him, following him wherever he was off to. Swami walked straight into the royal palace. Who could stop him? He went directly to the durbar hall where the arrangements to photograph the King were ready and walked to the King's throne and sat down. He removed his white kurta (long shirt) and cap. He put on the numerous strings of pearl necklaces lying nearby. He sat regally as if he belonged there. The King's staff and servants were left stunned and stupefied. Knowing Swami's spiritual status, not one of them had the audacity to order him to get off the King's throne. But at the same time, they were petrified lest the King gets outraged and angry with them. Nevertheless, one member of the staff mustered up enough courage to inform the King of the happening in the royal durbar hall. Far from being angry, the King felt blessed that Swami had arrived at his palace and was sitting on his throne. He ordered that Swami be photographed and be allowed to do as he wished.

The photograph was taken. This is the photograph that is still in circulation and is widely distributed even today amongst devotees as if Swami had got himself photographed for posterity. He had got himself photographed to reach his devotees and to remain accessible to

them even in this twenty-first century. As soon as the photo session was over, Swami removed the pearl necklaces from around his neck and placed them back where they were in the first place. He put on his kurta and cap, and left the palace. By the time the King dressed up and walked to the durbar hall, Swami had already left. The King sent his chariot to bring Swami back, but Swami used it instead to return to the mathi. Later the King came to the mathi and offered his obeisance to Swami. He gifted the royal throne and the pearl necklaces to Swami.

### **Tarabai's end**

Swami was now old. Tarabai started to construct a Samadhi place for him in the hall of the mathi. Swami thoroughly disliked the idea and would wonder aloud, "She does not know who will go first". Within a few days, Tarabai passed away. Swami cried like a child at losing a loving parent. Sitting next to her body, he suddenly said, "Mother! Before leaving, please eat one pedha (sweetmeat) from my hand". To the bewilderment of astonished devotees, Tarabai sat. Swami fed her a pedha. She ate it and fell dead. What could Swami, the Lord of the entire creation not do or undo!

### **Swami falls ill**

Soon Swami fell ill and was burning with high fever. The frantic devotees would bring ayurvedic (Indian herbal medicine) and allopathic doctors for him, anyone or anything that could cure their beloved Lord.

Swami would sarcastically joke with the doctors,  
"Will this medicine give me the strength to fight off Yama (God of Death)?"  
"Doctor, why should I fear death when you are giving me the elixir of life."  
"Yama will run away when he sees this tube (stethoscope)."

Alas! Even GOD in human form has to leave the earth

The year was 1900A.D, the month was August end (shravana according to Hindu calendar), and the day was a full moon day. That day Swami kept on mumbling randomly. Most devotees, then, did not understand the importance of his vague utterances. He said,

- "O Audambara Tree! You really are great. You offer shadow to one and all without distinction. Now onwards, I shall not be able to sit in your shadow."
- "O Light! You are like a saint. You spread your glow equally to all. Whether it is a student studying Vedas, a thief at work or a couple enjoying a private moment."
- "O Five Elements - Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Sky! I will now return the loan I took from you."
- "Am I going away somewhere? Where can I go? The entire cosmos is not big enough to contain me! I shall always stay there where my devotees sing and chant".

The few wise devotees understood the eventuality and fell into depression. They felt sorry for themselves and very lonely.

Suddenly Swami's thoughts wandered and he started calling favorite disciple Namdeva who was away in Ganagapur. Swami repeatedly murmured, "Why has Namya not arrived yet?" On the ninth day after the full moon, i.e., on Shravana navami, Namdeva arrived. Swami asked all his other devotees except Namdeva to go out of the room. Swami held Namdeva's hand firmly and said, "Namya! This tree of spirituality must grow tall like a vata tree. Remember that it is for you to make it grow." Perhaps this was Swami's way of anointing Namdeva as his heir apparent!

At 3.30a.m. Swami laid his head on Namdeva's lap. He smiled and said, "Goddess Amba is calling me".

At 4.00a.m. The sounds of bells were heard ringing at the temple of Goddess Amba as the early morning aarti started.

Swami left his physical body!

Namdeva went berserk. He felt absolutely orphaned. He called out to others and informed them hysterically about the great loss. Crying hysterically, he then started running home. As he ran, others present saw a blue flame coming out from Swami's body following Namdeva. When Namdeva reached home, the blue flame merged into the stone padukas installed at his home.

The other disciples and devotees were inconsolable. After all they had lost their God! Many fell into depression.

Even after Swami was no more, devotees would flock at the mathi. They would remember Swami and talk about him and the miracles they had experienced and witnessed. But they felt an inexplicable void that tugged at their hearts.

One evening, a few devotees assembled at the mathi. There, reminiscing of Swami, their talk steered to him. Just then all of them happened to look at Swami's throne. Suddenly they fell silent! Each one of them present could see Swami resplendently sitting on his throne, smiling at them. After a moment, the scene vanished. But once and for all, the devotees were convinced that Swami had not deserted them although he had left his physical body. He is very much present amongst all for us!

## **NIJABODHA MATHI**

Vairagya Mathi gets deserted Now that Swami was not present, disciples and devotees visiting the vairagya mathi started getting an uneasy feeling there. As it was occupied by Tarabai's son and his family, sitting there would make them restless. Hence they started to sit at the Shiva temple situated on the banks of river Panchaganga. There, they would sit and talk of Swami for hours together.

Swami gives directives to Vyas



One day, Vyas, a devotee received a directive from Swami instructing him that a new Samadhi temple - a mathi should be built. He was also instructed to approach the King of Kolhapur to procure land at a place known as Gangaves. When the devotees heard this news, they were filled with excitement and enthusiasm. However many devotees discouraged Vyas from approaching the King and told him that all his efforts would prove futile. Nevertheless, four devotees encouraged him to meet the King. Vyas along with those four devotees went to the palace. As they approached the durbar room, the guard on duty would not let them enter as the King was conducting a meeting regarding state affairs with his ministers.

Vyas and the other devotees waited outside patiently. They had full faith in Swami that he would arrange their meeting with the King and their effort would bear the required fruits.

Seeing that Vyas and his friends had waited for a long time to meet the King, the guard good-naturedly inquired as to what business they had with the King. Vyas told him about Swami and the dictum he had received from him to approach the King for the land. When the guard asked them if they were carrying the letter of introduction from any important personage, they replied in the negative. To this the guard said, "Without such a letter, I cannot allow you to enter as I am bound by rules and regulations of my duty. I can see that you are a pious man for I can feel peace pervade my entire being by merely talking to you. May God bring success to your endeavors".

An uneasy feeling descended on Vyas and the other devotees. Not knowing what to do next, they just stood outside the courtroom with prayers on their lips. To their sheer amazement, just then the King happened to come out of the room and saw them. He approached Vyas and asked him as to what was the purpose of his visit. Vyas respectfully bowed to him. He then took out one piece of laddu (sweetmeat), which was part of the offerings made to Swami earlier in the day. He broke it into two pieces. He ate one half and offered the other half to the King. Bewildered by such behavior, the King asked him for an explanation. Vyas explained, "Sire! You have many enemies who may want to poison you. I have therefore eaten one half of the sweetmeat so that you may have no doubts about my intentions". The King was thoroughly impressed. He asked Vyas the reason for his visit. Vyas related to him about Swami's directives. The King told Vyas to come and see him the next day in the morning. He assured him that he would have the royal decree ready and signed for him. The King also instructed the guard to allow Vyas to enter the courtroom.

Vyas and the devotees accompanying him returned happily after this successful meeting with the King. The next day, Vyas visited the King in the morning. The King was extremely busy with state affairs and Swami's work was not done. Everyday without fail Vyas would visit the palace but his visits seemed futile. Although Vyas and the other devotees were getting impatient, somewhere deep in their hearts they knew that Swami was putting them to test and it would just be a matter of time before the task gets completed successfully.

One day, the Prince of Kohlapur organized a religious function at the temple. There, he invited groups of singers who sang devotional songs in praise of God. Vyas was also invited. Just when

Vyas started to sing, the King arrived to attend the function. For two hours Vyas sang songs devoted to Swami and enthralled the King and others in the audience. At the end of the function, the King himself approached Vyas and said, "Holy Brahmin, never in my entire life have I heard such inspired singing of heavenly songs and melodies filled with godliness and devotion as I have today. You almost transported me to God's presence! Never before have I experienced such peace and harmony. Come and see me in the morning tomorrow. Your unfinished task is very much on my mind. I shall surely get it done tomorrow".

The next day when Vyas entered the premises of the royal palace, he saw the King taking a walk in the garden. Vyas walked towards him and when he was in close proximity, he bowed. The King took out a paper from the pocket of his apparel and handed it over to Vyas. The paper was a signed and sealed order from the King of Kolhapur to the presiding officer of the municipality to bequeath the required land at Gangaves for the purpose of building of Swami's Samadhi mathi to Vyas as the managing trustee. The King advised Vyas to get the land legally registered in the math's name and get the land's deed documents drawn out.

Vyas along with his mason friend went to meet the presiding officer at the municipality office. After reading the royal decree, the officer suddenly started to scream rudely, "You cheat! People like you take advantage of the King's generosity. By falsely taking God's name, you want to snatch the land for yourself. I shall not let this happen. Our good King may not recognize fraudulent people like you but I do." Furious at such uncalled for uncivil behavior, Vyas loudly told his friend, "Look at the audacity of this man. He is actually defying the royal decree. Let us not waste a minute here. May God help him."

Although Vyas had put on a defiant front, he was actually devastated from inside. He felt he had done his best and he prayed to Swami to intercede and do the rest.

When Vyas did not show up the next day, the presiding officer at the municipality office started to panic lest Vyas reported his rude behavior to the King. He had behaved thus in order to get a fat bribe to prepare the documents. Horrified at the consequences, apprehensive at the resultant punishment and filled with jitters, he could not eat nor sleep. Finally, he decided to visit the concerned site. Everyday for a week, he visited the place. Realizing that Vyas was not reacting to his visits and was instead absolutely calm, the officer then brought two of his assistants to measure and mark the land to be allocated. He then drew the land's deed documents. He then asked Vyas to come to his office to sign the documents as the managing trustee of the bequeathed land. On the appointed day, he handed over the documents to Vyas. He also personally gifted a coconut and rupees five. During this entire period, Vyas had not uttered a single word. But finally with documents in his hands, grateful tears flowed from his eyes.

Now that the land was available, money was still needed to build the four walls and a roof of the mathi. The devotee who was a mason offered to build the mathi with his fellow masons free of charge. Nevertheless money was still needed to buy the raw material.

Vyas' friend provides the money as thanksgiving to Swami

A friend of Vyas who held a job in the royal service was falsely accused of fraud and was put behind bars. Vyas advised him to surrender to Swami and keep on reading the sacred Shri Gurucharitra. In jail, the man refused to eat or drink but kept on reading the holy text. The jailer felt sorry for his plight and cajoled him to intake something but the latter firmly refused. Thus seven days passed. On the eight day, the King paid a surprise visit to check on the running of the jail. When he saw this prisoner, he inquired about him. He checked on the relevant papers related to him and found him innocent. He ordered that the man be set free immediately. The grateful man rushed to Vyas and gave rupees four hundred for the construction of the mathi. The money was sufficient to build the mathi.

Thus Swami's Samadhi temple, the Nijabodha (self-realization) Mathi, was built. The stone padukas made by Balaku, which were later given to Krishna Lad were installed there. From the day of installation to this day, daily rituals like pooja (worship) and aarti are conducted there everyday. What is significant is that everyday since the first day, continuous non-stop chanting is done by devotees without a single break. The chanting is always accompanied by veena (an Indian stringed musical instrument).

#### **Centenary celebration**

In the year 2000A.D., to celebrate the completion of hundred years of the Nijabodha Mathi, the building has been completely renovated. Swami's full size bronze statue has been installed. A spacious hall has also been built for reading Shri Gurucharitra and for chanting and meditation. Those who are lucky to visit this place are pervaded with peace, harmony and eternal bliss. And a true devotee can see Shri Krishna Saraswati Swami present there.

----- OM TAT SAT -----