

Gratitude

Bajrang Zende

I am a slave, I am a slave, and I am slave of yours. You are my mentor and master of mine...
Food, clothing, and everything I needed, you gave me aplenty and enough...
I sleep on ground & roam in the skies; all the seasons are servants of mine...
You roam merrily in the dense forests and the entire universe, O Lord Datta, you are my mentor
and master of mine!!!

- A verse from '*Shri Datta Premlahari*',
composed by Shri Pant Maharaj, Balekundrikar

- **Marathi Publisher:**
Shri Bajrang Bhimrao Zende Maharaj
Vijaynagar (Mhaisal Station), Miraj
- **Marathi Edition:**
First – 28 February 2016
(Madya Vadya Panchami)
- **English Publisher:**
Ameet Bapusaheb Patil
- **English Edition:**
First – 24 October 2022
Diwali 2022
- **English Edition Price:**
Free to all devotees.

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The strong pillars in my life.
I was molded in their company.



Late Akkatai Yashwant Jadhav, Miraj
Who showed me Shri Shrikrishna
Saraswati Datta Mahraj's Path



Late Maisaheb Shirke, Kolhapur
Who showed me the path of a Guru



Late Sonutai Krishnaji Kulkarni, Akkol
Who showed me the path of Shri
Kshetra Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar
and ShriShiv Chidambar
Mahaswamiji of Murgod



Shri Satish Ratanchand Shah, Aragkar
Who introduced me to Shri Ramesh
Maharaj Kulkarni (Akkolkar)

|| Parents are God ||



Late Bhimrao Ganu Zende, Miraj



Late Laxmibai Bhimrao Zende



Late Krishnaji Narayan Kulkarni Akkol

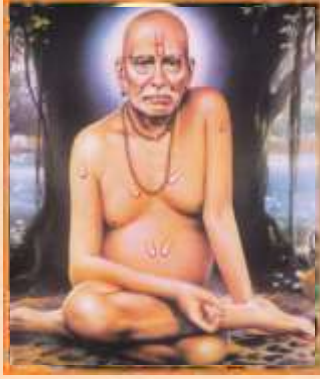


Late Sonutai (Radhai) K. Kulkarni Akkol



Late Baburao Jyotiba Suryavanshi, Sangli
Late Laxmibai Baburao Suryavanshi, Sangli

Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu: Gururdevo Maheshwar: |
Guru Sakshaat Para Brahma Tasmai ShriGurave Namah: ||



|| Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj ||
Akkalkot

|| GURUPEETH ||



|| Shri Shivchidambar Swami Maharaj ||
Murgod



|| Shri Narsinha Saraswati Maharaj ||
Karanja



|| Shrikrishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj ||
Kolhapur



|| Shri Pant Maharaj ||
Balekundrikar



A family photograph – From right Smt. Bhamabai Sapkal (younger sister). Smt. Janabai Jadhav (elder sister), mother Lt. Lakshmibai Bhimrao Zende



A family photograph – Captured on the auspicious occasion of Lt. Vasantrao Bhimrao Zende's marriage



With mother, Lakshmibai Bhimrao Zende

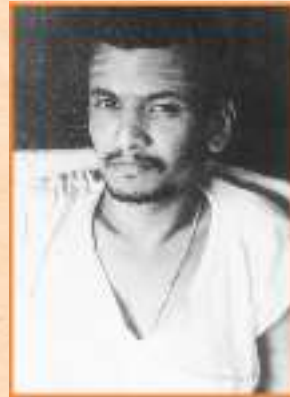


The famous sacred place of Hazrat Mirasaheb Dargah, Miraj



The Jagrut Maruti (God Hanuman) at Nadi Ves, Miraj

Rare pictures of Shri Ramesh Maharaj (Akkol)





Moments with Shri Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni (Akkol)



Seeking his guidance



A quiet moment at his residence in Akkol



Felicitating him



At the sacred place Shrikshetra Sorati
Somnath



A pleasant moment with him



A pleasant moment with him



Shri Kshetra Pangare



A quiet moment at Shri Kshetra
Garudeshwar

Rare pictures of Shri Zende Maharaj





With "Bandu" dog in Miraj



Shri Kshetra Trimbakeshwar



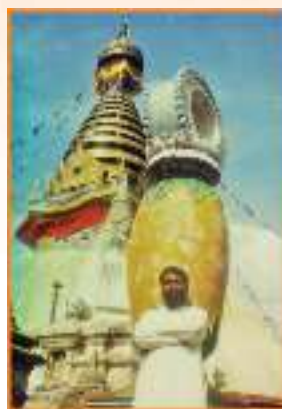
Shri Kshetra Pangare



Shri Kshetra Tirupati Balaji



Shri Kshetra Alandi



Shri Kshetra Lalitpur
Nepal 10 July 1982



Shri Kshetra Tirupati



Shri Kshetra Kanakaditya
(near Adiwara Ratnagiri)



Retirement Felicitation
28 February 2010



Shri Kshetra Shirdi. From Left – Lt. Shivappa Yeware, Dattopant Shinde, Shri. Savanta Mhetre, Shri. Ram Mahajan, Lt. Shivajirao Kamble 28 Feb 1982



Bijapur. From Left – Shri. Mangal Shinde, Shri. Anand Kashid, Madhukar Chavan, Lt. Prabhakar Gokhale, Shri. Ram Mahajan, Shri. Panditrao Bhuyekar, Shri. Sadashiv Karavade, Shri. Balasaheb Parit, etc. 11 Apr 1982



Sajjangad. Lt. Smt. Lakshmibai Suryawanshi, Lt. Dattatreya Shinde, Smt. Bhuyekar, Smt. Vijayamala Shirke, Lt. Balasaheb Shirke, Lt. Shivaling Gheware, Lt. Shankarrao Kamble, Lt. Baburao Suryawanshi, Lt. Shedbale, Shri. Panditrao Bhuyekar. 06 Mar 1983



Shri. Kshetra Kedarnath 21 June 1982



With Lt. Indira Gandhi 18 June 1982



Shri. Kshetra Badrinath 24 June 1982



Gaurikund to Kedarnath 21 June 1982



Shri. Kshetra Pashupatinath, Nepal 10 July 1982



Shri. Kedarnath Temple. From Left – Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni, Lt. Aisaheb Kulkarni, Shri and Smt. Kulkarni, Aurangabad 21 June 1982



Shri. Kshetra Gaurikund to Kedarnath



Shri. Kshetra Badrinath. 24 June 1982



Shri Kshetra Trimbakeshwar. 02 Oct 1983



Shri Kshetra Kudalasangama. From Left – Shri. Chandu Homkar, Shri. Anandrao Mandale, Dr. Mhetre, Shri. S. M. Sannake, Shri. Appa Kudache, Shri. Mangal Shinde. Sitting From Left Shri. Kulkarni, Lt. Subhash Ulagadde, Shri. Panditrao Bhuyekar, Shri. Anandrao Mali, Shri. Vinod Gokhale.



Shri Kshetra Pithapuram. From Left – Shri. Appa Kudache, Shri. Balkrishna Gokhale, Shri. Vinod Gokhale, Lt. Ram Hari Kharade



Shri. Kshetra Badrinath. 23 June 1982



Shri Kshetra Pithapuram. From Left – Shri. Balkrishna Gokhale, Shri. Belgavi, Shri. Maruti Ovulkar



Shri Kshetra Pithapuram. From Left – Shri. Belgavi, Shri. Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni, Shri Balaji Katkar



Shri Kshetra Girnar – worship of sacred
Shri Datta slipper by Shri. Ramesh
Maharaj. 20 Nov 1992



Shri Kshetra Sorati Somnath. November
1992



Shri Bhagwan Swami Narayan Temple Gondal.
From left – Adv. Shri. Kotwal, Ramesh
Maharaj, Lt. Girjavahini Kulkarni, Shri. Appa
Kulkarni



Shri Kshetra Sorati Somnath. November 1992



Shri Kshetra Nrisinha Mehta Temple,
Junagarh. November 1992



Shri Kshetra Sorati Somnath. From left –
Shri. Pramod Basarage, Shri. Ramesh
Maharaj Kulkarni. November 1992



Shri Kshetra Shikhar Shinganapur – From
left – Lt. Ram Hari Kharade, Dr. Shri.
Mhetre



A quiet moment with the Param Pujya Ramesh
Maharaj at Shri Kshetra Pangare



At an opening ceremony. From left, Lt. Dinkar Gokhale, Dr. Jaysingrao Shinde Mhaisalkar, Shri Vijaykumar Kolekar, Lt. MLA Mohanrao Shinde etc



Shri Dyaneshwar reading festival Vitthal Temple Miraj. From left, Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar, Lt. K. K. Kolesaheb, Lt. Appanna Vandre, Shri Shamrao Pawar, Shri Baburao Patil. Feb 1984



Shri Ganesh temple Vijaynagar (Mhaisal station) Kalashrohan. Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni, P.P Keshavrao Gokhale, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Shri Shivajirao Dhulubulu, Shri Tukaram Chavan (Police commissioner). Shri Anandrao Mandle, Shri Shailesh Shindagi, Shri Ram Mahajan, Lt. Subhash Ulagadde etc. 18 June 1998.



Shri Shrikrishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Sanjivan Samadhi Ceremony – August 2000



Shri D. K. Thavare (Bhau)



From left, Shri Laxmanrao Jadhav, Shri Manojbaba Shinde, MLA Shri Hafijbhai Dhature, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Prof Shri M. B. Joshi



Lt. Prof. Shivajirao Bhosale (Phaltan)



Lt. Ram Hari Kharade, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Lt. Chimsaheb Jagdale.



Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Sanjivan Samadhi Ceremony. From left, Shri Vijaykumar Kolekar, Shri Raju Shinde, Shri Dyaneshwar Khade, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Shri Bapusaheb Pujari, Shri



Clinic inauguration. From left Shri Madhukar Mhetre, Shri Ramdas Patil, Shri Vidyadhar Kabure, Shri Ratanbaba Shinde, Shri Subhash Nagargoje, Lt. Shivajirao Shendge (Bapur), Lt. Nanasaheb Sagre, Shri G.R. Kulkarni



Inauguration of Lt. Surajmalji Ratanchandji Lunkad Library and Sane Guruji lecture series.
Industrialist Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad, MLA Shri Hafijbhai Dhatture.



Shri Ramesh Maharaj and Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad of Chakan Oil Mills – Sangli / Pune



Lt. Babitai Lunkad Library inauguration. MLA Shri Hafijbhai Dhatture, MLA Shri Sharad Patil, Industrialist Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad, Shri Maruti Aaldar. Sept 2006



Industrialist Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad.



Shri Datta temple Sangli Inauguration. Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Shri Dasram Maharaj, Shri Bapusaheb Deshmukh



Inauguration. Free water scheme in Shri Datta Monastery. Vijaynagar (Mhaisal Station)
Lt. Minister of Maharashtra State Shri R. R. Patil, Lt. Ram (Tatya) Kharade. 21 July 2002

Lt. Surajmalji Ratanchandji Lunkad Library organized Shri Saneguruji Lecture Series



Padmashri Dr. Shri D. Y. Patil (Former Governor of Tripura / Bihar) guiding



Felicitating Minister Shri Annasaheb Dange



Felicitating Shri Mahesh Shirke, Kolhapur



Felicitating Shri Deepakbaba Shinde



Late Shri P. B. Patil Sir guiding



MLA Shri Sudhakar Paricharak guiding



Prof. Shri Bapu Jadhav guiding



Industrialist Pravinsheth Lunkad guiding



Felicitating Industrialist Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad



Felicitating famous orator Shri Indrajit Deshmukh



Felicitating Shrimati Padminidevi Shinde
(Mhaisalkar)



Felicitating Shrimati Shantadevi Shelar



Felicitating famous singer Kirti Shiledar



Yoga Demonstation



Shri Shankarrao Gundawade, Salgare's food processing program.

Felicitating Dr. Shri Anil Kakodkar (Atomic Scientist)





With Padmashri Dr. Shri D. Y. Patil



Felicitating famous music director O. P. Nayyar. Adv. Shri Chiman Lokur, Shri A. Y. Meshram, Shri Deepakbaba Shinde and others.



Inauguration of Babitai Surajmalji Lunkad Training Center. Padmashri Dr. D. Y. Patil, Lt. R. R. Patil (Home misinister), Shri Pravinsbeth Lunkad.



Inauguration of Shri Sane Guruji garden. Padmashri Dr. D. Y. Patil, Lt. R. R. Patil, Lt. S. R. Patil, Shri Sudhakar Paricharak, Shri Mohansheth Kadam, Dr. Shri Bhau Joshi



World famous Violin player
Shri Prabhakar Jog



Shri Prabhakar Jog felicitating Member
of Parliament Shri Sanjaykaka Patil



Shri Datta Monastery Mhaisal Station. From left, Shri Chandrakant Kurne, Shri Manojbaba Shinde, Shri Bisalappa Naik, Shri Ratanbaba Shinde, Shri Tanaji Shinde etc.



Shri Kshetra Garudeshwar. From Left, Shri Appa Kudache, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Lt. Girija Vahini, Shri Chandrakant Kurne, Shri Savanta Mhetre, Lt. Basarge, Shri Pramod Basarge etc.



Visiting Miraj Datta Monastery. From left, Shri Rajaram Ghatge, Lt. Vasantao Kulkarni, Lt. Bapu Dixit, Lt. Dixit Vahini, Lt. Chaya Kaku



Visiting P.P Shri Mahadba Maharaj of Shri Kshetra Narsinhwadi with Lt. Dattoba Mali (Malgaon)



Jadhav Datta monastery visit. From left, Balasaheb Bharde (Chairman Vidhansabha), Shri Prahlad Jadhav. Standing Lt. Dattatray Jadav, Koparde Buva, Dadasaheb Landge, Bapusaheb Jamdar, Chandrakant Jadhav, Damu Udupi.



Jadhav Datta monastery visit. From left, Kisamaharaj Sakhre, Shri Shirvalkar Mauli. Standing, Annappa Sutar, Keshavrao Gokhale, Dhondiram Mhetre, Lt. Dattatray Jadhav, Chandrakant Jadhav etc.



Lt. Balasaheb Shirke's Bhajanseva in Miraj Shri Datta monastery.



With Lt. Keshavrao Gokhale



With Mr. Universe Pramodchandra Dogra



Shri Bapusaheb Pujari felicitating Shri Ram Naik (Governor of Uttarpradesh). 1 March 2008



With Hindi music director Shri O. P. Nayyar



Shri Kshetra Aadivare. Dr. Shri Bahu Joshi, Mrs. Vahini and Kiran.



Famous viloin player Mrs. M. Rajam



Shri Chandrashekhar Kelkar Anna and Shri D. K. Patil



Shri Kshetra Balekundri Palakhi Seva. Shri Panditrao Chavan Kolhapur and Shri Anandrao Shelar Islampur



Senior film actor Lt. Chandrakant Gokhale



Shri Ramesh Maharaj felicitating Shri Sudhakar Paricharak



Bhumi poojan by Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni of Shrikrishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Monastery, Miraj



Shrikrishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Monastery, Miraj. 1995



Shrikrishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Monastery, Mhaisal Station. 1986



Inauguration of Shrikrishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Monastery, Mhaisal Station by Lt. Balasaheb Shirke, Bapusaheb Jamdar, Lt. Arun Joshi, Lt. Anna Shinde, Dhondiba Shinde. 1986



Shri Ganesh temple, Mhaisal Station. 1998



Shri Sai Samarth Vitthal temple, Mhaisal Station. 2003



Shri Shegaon Saint Gajanan Maharaj temple. 2013



Shri Swami Samarth monastery, Krishna Ghat, Miraj



Shri Krishna Buva, Krishna Ghat, Miraj



Lt. Surajmalji Ratanchandji Lunkad Library / Clinic. Mhaisal Station

Pictures from travel



Gokarn Mahabaleshwar



Gokarn Mahabaleshwar



Shri Kshetra Girnar



Shri Kshetra Murgod



Shri Kshetra Murgod



Shri Kshetra Hedavi



Shri Kshetra Hedavi



Shri Kshetra Shegaon

Pictures from travel



Kokan



Kokan



Shri Kshetra Velneshwar



Shri Kshetra Hedavi



Shri Kshetra Hedavi



Shri Kshetra Pangre. Taluka Rajapur



Shri Kshetra Pangre near Banyan Tree

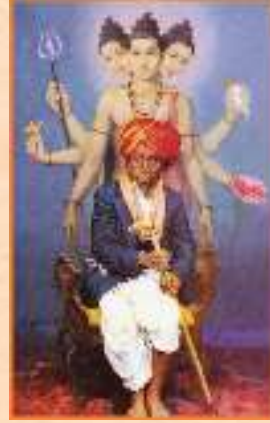


Shri Kshetra Ganpatipule

Under Their Shadows



Shrimant Kedarrao Shinde (Mhaisalkar)



Param Puja Mhadba Patil Maharaj
(Dhulgaonkar)



Param Puja Govind Maharaj Kulkarni, Sangli



Param Puja Dasram Maharaj Kelkar, Sangli



Param Puja Hanumandasji Maharaj,
Yashwavtnagar / Sangli



Shri Laxmi Narayan Krupa,
Akkol



The Woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep,
Miles to go and before I sleep,
Miles to go and before I sleep.

Gratitude....

(Aware of everybody's favors)

- Bajrang Zende

Preface:

While reading the book 'Krutagyata' (Original Marathi version of Gratitude), I realized that this person from an ideological courtyard kept moving towards a Godly form. And this reminded me of the following.

We meet many people in our lives. Some of them are mere acquaintances and some have sailed through our examining. Some we meet on occasions, at work, with relatives and families, and with friends, etc. Some are forgotten easily and some after a while. A few though go straight to the heart, make a place for themselves, and form a strong bond. Even if they are not in regular touch or communication, they remain ours. An important point here is that it is not enough to form a relation one way. The person should also consider us as his or her own. Such people become each other's and of the same thinking. I have been looking at Shri Zende Maharaj as one such respectable person. I first met him when I was working in Kirloskarwadi. My friend Subhash was with him. The first meet was so impressive that it engraved in my mind. I loved it very much and it is still as fresh today. I have been meeting and observing him for the past 25 years. This person can make everybody his own. A human amongst humans. A human moving towards Godly form! From the bottom of my heart, I believe this is how he should be looked upon.

Today, glancing at his life, I look at him as a spirit that has awakened the society. 'Maharaj' is a title given to him wholeheartedly by the people in his company. There is no 'kafani' on his body, nor lemons, doll, thread, or ornaments around his neck. Only words and an infinite treasure of positive and lovely spirits. I do not recall anybody distancing from him after meeting him. The purpose of writing this book is to provide a small glance at the character. Some may call it an autobiography, self-portrait, or something else. But as realistic writing, it is a true depiction of the historic past of his life.

His life reveals that the alms he asked for the betterment of the society from the Almighty, have proved to be sacred for everyone. Asking for reverent alms from God, he is one of a kind. He is a person of clean work. He is a man who longs for the splendor through knowledge, the companionship of good people. He is someone who loves the society, bears similarity towards all from within, recognizes situations, considers people's opinions, and analyzes their soul accurately. He safeguards his pride but ascertains that his behavior and talk doesn't offend anyone. All-new means of happiness must be followed - his thinking is beautified with such thoughts - and to achieve those, he committed himself to God, all his life. Such a Man amongst

Men – A wayfarer on the spiritual path. His journey is ongoing wholeheartedly and integrally. And this is a summary of his life.

In this piece of writing, his thoughts, plans, intellect, feelings, and inspirations have manifested themselves in various forms. He has demonstrated his state in navigating through numerous phases of his life quite frankly. Through his writing, the reflections of his life's favorable and unfavorable, wanted and unwanted, happiness and sorrow, flourishment and deterioration, day and night, sunshine and shadow, work and retirement, stress and rest, union and separation of devotion, are revealed easily. This, he has expressed as the purpose of this book. This scripture lays many topics. Spirituality and the path of devotion are the foundation of his thoughts. A description of his travel, unforgettable experiences, and self-belief beyond the realm of happiness and sorrow, may have become his vehicle of meditation. Consequently, he spent his life dedicated to the Almighty. He is fortunate to have freed himself from envy and jealousy. His principle is that humanity is a religion and that all humans are equal. He strives for the betterment of all people. He never differentiates between them based on their wealth or skin color. As written in Dnyaneshwari, Wherever and whenever there are difficulties in life, they should be overcome. This is the path that leads to God. Zende Maharaj has expressed all those feelings as they happened in his life. He penned down the surrounding scenery as seen. There is no use of unnecessary decorated words or fancy sentences. In expressing his behavior amongst the young and elderly, his culture, his code of conduct, his scholarship, and his understanding of public devotion, he has not deviated from reality. These days the sight of knowledge is rare. But the author has tried to touch this topic as well. He has tried to keep himself aloof from the difference of opinions amongst the theists and instead has played the role of a soother. Staying in the company of good people and the devotees reaching Sadhu-sainthood, this Zende Maharaj enjoys himself. He wholeheartedly listens to the speeches of the learned. He thoroughly loves good literature because Sharadchandra Chatterjee, Sane Guruji, Anna Bhau Sathe, V. S. Khandekar, and Baba Amte are his inspirations. Shri Krishna from Kurukshetra and Mahatma Gandhi, the promoter of the 'Go-back' revolution, the ideology of such is a treasured collection of Zende Maharaj. Maha Purush's are the lighthouse of life. This philosophy is evident in this scripture. His entire life is about remembering humanity. He may have eagerness and curiosity towards the grandeur of the great souls. But all of this is on a stable platform of devotion and meditation. It is unbiased. Devotion, Bhajan, narration, Kirtan, singing, playing musical instruments, reading, contemplation, and rumination are his ways of meditating.

Today he has a respected life. He does not believe in superstitions. Holding an Aarti of indifference, he has tried to shed some light in the context of the society through the book Gratitude. People should progress, villages should develop and prosper, faith should be safeguarded, life should be lived cooperatively, modernization should be adopted but all of this while upholding the values of humanity. These are his spirits.

Of importance is that 'Gratitude' does not have any instances of insistence. Neither does it impose anything on anyone. His life is about striking the appropriate cords with the society and his wholehearted determinations to free himself from its debts. His contemplations from 'Gratitude' will be a viaticum for the current and future generations. A common man can become uncommon. The Gratitude Temple shall give such a glance to the readers. With these auspicious hopes, I put my pen down.

Prof. Bapu Jadhav



Foreword...

The reverend Akkatai Jadhav and I got acquainted around the year 1973 - 1974. This introduction happened due to some difficulties in my job. At the same time, I also got introduced to Miss Ratantai Kshirsagar who lived with her. At the age of 20 - 21, the latter was showered with blessings of Lord Datta's Avatar – Shri Swami Samarth and Kolhapur's Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj. Miss Ratantai always had health problems. Her father was a farmer, and their financial condition was critical. Hence, they were staying as tenants at Smt. Akkatai Jadhav's house. Smt. Akkatai got many types of Sadhanas (practices) and Upasanas (worship) done from Miss Ratantai. Since many years, there was a free-flowing energy of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's mysterious and secret arcane in Akkatai's house. She made Miss Ratantai aware of this and helped her progress extensively in her spiritual journey. Like Miss Ratantai, she had brought this doctrine into many people's lives. Thus, she enabled many devotees to sail in this stream of sacred devotion and flourished their lives. I was one amongst them.

Around May-June of 1974, I got acquainted with Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni of Akkol. He was an Ayurvedic Doctor and was Akkol's *Vatandar - Inamdhar* (Sarkar). He was a family man and was well versed in Ayurved, Allopathy, and Science. His advanced spiritual science journey was both deep and mysterious. Once, he had come to Miraj along with his mother-in-law for her doctor's appointment. One of my very close friends, Shri Satish Ratan Shah (Agarkar) introduced me to him. In fact, my devotion was already in a steady mode since the year 1973 under Smt. Akkatai's guidance. I was routinely carrying out my upasana (worship). Apart from that, it had become a routine for me to visit the Samadhi (Mausoleum) of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj at the sacred residence of Punyashlok Tarabai Shirke in Kolhapur.

Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj's tremendous progress in spirituality, compassion, simple - straightforward advice, genuinely selfless loving and egoless nature, got my mind attracted towards him. My mind and life were entirely swayed away by his influence. Later, for many years, I got an opportunity to be familiar with his inner character and assess his life as a whole, at times, through his pieces of



advice, his childlike behavior, and his calm authentic temperament. Sometimes I used to think of writing his biography. However, the very next moment I used to question myself, whether I am totally familiar with this magnificent spiritual devotee and do I know him so well to do justice to his stature? Besides, my job was consuming much of my time, hence this was not possible. Also, there wasn't a wealth of literature available about him from which his life's mysteries could be discovered. There was hardly any information available about his worldly life or his previous religious merits. He always spoke in a self-controlled and constrained manner. On top of that, he rarely spoke about miracles. Through his association and my good fortune, I was acquainted with his father - Kaka, his mother - Aai, wife - Girija Vahini, Kids, Servants, and the Wada (traditional Marathi style house). I have tried my level best to narrate this aspect of my familiarity with them through this book.

It was not that I was very religious since my childhood. My father, Lt. Bhimrao Ganu Zende, was a devotee of God and a professional hairdresser. He played harmonium during *Bhajans* and *Kirtans at nights*. My mother worked hard her entire life. She used to visit Temples in our Pawar Gully (street) like Shri Vitthal Temple, Mirasaheb Dargah, Lord Datta's incarnation – Shri Annabuva Maharaj Temple, and Lord Hanuman Temple. Accompanying her to these temples was my only religious devotion. After Lt. Akka and Lt. Ramesh Maharaj, I got an opportunity to meet *Punyashlok* (reverend) Maisaheb Shirke of Kolhapur as well as *Param Pujya* Ramesh Maharaj's mother. Although this acquaintance was of their outward life, it was especially respectful from my perspective. Because of their ideologies, my life, the paths of my undercurrents, my Sadhanas, my determination, and my work kept progressing, growing, and spreading. Therefore all of these people are my Gurus. I am whole heartedly grateful towards them.

India has witnessed many great incarnations. This tradition of incarnations is ancient and noble. The Avatar (incarnations) saints provide ordinary human beings with an eternal blessing and take them on a path of growth. Such great Avatars include Shri Swami Samarth, Shri Shivchidambar Mahaswami, Shri Shrikrishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj, and Panth Maharaj Balekundrikar, etc. Many people have evaluated such Godly men's lives and preaching. I have tried to re-introduce such literature and stories through my writing. I have however not discussed their ways of worship or their ways of preaching as that should only be taken up by Siddha Mahatmas and Adhikari Purushs. I was blessed to enjoy the company of such Saint Mahatmas and to witness their ways of spiritual worship. They loved human life. They had analyzed the capabilities of human intellect, thinking, education, compassion, and simplicity.



Ever since I was twenty years old, I have been walking on the path of Guru Parampara – the tradition of following your master in the capacity of his obedient disciple and I have experienced many ups and downs. I have been through the toughest of the challenging times. I have abandoned all worldly pleasures and have chosen a hard life. At the same time, I have always strived for making my life prosperous and pious through the means of sacred practice of God worship. Further, I have tried to make people's lives easier.

Lt. Surajmalji Ratanchandji Lunkad Library, Clinic, Kindergarten, and a Training Center were stood up with the help of Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad. This was only possible due to his generosity.

On 28 Feb 2010, after working for 38 years, I retired from Government service. On 12 Oct 2010, I underwent a major surgery. Dr. Shri Bindusar Palange, Dr. Shri Madhukar Mhetre, Dr. Shri Kedariprasad Kulkarni, Dr. Shri Sanjay Kulkarni, Dr. Shri Vinod Shinde looked after me with utmost care and gave a much-needed boost to my life. Later, I rested for six months. During this time, I recollected childhood memories with my parents, the journey from start to retirement of my service that Shri Shivajirao Dhulubulu had influenced initially, the ever-helpful friends, and the people that worked hard with me and went away. Moments of happiness and sorrow brought tears in my eyes. All of these people have shaped my life. I often thought that I need to pay homage to their good work and strong association with me over these years. Hence, I have written this literature to express my gratitude towards the kindness of every person mentioned in this book. By any means, this isn't any attempt to glorify myself or my work.

This book is written keeping in mind the period between 1960 through 2010. Memories from these 50 years are fading away. Even then, whichever memories I could recollect are expressed here.

Actually, writing of this "Krutagyata" (Gratitude) book should have been completed in the year 2010-2011. I would have received the precious guidance of Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj. In this book, I have made an honest and humble attempt to shed light on his enlightened life. I find solace and happiness thinking that it is with his blessings that this book is completed. He never preached. But traveling with him to holy places benefitted me with an abundance of spiritual companionship. When I was alone with him, there was plenty of open-hearted guidance from him. He used to be very calm and devoted to meditation during traveling. Even before me, there were other important and blessed people in his



spiritual journey. But it was my good fortune that after meeting him only once, I got to walk and travel with him. Shri Ramesh Maharaj passed away on 22 July 2011. After his sad demise, I started missing him more than before. My mind and body used to be restless due to his absence. A flashback of nostalgic memories and precious teachings in 36 years, from year 1975 to year 2011 used to rush through my mind and I used to feel dejected. The memories included few incidents of happiness while others of laughter. They made me speechless. I have sincerely tried to jot down all the incidents that have occurred during this period. This narration is a humble literal tale of my personal experiences that are blend of favorable and adverse situations, joys and sorrows, progress and struggle, prosperity and deterioration, day and night, spirituality and pathways of worship, introspection and realization I have faced throughout my life. I have tried to shower these literal flowers in your courtyard. I received invaluable support from Prof. Shri Bapu Jadhav and Dr. Shri G. R. Kulkarni. I express my sincere thanks to both of them.

Your servant,
B. B. Zende
Vijaynagar, Mhaisal (Station)

	Shri Gurudev Datta			
	Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Prasanna			
	Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj Prasanna			
	Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami Maharaj Prasanna			
Shri Pant Maharaj Prasanna ||

In the last leg of my nomadic life, when I look back and try to gather all the memories of my life; I can see an avalanche of incidents, magical moments that are flooding my mind. As I rearrange these nostalgic memories and try to organize the canvas of events, all of the memories are getting interwoven with each other, and an emotional fountain is busting on the scene. It's like a mirror breaking into many pieces and while looking into every piece and wishing for my reflection to appear in them. Many of the reflections resemble to tunes of memories. And the symphony of these tunes is nothing but my life! I have been the traveler on the pathways of life that became successful and meaningful due to the power of goodness. This path I traversed was not a routinely traveled one. It was unfamiliar, tough, uphill and daunting. At times it was pleasant while rest of the times, it was full of thorns, potholes, rough patches. This foot trail leads to many saint's, Temples and also to families. Walking non-stop on it became my passion. This trail started in my home. It met other trails. Where there was no trail, footsteps formed them. This was not a single person's journey. Countless steps have traveled on these trails. It resulted into numerous spiritual pathways of humanity and prosperous life. And I am a spiritual traveler on this glorious and pious path. And again, I see myself as a social student who passed in every examination of life!

The childhood of any human being is a heritage of happiness. As many wise and noble Sadhus and Saints have said, childhood is an irreversible, once in a lifetime phase and an eternal experience to the mankind. My entire childhood was spent in Miraj (District Sangli – Maharashtra – India). I was born at the time of sunrise on Hanuman Jayanti, i.e. the birth anniversary of Lord Rama's greatest disciple, Lord Hanuman who is also called as Bajarang Bali, on Thursday 10th April 1952. In those times, the convenient day chosen as my birthday to enroll in school was 1st March 1952. In a sense, I consider this incident as a 'birth before birth'.

My father's name was Bhimrao Ganu Zende and my mother's name was Lakshmibai Zende. My grandfather's name was Ganu Sadu Zende and my grandmother's name was Kasabai Ganu Zende. My paternal uncle's name was Mahadev Ganu Zende and aunty's was Manjula Mahadev Zende. Today, none of them are alive. But I am their descendant. Their memories fill my soul and give me peace of mind. My time with them flashes in front of my eyes. The flood of memories never erodes. Their affection, love, sympathy, and touch move me even today.

We were five siblings. Eldest was my brother Vasantrao, second my brother Pandurang, third my sister Janabai. I was fourth and sister Bhamabai fifth. Our small family of those days was happy and had enough food for everyone.

People say that during my birth, my mother struggled for three days during delivery. Her pain was unbearable and troublesome. That era was like that. Maternity hospitals were still a distant dream. Science had not spread its wings in our area yet. The midwives from the neighborhood used to assist during delivery. An elderly lady called Goura Ajji was a famous and experienced midwife. Primarily she used to do deliveries. But she too couldn't deliver me. Consequently, everyone in the family was anxious, worried, and in difficulty.

My uncle Mahadev Zende regularly visited the Maruti (Hanuman) Temple in Nadives (Near Miraj). He used to carry sugar and essence sticks as offerings to Lord Maruti. That day was a Thursday, and it was Hanuman Jayanti. So, uncle left for the Temple very early morning. Looking at the critical condition of my mother due to labor pain, my uncle vowed Lord Maruti that if my mother delivers a baby boy, then he will christen the boy with the name of Lord Maruti. And as it was destined, I was born on Thursday, Hanuman Jayanti. Everybody in the family was joyed and breathed a sigh of relief. Most importantly my mother was released from trouble and unbearable pain. We used to call our uncle as Anna. Throughout his life, he never missed taking blessings of the Maruti Temple in Nadives. In all of this, since I was born on Hanuman Jayanti, I was named Bajrang.

We stayed together as a joint family and grew up in the same house. We experienced togetherness with we three brothers, two sisters, six cousin brothers, and one cousin sister. Our house with twelve kids was a happy home. Financially, our family was not rich but there was rich prosperity of love, affection, warmth, simplicity, and mutual trust. Such was our serene and nostalgic childhood! Our uncle had six sons, namely, Ram, Vijay, Eknath, Anand, Govind and Ramesh followed by the only daughter. So, as a matter of delight, he had celebrated her naming ceremony in a grand way in those days to the best of his abilities She was named Akkatai. It just reminds me that in those days too there was a generation that celebrated a girl child's naming ceremony.

My uncle used to call my parents as Dada and Vahini. So, we siblings also called them as Dada and Vahini and called uncle and aunty as Anna and Akka. My father had a sister. Her name was Krishnabai. She was married to a family in Tardal near Ichalkaranji (District Kolhapur). Her husband's name was Moru Jadhav. I had never seen him though. Their sons were Tukaram, Mahadev, and Sadashiv and the daughters were Shaku, Gunvanti, and Malu. Out of them, Malu was married to my cousin brother Ram.

My grandfather Ganu Sadu Zende's native place was Kavlapur (District Sangli) but his widowed sister Rakhmabai used to live in Miraj. He moved to Miraj to support her. He lived separately in Miraj. He had once niece. We used to call her Nani. My grandfather moved to Miraj to support his sister. This event of him leaving his village and moving somewhere else to support a loved one taught me a permanent lesson on how to support your relations.

My grandfather used to travel for his saloon business. That era was like that. The Patil Gully (street) that we lived in was primarily occupied by Lingayat (A caste within Hindu religion. They are devotees of Lord Shiva) Patils. Besides his saloon business, my grandfather used to manage other people's farms on a plowshare basis. He cultivated Lt. Malgonda Patil and Lt. Dadasaheb Patil's farms for quite a few years. Once the financial position of our family improved, he bought some farmland. In our childhood, our house had bullocks, Indian buffalos, and goats. We cultivated Jowar and vegetables in our farm. We also used to sell grass. In the olden days, our saloon profession was considered in the '*Balut*' (A public servant of a village entitled to) category. Our designated territory as *Balutedar* for saloon work was a village called Kanadvadi (District Sangli) near Savali. Within one year, we received remuneration in the form of essential food supplies like 15-20 bags (of 100 kg each) of Jowar, Groundnuts, and Toor Dal. Consequently, ours was a fulfilled happy family. We had enough essentials for the family and we were content with that.

In those days, we used to go to the Karnal village (District Sangli) during every summer holiday. It was my maternal grandparents' place. My maternal grandfather's name was Maruti Hari Jadhav and my grandmother's name was Akkubai Maruti Jadhav. As my mother was the eldest sibling in that house, all of her brothers and sisters called her *Akka*. Her sisters were Kasa, Bhagu, Gangu and her brother's name was Manohar. I liked these relatives of Karnal very much. After all, it's all about the love, affection and warmth of grandparents and the magic of mother's native place. Per my experience, the emotional bond forged with the grandparents' family is eternal and extremely from the bottom of heart. My maternal grandfather was also in the saloon business. He was very funny and had a great sense of humor. My maternal uncle also did saloon work and some farming on the side. Later, he worked at the Vasantdada Cooperative Sugar Factory in Madhavnagar (Sangli District).

Karnal reminds me of Lt. Vasantdada Patil. He was commonly called as *Dada*. His relatives lived in Karnal. When we used to visit Karnal during the holidays, we used to hear from elderly people about Dada's participation in the freedom struggle, the prison that he broke through, and the Krishna River that he jumped in. After hearing these stories, his mysteries grew and my respect towards him grew every time. Even today, when I hear the word Karnal I think of Dada. Some villages are like this. They can never be forgotten. A bond of wonderful memories and relations is forged with a certain place forever.

On the auspicious occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, the villagers used to cook and distribute kheer, rice, and curry. In those days, it was a custom to carry eating plates and filled drinking water containers for religious public meals. Not just that, but even for marriage functions too people used to carry them. Festivals like Hanuman Jayanti, Ram Navami, Urs (death anniversary of a Sufi saint in South Asia, usually held at the saint's dargah) were celebrated by the Patil-Mane family with excitement. Many young wrestlers in were known to sweat hard during practice sessions. In those days wrestling was people's hobby. In my view, it was a heavenly place for me and I was very keen to visit Karnal village whenever possible. The overall atmosphere in the village was very pleasant. The Gram Panchayat (means, Village Council) used to play radio in the evening. Villagers used to gather on the playground to listen to it. Household radios were not prevalent in those days. Neither were telephones. But people were still happy, and I would like to point this out.

There was a Dharmashala (a building devoted to religious or charitable purposes, especially a rest house for travelers) called 'Lugade Dharmashala' at the boundary of town. Mane's farm was adjacent to this Dharmashala and it had a well-constructed water well. We used to swim in it. The well had a water-powered wheel for lifting water. There weren't many water pumping engines in those days. Adjacent to the farm was a small hut cum hotel. Behind it was a big mine. It was deep. Even today the village has preserved signs of its existence. The mine had a small well in it. Water from this well was used to wash clothes and utensils. Drinking water, however, had to be manually carried by yokes from a stream located in Navraswadi. Both sides of the yoke either had large pitchers or tin containers. The sound of a person carrying these yokes was accordant with his or her steps. As if hard work was accompanied by music. This equation is engraved on my mind since those days.

My grandfather used to participate in 'Nirankari' sect's rallies (Nirankari Sampraday / incorporeal). He was known in Karnal as a very simple, humble and honest person. Now Karnal is changing. It has caught city winds. The rural mindset is vanishing. I think the Karnal of my childhood is no longer there. Amidst the hectic pace of life, whenever I find some leisure time; the sweet memories of my grandfather's place, the chitchat with my cousins, siblings, Lakshudada, Channakka, Sharakka take me down the memory lane into my childhood. As the memories bring out the nostalgia, I become emotional and after a while, today's reality brings me back to present.

My father was an extremely simple and humble but a funny person. He easily made a place for himself in other people's hearts. His saloon shop was setup in one of the shops in Kanwadkar Mashid while my uncle's saloon shop was rented from Lt. Dundapanna Harge. In those days people didn't name their shops. Since the neighboring community was Muslim, people from that community called my father as Bhimu Hajaam. Whereas others called him Bhimu Nhavi

(barber). In those days, surnames were according to the profession. Gavandi (construction worker), Sutar (carpenter), etc. were some of the surnames derived from the profession.

My father used to open his shop at seven in the morning. In the afternoon, the shop was closed. He utilized this time to wash his clothes, take a bath, and have a lunch. He always had his lunch with his mother. His friends like Pundaliksingh Rajput, Babusingh Rajput, Bhimsingh Rajput, Nanasaheb Pawar, Maloji Pawar, Tukaram Pawar were very close to him. Their chats, gestures, and jokes made their gatherings pleasant. Makbul Chaus's tailoring shop was adjacent to our's. He too had a good sense of humor. He used to come to our shop for tea. Baburao Kurane (Vardiwale) also used to provide some funny entertainment through his stories. All of this taught me that life itself is a school in the childhood. This is where education begins. In this life-school, there may not be lessons in alphabets, math, or science, but this is where education truly begins. I believe this is the first step in civic lessons.

My father had many friends. All of them were like brothers and loved each other. They were from diverse backgrounds and occupations. Paigambarvasi Shahabuddin Kalangade and Makbul Chaus never celebrated Eid without our family. Likewise, we never celebrated Diwali without them. Such friends didn't differentiate between religions, occupations, or financial status. Still, all of them had a common religion amongst them: Humanity. They were bonded by relation of humanity, and it was a strong bond.

In those days people didn't shave or have haircuts in the month of Shravan (i.e Fifth month of Hindu calendar). Because of this, it was a month of financial hardship for us. We would struggle to make both ends meet. But the Patil family from our neighborhood used to help us. At times, they provided us grains, cereals and other essential items and help us deal with the month of Shravan. For others, the month of Shravan definitely used to be full of happiness and festivities but for us, it was radically opposite.

My father's daily routine was methodical. He worked all day and did Bhajans at night. We usually didn't notice him returning home from the Bhajans. His melodious harmonium would wake us up in the morning. He had learnt to play harmonium from Bhausahab Pawar (Gondhali) whose house was behind Government's School No. 1 in Brahmanpuri. I had seen him sitting in our shop many times. He was fair, tall, aged between 70 to 75, wore a white two-legged dhoti, a coat, tall hat, and held a 12 spoke umbrella. Such was his impressive personality. He accompanied famous Marathi singer and stage actor Bal Gandharva in Bal Gandharva Company. He was an expert in playing leg pipe harmonium (i.e Paay Peti in Marathi So, whenever, he visited our saloon, we used to get chances to listen to memories, incidents, chats related to Bal Gandharva. If we were lucky, we used to get a chance to listen to his songs, too. Everyone used to get absorbed in such a mystic environment. The shopkeepers from nearby shops never

missed any opportunity to attend such gathering and concert. In case they ran out of space in saloon, they used to occupy steps of Kanwadkar Wada in front of our shop.

I don't know from where and when my father caught an interest in music. Probably, that was a musical era of Bal Gandharva and that may have had a lasting impact on him. But I got interested in music because of my father. His fingers were fluent on the Harmonium and I heard praises about his skills from many people. This was not just his hobby but he was truly a connoisseur of music. He had bought a German-made Harmonium. He practiced playing it from 4 AM. He played full songs from Bal Gandharva's stage plays. The whole street was enchanted with his music. The melody not just woke up our neighbors but also gave them the clue of an auspicious dawn. His livid sequence of musical notes and my mother's enchanting of songs while working on a hand flour mill made us feel that our house was filled with prayers.

My mother came from a village. She knew many songs that were typically sung on the handrotated flour grinding mill. She also knew Nag-Panchami songs. She was an expert in poems that involve self-introduction while taking a spouse's name and the songs played during a baby christening while swinging the baby bassinets. She was like a treasure of folk songs and literature. The religious observance and rich legacy of my parents unknowingly made my life one with folk music and theatre music.

I still remember the incident when my father had tears in his eyes when he had to sell his beloved Harmonium to pay for my elder brother's exam for merely 50 Rupees. I choke up with emotion even today. During the course of his life, I bought and gifted him other Harmoniums worth thousands of rupees. But those melodies from his old Harmonium were never repeated from him. Those old melodies had a prolonged effect for many years on me. I feel this way even today.

My father taught me to love songs, tunes, and music. I took a deep interest in listening to singers like Bhimsen Joshi, Kumar Gandharva, Hirabai Badodekar, Saraswati Rane, Kapileshwar Buva, and Panchakshari Buva and enjoyed musicians playing Sitar, Sarod, Tabla, and Sanai (Clarinet). Because of my father's love and interest in music, he used to visit many musical programs and concerts. As I used to accompany him to such musical delights, I got ample opportunities to enjoy the musical magic. By good fortune, I was able to watch such well-known musicians play on the Mirasaheb Dargah ground. These are some of my life's golden memories.

Be it Bhajan or Kirtan, my father rhymed beautifully to all devotional songs. He went to Bhajans every Saturday in Miraj's fort-area Maruti Temple or the one in Tasgaon Ves (Precinct or entry point of town). Miraj's specialty was that there was a Maruti Temple in each of its Ves. Tasgaon Ves's Maruti Temple was away from the community and was on a hill. There was a big pond behind this Temple along with big Banyan trees. The priest there belonged to the Rajput family.

My father was a friend of him. One day when I was not feeling well, my father went for Bhajan there a bit late. At that time other people who were present for Bhajan like Parshuram (Sonikar) Mali and Vasantrao Pise casually enquired the reason for his late arrival. My father replied to them that “My son, Bajrang has diarrhea and digestion problems. The doctor's treatments was not effective. Hence his physique is becoming weak and unreliable. So, I am late”.

A recluse (Bairagi) who lived in the Temple heard this discussion. In those days, such recluse people used to stay in or near the Temples that are located outside of towns. After the Bhajan was over, that recluse gave my father some plant roots as medicine that were to be consumed with milk. I was given this treatment from the next day. Interestingly within fifteen days, my stomachache went away and also diarrhea was cured. Originally, I feared if I would ever recover from this sickness. But eventually, I became very healthy. My father then took me to the Temple for this recluse's Darshan. But he was nowhere to be found. After this episode, my father believed that Lord Maruti himself incarnated himself in the form of this recluse and cured his son by giving medicines. This belief became so strong that he started believing that I had reborn and got a new life. As a result, my father started offering services in the form of Bhajans on every Saturday and on Hanuman Jayanti in the Maruti Temple located at Tasgaon Ves to repay this favor. These days the overall look of this Temple and its surrounding has changed completely. The area around the Temple has many dwellings. The pond has become history and is replaced with buildings. The square (chowk) has Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil's statue. The trees around the Temple have vanished. The soundless peace of those old days has surely gone. This is absolutely true.

In a way, our native place is Babhulgaon (Sangola Taluka in Maharashtra). Our ancestors were the Patils and Vatandars of that place. Chhatrapati (King) Shivaji Maharaj's father Shahaji Raje was a Knight in Bijapur's Adil Shah's Durbar (court). King Adilshah was upset with King Shivaji's guerilla warfare and frequent attacks on his empire. So he kept Shahaji Raje under house arrest. Our ancestors who lived in Shahaji Raje's territory moved from Bijapur kingdom to Kavlapur (District Sangli) and raised a saffron flag (A flag means Zenda in Marathi) of freedom there. Due to this heroic act, our Patil surname became history, and we got the new surname Zende that stayed with us forever. Kavlapur has about five hundred members of our Zende family tree. Even today they live with self-respect. The surrounding towns like Vita and Kadegaon however still have families with the Patil surname within our community.

Miraj was a small place in my childhood. It was a small Taluka too. In those days, more than the rich; it was a place known for predominantly poor population. The Eastern side of Miraj was plagued with drought. Different areas known as ‘Peths’ christened by seven days of a week and twelve pillars still exist in Miraj. Somvar (Monday) Peth, Mangalwar (Tuesday) Peth, Budhuvar (Wednesday) Peth, Guruvar (Thursday) Peth, Shanivar (Saturday) Peth were all named for

convenience to identify the dwellings. We used to live in Budhuvar Peth. We had two small dual-storied houses. On the right side of our house there were a couple of Muslim families with surnames Kurne, and Banadar. Adjacent to them was Dhor Gully, Chambhar (Cobbler) Gully, and Mirasaheb's Dargah. On the left side of our house was Pawar Galli, Pawar Wada, and Shri Vitthal Temple. In the front of our house, there were families of Khot and Yesu Mali. Along the houses of these families, there was Harijan Wada, Chakkar Sadak (Road), and Railway shed. The local famous Lakshmi Market was situated at the heart of town. In those days, the Town Hall built in front of Lakshmi Market served as the office of municipality. This Municipality used to sound sirens at noon and 8.30 PM. It was very useful for both educated and uneducated people to know the time of the day. There were fruit and vegetable shops along the steps of this Laxmi Market while some vendors used to sell vegetables and fruits by sitting on the road. Some of the vegetable vendors were women and they used to conduct business independently. This was one of Miraj's specialty through which it had given a message of equal treatment for women. Miraj was famous for its fresh, low cost and good vegetables. People used to say that the quality and prices of vegetables in the nearby vicinity was not at par with that offered by Miraj. There was a saying "Khwaja Ki Basti, Bhaaji Roti Sasti" (In Khwaja's (Mirasaheb's) town, vegetables and bread were economical). Every Tuesday a special bazaar of pulses, grains, and butter used to be setup. Even the Wednesday's bazaar was also big. Farmers from nearby villages used to setup their stalls and sell fresh vegetables. The joy of roaming through such a wonderfully setup market was simply wonderful. Even today, different Peth's have bazaars. But the charm of the old days is not seen now. The reasons may be many. Now markets are run with a pure business-oriented mindset, and they lack the emotional connect between the vendor and the customer that was evident in yesteryears.

In a way, in those days Miraj was a developed village. The hospital built by missionaries was a grand one. It was the only place that provided extremely reasonable medical treatment. Dr. Donaldson, Dr. Fletcher, and residential doctors had brought a big name to it. There were many other hospitals in town. Dr. Pathak, Dr. Bhadbhade, and Dr. Gosavi were amongst the famous ones. Remarkably, Miraj's weather was pleasant. It had naturally gifted water supply and had the convenience of railways. Consequently, Miraj became the mecca of medical treatment. Not too far from Miraj, the T.B Hospital in Wanlesswadi was famous throughout India. The expansive Hindu Dharamsala (rest house) built for lodging of patients had also become famous.

Miraj's Ganesh Talav (lake) was also famous. It was situated in front of the Ganesh Temple. All the Ganesh idols from the Ganesh festival were immersed in this lake. Even today, one can see this tradition. In my childhood, places like Railway Station, S. T. Stand, Laxmi Market, Shivaji Chowk near the Mission Hospital, and Guruvar Peth used to set up Ganesh idols in temporarily erected pendals during the Ganesh festival. Art teams, carnivals, and dancing parties provided entertainment for many citizens, women, and the younger generation, etc. Such events provided me opportunities to attend performances of great musicians like Vasant Pawar and Kalyanji.

In those days, the Ganesh Idol immersion procession used to start at 4 PM and continued until 11 PM. In this procession, a music band, Lezim (a small musical instrument with jingling cymbals typically used in Maharashtra), and traditional music instruments were always part of the musical extravaganza. The live scenes based on King Shivaji, his soldiers and their heroics setup by the festival group of Shivaji Chowk were some of the outstanding crafty creations. Along with the native residents, citizens from nearby locality used to visit Miraj to enjoy festivities and these huge gatherings added to fame of Miraj. This was indeed considered as a matter of pride for this town. On the last day of the Ganesh festival, all festival teams rendezvoused their Ganesh idols in the Laxmi market and then joined the procession to immerse the idols in Ganesh Talav. This too was considered a specialty of Miraj. Today, the Ganesh Talav remains the same. Only the nature of the festival has changed.

Miraj's 'Bhuikot' fort (a fort constructed on plain land instead of a mountain) is historically famous. Miraj was an important place in Adil Shah's kingdom. This fort accommodates Tehsildar's office, Praant (revenue subdivision) office, and Court. It also has sacred places like Narsinha Temple and Maruti Temple founded by the great saint and Guru of King Shivaji Shri Ramdas swami. Earlier, there used to be a big trench around the fort and it was always filled with water all year round. The population inside the fort was minimal. The fort had towers too. Now, the nature of this fort is changing and its silent peace, historical nature is ending.

Miraj in those days had become famous because of its very old railway station. It did not have many platforms, but it could accommodate two types of trains - Narrow Gauge and later Meter Gauge. It was a big railway station to connect to Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, Pandharpur, Kolhapur, and villages in Karnataka. Trains used to come and go at their particular times but were limited in numbers. I remember, the train going to Pandharpur for Aashadhi-Kartiki Wari (Aashaad and Kartik are months in the Hindu calendar. Wari is an annual pilgrimage-yatra) used to be jam-packed. Some passengers used to sit on the roof of train compartments. This train ran on the narrow gauge. Consequently, its speed was super slow. Once the train left Miraj, some passengers used to get down and pluck groundnuts from near-by farms and board the train again. Such was this train's speed! Sometimes, this train used to stop in the middle due to problems in its coal engine. There were many funny discussions about this train amongst people.

The Pune - Bengaluru - Hubballi route had two trains daily, one in the morning and another in the evening. The rest of the day was quiet at the station. Many people in those days didn't have wristwatches. Only some affluent people used them. However, the arrival and departure of trains was a novel way of guessing the time of the day for residents. Besides, there was a daily

siren from the railway shed at 7 AM, 11 AM, 1 PM, and 5 PM. This siren could be heard not just in Miraj but also in neighboring villages and settlements.

There was a canteen owned by Babulal Agrawal outside the railway station. Adjacent to it was a Maruti Temple. Gosavis (Homeless) and Bairagis (recluse) used to live in this Temple. It was a shed-less Temple. There were fruit shops, tea stalls, and a railway tenement (colony / chawl) outside the station. The posh Sukhnavas Lodge was a sophisticated option for lodging among its contemporary options. This location was quite mesmerizing and peaceful indeed.

Today, Miraj station has seen massive expansion and become one of the most famous and leading railway junctions in India connecting this city to different parts of the country and the national capital, too. The smoke leaving coal engines are replaced with diesel ones. The number of platforms and walkway bridges have increased and so have the number of passengers. Day and night there are a growing number of trains. However, the sound of trains is missing. Today one can see the changing climate, rapid development, and fast paced life of Miraj.

Our locality known as Budhuvar Peth, was a peaceful area. Kanwadkar Sarkar's Wada was scenic with a big front yard, Bakuli trees on both sides, and a big tamarind tree on one side.

Kanwadkar Sarkar was an Inamdhar (a title bestowed on a person who was awarded lands as grants or gifts) of Kanwad (District Kolhapur). They were two brothers. The elder was called Mothe Sarkar (elder Sarkar) while the younger was called Dhakte Sarkar (younger Sarkar). He was tall, fair and always wore white half sleeve shirt and white pant. He was a man of kind, religious and affectionate nature. The elder sarkar was a Brahmachari (unmarried and spiritual). Every Friday after the Namaz, he used to bless sick children. With his blessings, kids with fever, coughs, etc were cured. My father had taken me too to him once.

In the evenings, Sarkar used to sit on the steps in front of the Masjid. At that time, many neighbors including my father used to accompany him. This elder Sarkar was the one who had arranged for the commercial space in front of Masjid to be given to my father for his saloon. Our family depended on this saloon shop for our daily food. In this Budhuwar Peth, the main dwellings were of Patwegars, Malidiwale, and Mujawars. In the evenings, people used gather at our shop to enjoy casual conversations full of jokes, laughter, and mockery. Those were golden days full of happiness and innocence. Balkoba Sonar's (Kshirsagar) Wada was also in Budhuwar Peth. He gave discourses (pravachan) on Gyaneshwari in his Wada every night. My grandmother used to attend these sessions. His backyard had an old Audumbar (cluster fig tree) tree. Many children, including me, used to go there to eat umbar fruits.

We took the white flowers and the ripe fruits every day from the Bakuli tree in Kanwadkar Sarkar's Wada. Even today, the fragrance of those flowers comes to my mind. On the next day of the holy Muslim Kattal night of Alava, a prasad of daal-rice was served in the masjid. I tasted

this prasad without fail every year for many years. My father used to bring some of it home for others. This prasad was very tasty. Even today when I pass through Budhuwar Peth, these memories pass in front of my eyes. My legs still stop for a moment and then move forward in front of our shop. My father is no more, and neither is Maqbool uncle. Razzak's shop has seen its last and Rahiman Mama is no more today. Nagu uncle who used to run a laundry, Namdev uncle, and Khatib uncle who used to erect pandoras (Mandavwale) have breathed their last. One doesn't see much crowd at the water tanks and the aromatic Bakuli tree is also not there.

Our Zilla Parishad (District council) elementary School No. 3 used to run in the Masjid premises in this locality. This school had classes from first to seventh grade. The school was on rent in a building owned by Abdul Patwegar. We were blessed with a very disciplined Headmaster named Amir Ghudulal Jamadar. My first-grade teacher was the loving Lt. Mrs. Kamal Vibhute. There weren't different teachers for each subject like today in those days. Only one teacher taught all subjects and took the class forward. From fifth through seventh, my teacher was the Lt. Shri Dagadu Narayan Satpute. He was new to the school. He had beautiful handwriting and was an ambitious person. He used to beat us too. But the intention behind it was to ensure that his students excel in their studies. As per the norms, we had our Central Board Examinations in seventh grade. He always wished that his students should pass this exam with flying colors. On the seventh day after his marriage, he told us to study in the school building and also slept next to us. Because of him, education, self-reliance, and culture were bestowed on us. I feel proud to mention that all his students have been successful in life. In the year 1965, our division of seventh grade had a 100% passing result. My classmates, Shri Annasaheb Kurne, Shri Sahdev Pawar, Shri Ruikar brothers, Shri Ram Durgade, and Shri Suresh Lokhande passed with good marks. All of us owe this to the sincere efforts, inspiration and blessings of our teachers that became our assets for lifetime. Our locality of Budhuwar Peth, my school, Kanwadkar water tank, and our shop, too, became my places of worship and hence became my memories.

Our town Miraj was neither a city nor a village. It is a Taluka place on the border of Maharashtra and Karnataka. Hence, a variety of languages like Marathi, Kannada, Tulu, Telugu, Hindi, and Urdu were commonly spoken amongst people. People didn't get any formal education of these languages, still they were well versed with them.

The area between Kolhapur Road and Sangli road was occupied by the Railway Station, Railway Goods, Locomotive Shed, Kolhapur Railway tenement (colony / chawl) of railway staff, and Manik Nagar Railway tenement. The railway staff of Miraj junction's railway station was multilingual and spoke Kannada, Tulu, Telugu, Hindi and Urdu languages. A blend of Marathi, Hindi, and Urdu makes Miraj's unique language. Even today, one can hear conversations in this blended language. If this language is spoken in other cities, people recognize that the person has come from Miraj. It may not be a pure language, but it is a symbol of love, affection, and

secularism. People from the Railway tenement, used to visit the marketplace on bazaar day while others came to the market's cinema halls to watch movies.

There were five cinema halls in Miraj. Amar Talkies near the railway station, Mangal, Madhav, and Deval Talkies in the city center, Asha Talkies on the way to Ganesh Lake. Hansprabha Talkies had shut down in my childhood. It was converted to Bal Gandharva Natya-Mandir (theater). People had a habit of drinking soda, lemon drinks and mixed flavored drinks on the stalls outside the theatre during movie intermissions or when the movie was over. The sound of soda bottles often caught everyone's attention.

In those days, a movie ticket was priced at 5 Anas (meaning 31 paise). Some movies occasionally were half this price. Those were the days when people went crazy for movies. Amar Talkies screened Kannada and Telugu movies for the railway station employees and people from Karnataka. New movies often had tremendous crowds. Tickets were sold in the black market and fights often broke out in this process. The chairs inside the theaters did not have numbers on them and neither did the tickets. Hence finding a right seat was difficult. Many chairs were broken and there was shouting going on to get the ceiling fans turned on. People used to shout to get the movie started as soon as possible and for the Indian news. But once the cinema started, there was pin drop silence. Through all such incidents, watching a movie was somehow still entertaining. A curse (bad word) given in a loud voice to the villain and occasional crying of women on some scenes was common. When a popular song or dance sequence would begin, people used to blow whistles and the atmosphere in entire theatre would be so energetic that it shook the theaters. The contemporary society connected well with such movies that were crafted with varieties of emotions. I enjoyed watching movies like Wakt, Anari, Mughal-e-Azam, Madari, Insaniyat, Anmol Ghadi, Guide, Shagird, Sholay, etc in these cinema halls. Whereas movies like Samrat, Chandragupta, School Master, etc. were shown to us at half price by our school. Villagers traveled in bullock carts to see movies like Bhabhi, Choti Bahen, Khandan, Gaj Gouri, etc. Advertisements for these movies were in the form of triangular blocks and display boards that were mounted on either side of a hand-driven cart. Whereas sometimes they were put on a horse cart and the songs were played through speakers. I used to chase them for a long distance listening to these songs. It had become my hobby. I used to like Dev Anand's CID movie's songs too. Interestingly, Shri O. P. Nayyar was CID's music director and coincidentally, I became acquainted with him in the future. It was like a dream come true. There was special happiness watching movies in the summer. In my childhood, watching movies with my friends Lt. Shri Bal Pawar, Shri Ashok Mali, Shri Vasant Khot, Shri Vitthal Vijapure, and Shri Ramling Chikode was a special joy.

Even though Miraj was not a big town, it still had people from all social strata. Mirasaheb's Dargha was a place of worship for the entire town. Both Hindu and Muslim went to this Dargah. Even today, the same can be seen. Every Thursday one could see heavy rush in the Dargah. In a

way, my spiritual journey began here. My mother used to take me to Ajaans every Thursday morning. After crops were harvested, some part of the first yield of Jowar grains were offered to Mirasaheb's Dargha. We used to offer meals to five fakirs at our home. In the holy month of Ramadan, my mother observed fasting for a month. She worked as a laborer in the farms during daytime and visited the Dargah in the evening before returning home. This had become her routine. When breaking her Ramadan fast, she ate one or two tamarind leaves from the Dargah premises. In those days many people didn't have watches. So, Muslim youth played devotional songs through the streets and awakened fellow Muslims at the time of dawn.

In those days, Vasudev sang songs in front of people's houses as if he was summoning them. The Jangams would tie ankle bells (ghungaroo) and seek alms by going door to door. Fakirs would seek alms on every Friday. At the beginning of the monsoon, Potrajs sang devotional songs and marked their attendance. In all of this, the most memorable festival was Muharram / Alava. It was a fun time. Our neighbors and railway employees painted themselves in yellow stripes and impersonated themselves as tigers. Unlike today's world, there weren't many means of entertainment during those days. But a beautiful blend of folk art and pathways of devotion to God provided entertainment through various festivals. The portrayal of various identities through mimicry of tigers, bears, milkmaids, wrestlers, and Swami Vivekanand was a perfect source of entertainment and joy for kids. Panja Bhets (palm wrestling) would take place in Dargah premises, and a large crowd gathered to watch the show. People from nearby villages and towns gathered in the evening and early morning to watch the 'Tabut Meetings'. The thunderous sound of Dhol Tasha (a type of drum), the tall Abdagiris (a type of sacred flag), generous spraying of Abeer (a type of red powder similar to kumkum or gulal) were adequate to surpass the limits of happiness easily. Relatives from various places came and stayed with us. Houses were filled with guests. On the last day of Muharram, a truck with a barrel of colored sherbet (tasty drink) distributed the drink to everyone. I have not tasted such tasty sherbet ever since. After Muharram was over, our Muslim brothers from the neighborhood's Desai Wada, Kurane Wada, Baanadar, Kalangade gave us Muharram Roats (round homemade cookies made from wheat, sugar and ghee). This tradition of inter-religion brotherhood has continued even today.

During harvesting season around Diwali time, Bahurupis (street performers wearing clothes of various people like cops, Gods, etc) came home seeking alms. They impersonated various characyers like Lord Ram, Lakshman, Shankar-Parvati, etc and sang Abhangs (religious songs) on harmoniums as they walked through the streets. Offering them food grains and money was a custom in those days. A person named Bandu Bahurupi who impersonated Lord Ram was worshipped as Niranjanswami later on. He stayed outside the city limits. His Samadhi (tomb) is in Dhavali (near Miraj) and is a place of worship for both Hindus and Muslims. Shri Vinayanad Maharaj of Hupri and his disciples have built a Math (monastery) of Shri Niranjan Maharaj at Vadgaon (District Kolhapur). Dervishis (members of a Muslim (specifically Sufi) religious order

who have taken vows of poverty and austerity) would visit during every harvesting season and conducted playful shows with bears and made sounds from their bracelets. These things are rare to see these days.

Every year, on the 24th day of the Rajab month (7th month as per the Islamic calendar), Mirasaheb's Urs (death anniversary festival celebrated by Muslims) was held. The first day of the Urs was the most important and others were stale (no longer fresh). Ustad Abdul Karim Khan Saheb's death anniversary would fall on the second day. Renowned singers and musicians from all over the country attended musical programs held on this day. Their performances were considered as offerings to the Guru and their services offered in this Darbar (court) got them recognition throughout the country. Renowned artists like Saraswati Rane, Hirabai Badodekar, Kapileshwar Buwa, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Ustad Bale Khan, Ustad Bade Gulam Gali Khan marked their attendance in this Darbar. Many times, my father played Harmonium with them on stage, and I felt proud of it. Because of my father's rigor in music, I inherited love towards it. Music became my hobby. It became dear to my heart. Be it Ragdari Raag, abhangs, poems, movie songs, or sugam sangeet, I get lost in the euphoria of music. I get satisfaction as if I get oxygen from it. This hobby led me to get acquainted and forge a friendship with musicians from the film industry like O. P. Nayyar, Madan Mohan, Prabhakar Jog, Vasant Pawar, and Ram Kadam. Mirasaheb Urs used to be an exciting extravaganza that included shops and stalls erected by people from distant villages. The carnival included electric and manually operated carousels, circus, animal shows, balloon and toy sellers, sugarcane juice stalls, food stalls, roots / vegetables stalls, and sweet stalls. The thrilling well-of-death motor-drome and the motorcyclist's precision riding in horizontal and vertical circles inside that iron cage amazed me. It also created curiosity in my mind about those skills. One could enjoy all such shows in merely one Ana (6.25 paise). The road leading from Miraj ST station, Dargah, Police station to Madhav Talkies was buzzing with stalls, rush and energy of the Urs. Friends and relatives would flock at everyone's house to enjoy Urs with their near and dear ones. My father's sister's son Sada and my friends roamed around the Urs all day long. The entire atmosphere of Urs would feel full of energy and enthusiasm due to sounds from loudspeakers, songs, trumpets, shouting of slogans by magicians, etc. All shops were crowded in the evenings. All the stalls and shops used to be full of items from clothing, toys to life essential items. This throng lasted until dawn. As days passed, the number of shops decreased. These shopkeepers then went to other such festivals and pilgrimages in different destinations. They lived their lives like nomads. Today here and tomorrow there. But these people appeared to be hard-working and innocent to me. They were poor but I believe they had public service was their motto. These shops slowly moved out as Urs came to an end. But their memories lasted for a long time. Their recollection was a deposit of happiness for many days and months to come until arrival of next year's Urs. I was a traveler in this journey of memories!

Miraj city's Goddess Ambabai's fair was also huge during the week of Navratri. This Temple is in the Brahmanpuri part of Miraj and is considered a lively Temple. A program consisting of devotional songs and music was held on each day of the Navratri. Pandit Ganpatrao Kavthekar and Pandit Bhanudas Gurav made arrangements for these programs. In my childhood, I went with my grandmother every year to this Navratri festival and took blessings of the Goddess. I go even today. My faith in such holy places was developed at a young age.

After my seventh standard of the school, I got admission in Miraj Highschool run by an organization called Sangli Shikshan Sanstha. This Highschool was located in the city center near the marketplace. It had spacious classrooms, a big playground, fully grown tamarind trees, a stonemasonry building, and eminent teachers. It was a famous school. Of all the other schools in Miraj at that time namely, Janta Vidyalay, R. M. Highschool, Vidya Mandir, and Jubilee Kanya School, Miraj Highschool was ranked the topmost. My secondary education was in Marathi. There were no English medium schools in Miraj at that time. Even a subject like science was taught in Marathi. In 1966, I took admission in eighth grade. My class teacher was Mrs. Kamal Vatve. She was an excellent teacher. Our principal was Shri B. D. Sahasrabudhe. The main fiber of this school was its academic awareness. Academics was the focal point and successful students was its motto. Consequently, the students graduating from this school were bound to scale great heights in their careers as they were trained that way. Miss Sharyu Gadgil (Bhide), Mrs. Hemlata T. Bhagwat, S. K. Kulkarni, D. J. Kulkarni, Karmarkar, Vasant Karandikar, Arvind Parchure, and G. G. Kulkarni very well handled the responsibilities of ensuring that the students studied properly. We, students, had immense respect for these teachers and even today, it has not diminished.

Lt. Harerampant Bodas taught us English and Sanskrit in our 10th and 11th standard. He was a respectable person in Maharashtra's spiritual field. He was a part of Shri Sonapant Dandekar and Shri Dhundamaharaj Deglurkar's sect. I was very lucky to be a student of such a person. Lt. Shobhana Bagewadi, Datey Sir, A. M Gramopadhye, R. S. Gramopadhye, and Patwardhan Sir sculpted us for our future. Apte Sir taught Mathematics and was in-charge of N.C.C (National Cadet Corps). He was strict in discipline matters. His sons Dattatray and Nandu were my good friends.

This high school gave me many friends. Football player Madrasi, Madhukar Kamble, very comic Aslam Tarlekar, Ramling Chikode, Vitthal Vijapure, Salim Bhokare, Shabbir Attar, and Lala Momin were my good friends. The studious ones who eventually became doctors like Dr. Bashir Bhokare, Dr. Milind Patwardhan, Dr. Ranjeet Sulhyan were also my friends. Other friends who shined in their respective fields were Vasudev Joshi, Mukund Datar, Thatte, Bapurao Pidde, Annappa Karole, Shankar Gouraje, and Vaichal. Those were happy and thriving days. Time flew quickly and the year 1969 dawned upon us. It was the year of S. S. C (Secondary School

Certificate). In preparation for my exams, I only read the textbooks and not the Navneet Guides or sample question papers. While reading textbooks, I went to the basics of concepts. Unlike today, there were no extra tuition classes. Neither was there a fad of it. In Shri Chougule's Sugam tuition, only the English language was taught. Whereas R. T Kulkarni and Sutar Sir conducted Math classes. Their fees were very nominal.

In those days, our Miraj Highschool's S. S. C (Secondary School Certificate) results were great. However, there were not many praising felicitations or interviews of successful students in those times. In March 1969's S. S. C exam, I passed with a first-class score. My mid-level education was thus completed in Miraj Highschool. This Highschool is now under the authority of the Sangli-Miraj-Kupwad Municipality. It has successfully fulfilled its education responsibilities.

After S. S. C (matriculation), I took admission in Willingdon College Sangli. Shri N. B. Tare sir was the principal. It was the college's platinum jubilee year (75th year). Prof. Govind Joshi taught us Marathi. Salati Sir, Prof. Bhide, Prof. Kulkarni, etc taught English. In 1970, I left the Science trade and opted for Arts. I took admission in Swami Vivekanand Institute's Arts, Commerce and Science College that Shri Bapuji Salunkhe had newly established in Miraj. Our college Principal Dr. J. C. Sinha had a solid personality. He was a Gandhivadi (following Mahatma Gandhi's principles) and very knowledgeable. He mingled with everyone in the classrooms. I chose Marathi as my core subject. Prof. G. L. Gabale taught Marathi whereas Prof. Sabnis taught English. Principal Sinha started the concept of Earn and Learn in college. We earned 10 Rupees per hour.

Our college was from 7 AM to 11 AM. After college hours, I worked at Shri. Indrakumar Shah's New Medical Shop until night 8 PM. Such was my daily routine.

Shri Balasaheb Saraswati Library was located at the center of Miraj. Our neighbor, the Lt. Balkrishna Khot was an employee of this library. With his help, I borrowed many books from the library. I was a voracious reader of books written by H. N. Apte, V. S. Khandekar, N. S. Phadke, P. K. Atre, C. V. Joshi, Shri N. Pendse, Shri M. Mate, Laxmibai Tilak, V. D. Ghate, Sane Guruji, Nath Jadhav, Vyankatesh Madgulkar, Ranjit Desai, Iravati Karve, Anant Kanekar, Manohar Malgavkar, Annabhau Sathe and Sharadchandra Chatterjee. I also read religious books and magazines like Amrut, Navneet and Marmik, along with newspapers. Unknowingly, my life was changing because of this reading. The language of my existence was changing.

I used to buy some books. Thanks to my elder brother, Lt. Vasantrao Zende, I started taking keen interest in reading. I got the habit of reading newspaper while taking meals because of him.

I have already narrated the deteriorating financial condition of my family. To pull us out of this situation, my elder brother Shri Vasantao moved to Mumbai with Lt. Shri Madhavrao Ishwarao Pawar (Dada). Shri Pawar was a respectable person in our neighborhood. He was a building contractor in Mumbai. His elder son Shri Pratapao Pawar was my elder brother's classmate. Before moving to Mumbai, my elder brother visited his friend Shri Indrakumar Shah's medical shop often. Shri Indrakumar Shah, his elder brother Lt. Ratanchand Khemchand Shah, and Shri Uttamchand Khemchand Shah (Agarkar) ran Ashok Medical Store next to Deval cinema hall in Laxmi market Miraj. Its new branch named New Ashok Medical Store opened near Gosavi Hospital. Shri Indrakumar Shah managed this new shop. After I passed my seventh standard exam, to keep me away from wandering here and there, my elder brother Shri Vasantao introduced me to Shri Shah. From that day, I became a part of their family and I still am. I performed all tasks in the shop like bring medicines, arranging them, selling them to customers, billing, cleaning the shop, etc. just like we do at our house.

When Shetji Indrakumar Shah went out of town, I managed the store very well and handed over the daily collection and keys at their house in the night. My colleagues in the shop at the time were Shashank Adhyapak and Rajaram Ghatge. From 1966 to 1969, our high school timings were from 12 PM to 6 PM. So, I used to leave the shop at 11.30 AM. Shetji used to give me 60 Rupees per month for my expenses which I would hand it over to my family. In those days, things were not that expensive. In the neighboring Bhau Joshi's Sugras Restaurant, one could eat enough food for two Rupees. Shetji fasted on Saturdays and brought Khichadi for himself and me. Such was our Shetji, big-hearted and philanthropic. By introducing me to Shetji, my elder brother Shri Vasantao gave me a priceless deposit for life. Because of him, I got righteousness, behavioral knowledge, and direction in life. Because of him, I was acquainted with his nephew and my spiritual brother Shri Satish Shah. This acquaintance and bonding is solidifying day by day.

The year 1972 was a drought year with scarce rainfall. Now, my mind was restless in Shetji's shop. Asking for a pay raise was not an option because there were two other workers in the shop. Their pay would also have to be increased. It had become very difficult for me to run my household at such low pay. My second brother Lt. Shri Pandurang used to work at the Marathe Mill. However, he too was laid-off from work. Consequently, when I was in my second year of Bachelor of Arts (B.A), I had to hunt for a new job. Sometimes, I used to sit in our hair salon in Budhuwar Peth. On one such Sunday, when Lt. Shri Malgonda Patil was a superintendent in Zilla Parishad Sangli, he had come for a haircut. My father informed him of my education and the necessity for employment. Shri Patil asked me to enroll my name in Zilla Parishad Sangli's newly

formed Samaj Kalyan (Public Welfare) Department and soon enough, I did so. I was called for an interview in the year 1973.



Deputy Engineer Shri Sankpal from the Public Works Department in Sangli (near Shivaji statue) took my interview. Many candidates had come for their interviews. Some of them were graduates and post-graduates. I had merely

appeared for my second year in B. A. So, getting the Junior Clerk job was tough. At the same time, I was trying for employment in District Co-operative Central Bank. Shri Gulabrao Patil was its Chairman and Shri Taklekar saheb was the Managing Director. I was exhausted with all of my fruitless efforts. I was unable to get a job as I was not a degree holder. Eventually, with the grace of God, I started accompanying the Chairman in his car and started giving good suggestions. All of this was merely a coincidence.

The job-hunt was still on. I remember when Shri Vasantdada Patil was the irrigation minister. I went to meet him for my job at the sugar factory. However, I could not meet him. At that time, the son of soil of Miraj city, the dynamic, and the sober Shri Shivajirao Dhulubulu was the Vice Chairman of the sugar factory. The next day, I went to meet him at his residence. He inquired about me caringly and gave a letter to hand over to Shri M. N. Shevade saheb Executive Engineer – Public Works Department – Sangli and asked me to meet him. I took the letter and went to meet Shri Shevade saheb. But I came to know that he was on official tour duty. This happened a couple of times. But one day I met him. Shri Shevade saheb said that they were looking for a graduate candidate. I informed him that I was in the last year of my Bachelor of Arts degree curriculum. I requested him to hire me as a peon until I complete my education and then hire me as a clerk. I also informed him that I was very much in need of a job. On this, he did not say anything.

But I did not stay still as my financial situation did not allow me to do so. I kept meeting Shri Dhulubulu saheb and with Shri Shevade saheb regularly. Call it my persistent effort's success or God's grace or Shri Dhulubulu saheb's efforts, on 23 May 1973, I got the order for my employment. On 25 May 1973, I reported as a clerk in Public Health Development Subdivision Number 1 in Sub Divisional Officer Shri Sheik saheb's office. This is how I got my job. I could bring food to the table. Everybody at home was happy. Neither I or any of my family members had the slightest of idea that it was just the beginning of my good fortune.

It took many years to figure out if I got this job due to my efforts or because of the invisible divine power behind me. My mother did mention once that I got this job because of the divine blessings of my Gurudev. Like I mentioned before, 1972-1973 were draught years. My father was ill, my eldest brother had gone to Mumbai for work, and the other brother had his personality issues. All of these circumstances had made our lives miserable.

A Temple of Lord Vitthal is situated in our Patil Galli and Pawar Galli. My father used to play music during rituals like Saptaahs, Kirtans, and Bhajans at this Temple. He would also visit this Temple daily to offer his prayers. He spent his whole life in such Temples doing Bhajans and chanting. Out of respect to him, people called him Dada (big brother). It was the death anniversary of Shri Ramchandra Jadhav in the month of August. My father had gone to Jadhav family's house that was situated near Vitthal Temple to perform Bhajan on the occasion of the death anniversary program. This Bhajani Mandal (group) consisted of Lt. Bhimsingh Rajput, Pundaliksingh Rajput, Babusingh Rajput and other members. My father had a great sense of humor and he liked making fun of others. That day there was too much fun and my father's dhoti was torn. Everyone returned home happily after having dinner. But my father spent some time talking to Akka Jadhav. During this conversation, he narrated our family's condition to her with tears in his eyes. On this, Akka asked my father to send my mother to meet her.

At the time, a few tenants used to live at Jadhav's house. Shri Ramchandra Shirsagar was one of them. He was our relative. He had one child. Her name was Ratan. She was about twenty or twenty-one years of age at the time. She used to have Sanchar (i.e to be possessed by demigods) of Renukadevi, Shri Swami Samarth, and Shri Kumbhar Swami Datta Maharaj.

My mother went to Jadhav's residence, and she met Akka. After evening Aarti, during Ratan's Sanchar, she said "I will give half Bhakari (Roti) to your son". This meant that some or the other source of livelihood would be given to me by the Almighty. In a sense, everyone is always curious to know about his or her future. Surprisingly, as communicated during the Sanchar, Maharaj had given me a source of livelihood. My mother started visiting Jadhav's residence regularly to offer her prayers on Thursdays. But I had never gone there. My mother told me about all of this later. I was not really God's devout earlier. But I used to visit Narsinhwadi once or twice a year and to Maruti Temple. But every Thursday though, I would visit Mirasaheb's Dargah.

In our joint family, all rituals and traditions were followed. All festivals were celebrated with excitement within our affordability. After a daily bath, we would pour a jar of water to the Tulsi (holy basil) tree in our front yard and only then eat or drink anything. We would celebrate the annual festival of Ganeshotsava (Festival of Lord Ganesha) by offering Aarati (prayers) and preparing Naivedya (food oblation) for all of the seven days. We would conduct Gauri Poojan (workshipping two wives of Lord Ganesha) as well. I don't know why, but I was becoming more and more religious, spiritual and God worshipping. I observed that my reverence of Lord

Dattatreya was on a rise tremendously. However, I didn't have any idea or information about Datta Sampradaya (i.e., a group that follows certain traditions).

When I got my first salary of Rs. 264.50, I was very happy. I had not even thought of such a salary in my dream, because, in those days one would get full vegetarian meal for two rupees, a Raleigh bicycle for six hundred rupees, a four-band Philips radio for three hundred rupees, and ten-gram (one tola) gold for two hundred fifty to two hundred sixty rupees. Such was the state of inexpensiveness in those days. I kept my first salary in front of God's idol and gave it to my mother.

I used to work in Public Health Development Subdivision Number 1 and 2. Sometimes, I had to work in Miraj Water Works. Shri Mehboob Abbas Sheikh was the Deputy Engineer for Subdivision Number 1, whereas Shri Bhagwant Gajanan Kamble was the Deputy Engineer at Sub Division Number 2. Shri Govind Ganesh Bhadbhade was the Deputy Engineer at Miraj Water Works.

Lt. Shri Vasantdada Patil had approved twenty-seven 'Lift Irrigation Schemes' in Sangli District to overcome the draught. Out of these schemes, Miraj – Nilaji, Kupwad, Mhaisal 1 and 2, and Bedag were assigned to the Subdivisions 1 and 2 for completion, whereas the task of providing drinking water to Miraj was assigned to Miraj Water Works. My job assignment was in the store clerk's office. In those days, the nature of work was to provide cement and steel to cement pipe manufacturing companies, get the pipes manufactured, complete the pipelines, construct jack wells (a water intake structure typically built-in rivers), sump wells, and pump houses. Lt. Shri R. G. Nagargoje's non-functioning shingle factory (baked mud-roof shingles) was rented to store and stock the cement and other construction materials. I was assigned to this storage unit. Mainly, this was a cement storage facility. Thousands of cement bags arrived by railway. A contractor would bring this cement from the railway station to this storage by truck. My job responsibility was to oversee the unloading and arranging of cement bags and maintain daily records, etc. At the same time, giving cement to pipe manufacturing companies and collecting money from them was the main task. At that time, Lt. Shri C. P. Date, Pandit Ganu Jadhav were the security personnel and other people were temporary workers at Nagargoje Godown (storage facility). All of these colleagues were very reliable, poor, and hardworking. As days were passing, the work-related nuisances were increasing, and I had to suffer mental stress.

Giving cement to contractors without a D. R (Dispatch receipt) was risky. Sometimes, cement dues were recovered from their invoices/bills. One of the officers was very strange. He would call me in front of the contractors and ask me to give them cement and get their signature on Advice Note. Later, after the contractor left, the same officer would tell me not to give cement without officially collecting money. Contractors would then bring a truck to collect cement, and

this would lead to arguments. In those days, there were no mobile phones. Establishing communication was hard. Consequently, I would get mentally disturbed and sometimes thought of quitting the job. But due to my family's condition, this was not possible. I did not take bribes. Not just that but, I did not even drink tea offered by contractors. Due to this, my ill-wishers from the office started conspiring against me. Consequently, I and the storage center were looked upon suspiciously by everyone.

Cement was scarcely available in those days because there was a shortage at all sellers. There was a ban on cement too. The storage center started getting audited frequently. Once, my food provider, Executive Engineer Lt. Shri M. N. Shevade saheb came for an audit. He checked all registers, paperwork, and expressed satisfaction with my work, and also made some suggestions. Two days later, I narrated this work-related stress to Shri Kale sir and Shri Sheikh sir's attention. I requested them to relieve me from this storage center assignment and give me another. But instead of granting my wishes, they expressed their trust in me and asked me to continue with this responsibility.

At this time, our office was in the Sugandha building, behind Gavai Bungalow on Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Road in Miraj. Shri Ashokrao Shamrao Jadhav was the senior clerk whereas Shri Madansingh Rajput and Shri Vijaykumar Jadhav were junior clerks. Shri Singh, Shri Ingle, and Shri Katti were junior engineers. Commuting from this office to the storage center on a bicycle consumed much of my time. I didn't have any job-satisfaction. But quitting it wasn't an option. I used to get very tired and so after office hours, I would visit the market in the evening and spend some time at Ashok Medical Store. This was all the recreation I had.

Shri Ashok Shamrao Jadhav was from Kolhapur. He was my senior clerk and had come to our office through a job transfer. He lived in Miraj's fort area near Shri Narsoba Temple in Daftardar Chawl as a tenant. So, one day after office, I went to his house to hand over the keys of the cash counter. I handed over the keys and office report to him and we had some snacks. While having a general chat, I noticed a black and white photo of a saint. I inquired to Shri Jadhav about the name of the saint. He replied it was Kolhapur's Shri Datta Maharaj. He did not elaborate. I was very surprised by seeing this photo. I felt I knew this photo from my birth. My mind was filled with a mysterious fear, and an enigmatic astonishment. I used to visit Shri Narsinhwadi sometimes and knew Shri Datta as a three-headed form. I was ignorant of any knowledge of Shri Dattatraya's next incarnations or saints who followed him. This subject ended right there. But whenever I visited Shri Jadhav's residence, I sought blessings of that photo from a distance and developed an anonymous faith towards it. I never asked Shri Jadhav who this Datta Maharaj was or about his character or history. However, many unanswered questions would come across my mind, and I could sense it as a mystery.

In between all of this, time flew. I completed one year of my service and did not realize how fast it went. Due to my staunch nature, I never accepted bribes, and neither did I give anything to anybody in my office. So, some people spread false rumors about me. Amidst all of this, I was calm, composed, and stable.

However, a sudden hurricane hit my life and there was a complete darkness before my eyes. Every day, thousands of cement bags came to the railway station. A carting agent (transport) would transfer them to the storage center by truck.

As the cement came in, it was distributed to cement pipe manufacturing companies and contractors. So, daily leftover cement was sometimes not counted due to the rush. One day, when I was counting cement bags as per the register, I could not account for six hundred cement bags. They were missing. Lt. Shri Date Mama and I checked again but ended up with the same result. I was scared. My family's financial condition was poor. To run the house, I had to work. As a clerk, I was responsible for the stock in the storage center. Well, I did not earn any outside money through malpractice either, and neither this thought had ever come to my mind. I couldn't do anything like this.

Some people used my name and made money on their own and enjoyed parties. Even after behaving so nicely and working with sheer integrity and utter honesty, what fruit did I earn? I literally could not think of anything in that tense situation. I felt dejected and could not eat food. I found myself in a bad situation. In those days, one bag of cement cost Rs. 50. So, 600 bags would cost Rs. 30,000. Forget 30,000, I could not even afford to pay Rs. 600. I was deeply thinking and desperately searching for a solution to deal with this crisis. It was just darkness and darkness everywhere. I kept quiet and without telling anyone tried to find an answer. When a person is in jeopardy or a victim of crisis, he suddenly remembers God, saints, Sadhus, fortunetellers, and the ones who claim to be possessed by demigods/spirits of people having divine powers. One needs to search for ways to deal with crisis and avoid further roadblocks or dangerous situation by trying to decode fortune. And one night, I felt like meeting Ratan Tai, the person because of whom I got this job or rather because of whose power of speech while she had Sanchar, I was blessed with this service.

Many years have passed, and I am not able to recollect it exactly. But I should have distributed some sweets to express my gratitude at Shri Jadhav's residence as soon as I got the job. But I did not believe in Sanchars back then. I was convinced that I got this job because of the referrals given by a few influential people. But now in the crisis situation, my ego had fallen. My future started looking painful and dark. I did not mention about this catastrophe on me to my parents or office friends, or colleagues. Now, there was only one way left for me. I went to Shri Jadhav's residence feeling guilty. Their house was only five minutes away from ours. I hadn't

visited their house ever before. Their house was in Bhui Gully. It had a small front yard, veranda, living room and a kitchen. The earthen wall of living room was full of neatly arranged photo frames of different deities. One of the photos in the corner was of the same saint that I had seen in my colleague, Shri Ashokrao Jadhav's house. I could not decode the mystery of this photo. The Aarti had begun, and Ratan Tai's Sanchar started. After the Aarti, many devotees would ask her questions and seek solutions. Ratan Tai would guide them. I chose not to ask her any questions. Now, Aarti was over. Many people had left for their homes. I too did not stay there for long as I did not know their family well. Later though, I started going to their house every day for the Aarti.

One day when I was there, during Aarti, Ratan Tai had Sanchar and she said: "I have given you half Bhakari. Eat it properly. Pay attention to your work". Akka told me that this Sanchar is of Shri Shrikrishna Saraswati Datt Maharaj. I too felt relieved and started seeing a way to get out of this calamity. I started considering Akka as a God's messenger. But even then, my mind was not completely at ease. I was only pleading for a solution out of this trouble. I continued going to their residence every evening for Aarti. I became acquainted with Akka and developed a curiosity about her, Ratan Tai, and family. Satvik (moral) nature was the epitome of Akka's character. Her creative talks automatically introduced me to the rest of her. While living a worldly life and running her family, she had attained a high spiritual stature. She was born in Miraj. Her birthplace was near Mangal Talkies and Bhandari Baba's Dargah. Her father's name was Shri Yashwant Nikam. He worked jobs to make ends meet. His financial condition was poor. Shri Yashwant Nikam had seen a lot of hardships in life.

Akka had six sisters and six brothers. Out of them, only one brother and Akka lived long. Her childhood passed in simplicity. She got married to Shri Yashwantrao Jadhav in 1940. Yashwantrao Jadhav's father's name was Lt. Ramchandra Sakharam Jadhav. His native place was Vele Kamthi in Satara District. His father had passed away in 1887's draught due to the plague epidemic. Ramchandra Jadhav's and his younger brother Maruti's upbringing was done by their widow mother Muktai. She left Vilekamati village with her three children, Ramchandra, Maruti and a daughter and came to Koregaon Railway Station in search of livelihood. In 1905, Lt. Ramchandra got a job in railways as a coolie (porter). While Lt. Ramchandra Jadhav (a. k. a Nana) was at Miraj in year 1910, he got an opportunity to meet Shri Tupare (a. k. a Mama), the maternal grandfather of businessman Shri Chougule. Shri Tupare Mama arranged for the marriage of his friend's daughter Miss. Gangubai with Ramchandra Jadhav. Members of the Jadhav, Tupare, Patole, and Chougule families were employed by the Indian Railways and lived in the Railway Chawl near the Minor Irrigation Office (This chawl has been demolished now). There Ramchandra Jadhav got acquainted with Lt. Ramchandra Patil. The latter worked in the Railway Police Department and his native place was Kerewadi (Taluka Kavthemahankal). His family consisted of wife Dhondubai, son Gopalrao and daughter Mathura. Lt. Dhondubai belonged to the Pandhare family. She had two brothers, named Uddhav and Ram. These

brothers visited Lt. Dhondubai's residence often. Because of this, Jadhav, Patil, and Pandhare families lived like joint families.

After departure of the last train on Miraj - Pandharpur route, Lt. Ramchandra Jadhav would return to his house in the railway quarters. On a certain night, he saw a Sanyasi (a Hindu Mendicant) sitting on a bench at one end of the railway platform. Ramchandra Jadhav enquired and found out that the Sanyasi had missed his train to Pandharpur and hence was sitting there. The Sanyasi spoke in Marathi and looked healthy. India has always respected Sanyas - Dharma (i.e being a Sanyasi) for ages. It has been perceived as a sacred lifestyle and society has given it immense respect, too. The mission of Sanyas – Dharma is to be one with God and forge a spiritual bond with God. Sanyasis always obey their Guru's orders. Due to these emotional values, Ramchandra Jadhav requested the Sanyasi to come to his house. The Sanyasi Satpurush obliged to this request gracefully. His name was Krishna Buva.

He was a close disciple of Kolhapur's Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj. His Gurudev had instructed him to visit Shri Kshetra (holy place) Pandharpur every month on Ekadashi (11th day of the lunar fortnight).

In later years, Krishna Buva started visiting Jadhav, Patil, and Tupare families during his visits to Pandharpur. Slowly, all of them formed cordial relations. Through interactions with Krishna Buva, his Gurudev's grand and divine life was introduced to these families. They started learning about the eternal bond between a Guru and disciple. Krishna Buva's Gurudev's name was Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj. Gurudev lived in Kolhapur in a house on a street called Kumbhar Gully. The house belonged to a saintly lady named Tarabai Shirke. She was a remarkably calm person and was like an affectionate mother to everyone. Because of the name of the street he lived in, Gurudev was conventionally known as Kumbhar Gully's Datta Maharaj. Gurudev was born in a small village called Nandani (Taluka Shirol, District Kolhapur, Maharashtra) on 7 February 1836 (Marathi calendar year 1757 Madya Vadya Panchami). His father's name was Shri Appa Bhatt Joshi and his mother's name was Annapurnadevi. As the fruitful blessings of austerity and penance of this couple, Lord Shri Narsinha Saraswati Datta Maharaj took birth as their Son. Thus, Gurudev was the reincarnation of Lord Narsinha Saraswati Datta Maharaj. According to Dharmashastra / theology, it is proven that a reincarnation is birth of God or Goddess in the form of a human being. He was a Siddha (a person who has achieved spiritual realization and supernatural power). Such a life attains emancipation, i.e., the human being doesn't need to go through the repetitive cycle of birth and death and the soul is set free at the end of this life. This Avatar of him was only to shower heavenly blessings on earth. None of the laws of nature applied to him. This was God Dattatraya's Avatar, and he was truly free from inside at the soul level. He was omnipresent in this world. He was fair skinned, glorious, medium height, handsome, and had a healthy and

strong body. His eyes were dark, stable, and delicate. His radiant aura emitted a layer of positive energy around his body. This Mahayogi (great yogi) could travel anywhere in the world as a micro-body and gave experiences to his disciples. He would give Darshan (an opportunity or occasion of seeing a holy person or the image of a deity) in various forms. His inexhaustible body would not become hungry, and he did not need food as such. He only ate food fed by the virtuous Tarabai (also called as Tara Aai, where Aai means mother). Even though he hardly ate any food, his face was always lustrous and radiant. He illustrated divinity and traveled as a conscious form through immortality. He was immortal through ages. He was an eternally awake Saint.

Krishna Buva's last name was Chavan. After entering married life, he was plagued with frequent fits caused due to Epilepsy. He worked in Shri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj's Darbar in Kolhapur as a horseman. At home, he had a happy family of his mother and wife. None of the medicines worked for his epilepsy. At such time, one of his friends suggested him to visit Shri Datta Maharaj from Kumbhar Gully and that He would cure him and keep his death at bay. Accordingly, one day he went to Kumbhar Gully for Darshan of Shri Datt Maharaj. Immediately after seeing him, Maharaj said: "Apply bhasma, apply ashes". (Bhasm means cinder - a small piece of partly burned coal or wood that has stopped giving off flames but still has the combustible matter in it). Hearing an answer without even posing the question, Krishna Buva was very surprised. He started seeking blessings of Kumbhar Swami on daily basis. Shri Kumbhar Swami would often tell his other disciples that Krishna Buva was an excellent horse with a good ancestral background. Krishna Buva would feel amazed to hear this. Krishna Buva's maternal grandfather worked in the King's court (Raj Darbar). He was a Malkari (One who has done Pandharpur yatra and wears a Tulsi seed necklace and one who has taken Guru's advice). He frequently did Waris (pilgrimage) to Pandharpur. Once he went to Pandharpur for Ashadhi Wari for Darshan and was late returning and reporting back to work at Kolhapur by a few days. (Ashadha is a month of the Hindu calendar that corresponds to June/July). On returning to Kolhapur, he went back to work. He informed his colleagues and seniors that he had gone to Pandharpur and hence was late to work by 2 to 4 days. All of his colleagues and seniors were confused. They told him that he reported back on time and that the attendance register had entries in it accordingly. They showed him this register. On seeing this register, Krishna Buva's grandfather had tears in his eyes. For him, Shri Vitthal God came in his form and worked in the King's court. He felt awkward and sad for the trouble he had caused to God. Feeling miserable to have made Shri Pandurang work, he resigned from his job. Such was the great ancestry of Krishna Buva. Kumbhar Swami used to ask Krishna Buva why he didn't do Pandharpur Wari yet?

Once Krishna Buva wanted to go to Pandharpur. He asked Kumbhar Swami for permission, and it was granted. He prepared to leave to Pandharpur and arranged for five rupees for travel expenses. On the eve of the journey, his mother asked him to bring her another saree as her current one had become old and was worn badly. On this, Krishna Buva got confused. He had to

choose between going to Pandharpur and buying a saree for his mother. He only had five rupees with him. Out of these two, he could do only one thing. This was his exam of truth. His mind could not process it. Such are exams taken by the Saints to test their students. At such a time, Krishna Buva remained calm from inside and bought a saree for his mother with those five rupees.

The next day Krishna Buva went for Kumbhar Swami's Darshan. In a powerful than lighting, but softer than flower voice, Kumbhar Swami said: "You did the right thing son." Through his omnipresent divine vision, Swami knew that Krishna Buva gave a saree to his mother. Upon hearing this, Krishna Buva had tears in his eyes. On the same night, one of his friends came to his house and said that he was leaving to Pandharpur for Darshan the next day. He mentioned that all of his family's travel arrangements were done. He had one horse for Krishna Buva and requested him to accompany them. In this way, even if he spent all five rupees for his mother's saree and in such poor financial condition, his Gurudev Kumbhar Swami had already arranged for his Pandharpur Darshan. Hearing his friend's humble request, Krishna Buva was very happy and he traveled to Pandharpur along with him.

There was huge rush in the town of Pandharpur as many devotees had flocked town to seek Lord Vitthal's blessings. He thought it will be difficult to get Lord Vitthal's *Darshan*. To add to his agony, he was suffering from Epilepsy. At that moment, the Temple's priest came to him and said: "Come Buva, let us take Pandurang's Darshan". He took Krishna Buva inside the Temple. When seeking Darshan, Krishna Buva saw Kumbhar Swami instead of Pandurang. He had such a divine experience. Krishnabuwa was reiterating the priest to arrange for Lord Pandurang's *Darshan*. He had lost his senses. The priest and people around him told Krishna Buva that he was indeed in front of Pandurang and said: "Can't you see? Are you blind? Pandurang is right in front of you". Then Krishna Buva had Pandurang's Darshan in a magnificent form. Now, Krishna Buva had a confirmation that Shri Pandurang and Shri Kumbhar Swami were the same.

Kumbhar Swami frequently said to Krishna Buva "Apply Ashes to your body". Once they were all going together with some disciples to Shri Kshetra Wadi-Ratnagiri for Jyotiba's Darshan. As usual Kumbhar Swami said that Krishna Buva was an excellent royal horse from a sacred Makari family having noble blessings of Lord Vitthal and sat on his shoulders. The Almighty's wishes are puzzling. Very soon, Krishna Buva's family was separated. His daughter was married into a family in Arjunwad (Taluka Shirol) and she left for her in-law's place.

As per his Gurudev's wishes, he applied ashes to his body, took Sanyas (Sannyasa is a form of asceticism) and went to Kumbh Mela in Allahabad / Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh) and joined Naga Sadhu's clan.

Kumbh Melas have been organized for ages in India. One that's held every six years is called Ardh (half) Kumbha Mela. Whereas one held every twelve years is called Kumbha Mela by Hindus. Thousands of Indian Sadhus travel together in herds and groups only for this holy festival. Hundreds of thousands of people take their blessings. Krishna Buva was with Naga Sadhus for twelve years. The main peculiarity of Naga Sadhus is that they are in a Digambar state (naked). They apply Bhasm (cinder) on their entire body and grow long hair and beard.

Krishna Buva's Gurudev Shri Kumbhar Swami ended his Avatar (i.e incarnation) on 20 August 1900 (Marathi calendar - Shaka 1822, Monday, Shravan month, Vadya Dashmi). As per Gurudev's order, Krishna Buva continued Pandharpur waris on Shuddha (Pure) Ekadashis (11th day of the lunar fortnight). After doing so for twelve years, he had Darshan of Vitthal Pandurang. He had met God and achieved the highest level of joy. This eternal joy was never meant to end. He had given a sacred bath to Lord Shri Vitthal – Pandurang in Chandrabhaga River (in Pandharpur) while in turn Lord Shri Pandurang had showered a divine bath on Krishna Buva.

As he had missed his train to Pandharpur and as per his Gurudev's indications, Krishna Buva was at Ramchandra Jadhav's residence in Miraj. In a way, it was emergence of good fortune for Ramchandra Jadhav, Yallappa Tupare, Patole and Pandhare-Patil families.

There are many Sadhus, Sanyasis, Bairagis, Yogis, and Gosavis in the Himalayas. Many Girijans (People who stay predominantly in hills and mountains) also live there. However, it is not necessary that all of them have God-realization. But because of Krishna Buva, all of these worldly people in Miraj were destined to meet God. They had realized Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj– Shri Kumbhar Swami. In a way, it was a dawn of emergence of fortune as far as my life was concerned.

While going back and forth to Shri Kshetra Pandharpur, Krishna Buva started visiting Ramchandra Jadhav's house. He also stayed there sometimes. In 1942, Krishna Buva gifted Ramchandra Jadhav with his Gurudev's Padukas (Footwear), green-colored caps, and Rudrakshamani (Rudraksha is a prayer bead). In 1945, Ramchandra Jadhav bought a small house in Nadives part of Miraj, on a street called Pawar Gully. A photo frame of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj was worshipped and founded in this house by the auspicious hands of Krishna Buva. Through this, the sacred work of cultivation of moral and spiritual values had begun at this pious place. It was a work of enlightening of life's goal and pathways of life.

An ancient and famous Shri Vitthal Temple is situated in the Bhui Gully – Pawar Gully. It is an awakened Temple. Krishna Buva, as per his Gurudev's orders, stayed on the banks of Krishna River towards the end of his life. When he was in Miraj, he would live in this Vitthal Temple. He

would go to Pandhare's house in the second 'prahar' (i.e between 9 a.m to 12 noon), and in the evenings to Ramchandra Jadhav's house to collect Bhiksha (food alms). But he lived in the Vitthal Temple. Sometimes, he would go to Arjunwad (a small village on the banks of Krishna River across Miraj. It is in Shirol Taluka). There, he would stay in Sadashiv Maharaj's Math (monastery). He would bathe on the banks of Krishna River. The place where he used to bath became to be known as Buva's Pathvatha. There is a small Temple at this place. Krishna Buva's hair was ten to twelve feet long. He once killed a giant ghos (i.e bandicoot rat) in Kolhapur's Shirke's residence (Gurudev Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi Mandir) with his braid. Krishna Buva finished his Avatar under a peepal tree in front of Shri Vitthal Temple on 6 November 1947. Jadhav-Pandhare-Patil-Rajput families gave him Samadhi on the banks of Krishna River. An era had ended.

In the meanwhile, on my personal work front, the movement of cement bags was occurring regularly. Fortunately, nobody came for surprise audits. I was very distressed by thought of questions like what about the lost cement bags? What if inspection happens? I was very nervous as it was a question of my entire career and life. One day, I was at the storage center to give cement to a contractor. One of the truck drivers was narrating an incident of accident that had occurred with another contractor. He also provided me with the information like the amount of damage occurred, two months have passed since leg surgery of the accident victim driver, the way the victim driver is sitting idle at house, etc. The sub-contractor who was injured was Mohan. I was somewhat acquainted with him. He had become a building contractor. He lived in a village near Miraj. I boarded a bus to Mohan's village on a Sunday, being holiday, to meet him.

His house in that village was a typical rural house. It had a cowshed in the front, a porch with a metal-bedframe. Mohan was lying on the bed with a fractured leg. On seeing me, he said "come Raosaheb" and tried to get up. But because of his heavy structure, he could not. I said "Please don't do that. Lie down". He said, "Raosaheb I made three trips of cement from the storage center and sent the truck ahead with a driver. I was returning on a motorcycle to sign on the advance slips, but when I was near Mission Hospital in front of Bombay Hotel, another motorcycle crashed into me at high speed, and I fell unconscious. I was admitted to a hospital and had to undergo surgery on my leg. For the past three months, I am at home. I took the cement but have not signed the advance slips. So, send me the slip notebook and I shall sign it".

I was shocked. I had merely come to visit him because he had met with an accident. This visit was a formality. I had forgotten that I had given him 600 bags of cement and had failed to take his signature. Today, I wasn't there to collect his signature because this matter was not on my mind.

On one hand, I was deeply moved because till date six hundred bags of cement were unaccounted for. During that tough period, there was nothing but darkness in my life. I was

unable to enjoy food, leisure or in general, life. Many times, I would be engrossed in these thoughts of sheer disappointment all by myself. I was living under such a debt of sadness. But my Gurudev had rescued me from this major crisis. I realized my mistake in my mind and said to him "I am not here to take your signatures but to enquire about your health. Are you feeling better now?" We chatted about various topics, and I started my return journey merrily with a sigh of relief. The rain had just fallen. Air was a bit chilled, and I had got one of my life's biggest chills. Clouds had formed in the sky. My mind was deeply moved like never before. The Rainbow was showing off its beauty in style at the horizon. In my mind, I was feeling that the rainbow had painted a path of my success. Like a sea's tide, my mind was filled. What did I go there for and what did I achieve? It was an unforgettable day in my life.

The next day, I met Mohan and took his signatures on the advance slip for the six hundred cement bags he had taken. I was very eager to take Darshan of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj who had rescued me from a big misfortune. The photo in Shri Ashokrao Jadhav's house and Shri Ramchandra Jadhav's house was the same. This kept astonishing me.

One day, Shri Ashok Shamrao Jadhav said to me "I am going to my native place in Kolhapur for the Ganpati festival. Kadamwadi is my in-law's place. Please come to Kadamwadi". His wife's name was Surekha, and his daughter's name was Rani. Two days later, I went to Kolhapur. I met Shri Ashokrao Jadhav in Kadamwadi and accompanied him to Papachi Tikati (part of Kolhapur city). Then we went to Kumbhar Gully to seek blessings of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datt Maharaj. That day was of Ganesh Chaturthi in the year 1974. This was my first-time seeking Darshan of Datta Maharaj. After taking the Darshan, I did not remain myself. The 'I' in me relinquished forever. It is beyond words to narrate the experience and the blessings of the Almighty. After taking Darshan of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi, I couldn't take my eyes off from the photo placed above the Samadhi. I kept gazing at it for a considerable time. My eyes were overwhelmed with divine light, and I could sense a dazzling light emerging from the photo. I felt that my entire body was fully occupied by that divine glittering light. The act of looking at that photo and seeking *Darshan* of Samadhi continued for some more time. Datta Maharaj's eyes were big and dark black. He looked stunning and kind and His face had an expression of infinite knowledge. I felt shades of divine bliss in that image. Further, I sensed a mysterious smile too. His striking eyes were looking kindheartedly at the outer world. The entire experience was indescribable. That effect of that photo on my inner mind was growing. The silent prayer in my mind was heard by the omniscient Gurudev and as-if I was granted fearlessness. The sufferings in my mind were vanishing. The distractions in my mind were pacifying. The night was concluding, and it was time for sunrise in my life. I felt like there was nothing left to see or live for in this world. I could see the loving eyes of Datta Maharaj showing me my future. I was frozen. Memories from my previous life were awakened. He was not just a Parmeshwar (God) but was my Gurudev from many previous lives. I sensed that I had recollections of my previous life. I felt that God had come down from heaven to bless me. My

fear about Him was subsiding slowly. I thought I might reach the Samadhi state soon. This moment turned out to be a life-changing one for me. It remains an unforgettable one.

It was the day of Ganesh Chaturthi. People were carrying beautiful idols of Lord Ganesh to their homes. It was time for Aarti. With simple and pious feelings, devotees were offering many garlands, flowers, and fruits to Gurudev's picture and Samadhi. Many devotees were standing for Aarti with utmost belief and respect. After completion of aarati at second prahar of day, at around 12:30 p.m. to 12:45 p.m., we left the Temple.

Small raindrops were still falling. The entire atmosphere was full of mystic scent of incense sticks and aromatic flowers. The glee of truth and passion had occupied my mind. We saw a neat colored oil painting of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datt Maharaj in a frame maker's shop in Papachi Tikati (part of Kolhapur city). Shri Ashok Jadhav saheb and I enquired about it and bought it. Everything was unfolding as-if it was pre-planned.

The pictures I saw in Shri Ashok Jadhav's rented house, in the shrine of Akka Jadhav's house while I was going through crisis, as well as above Gurudev's Samadhi in Shirke's Datta Temple were exactly same. My mind was filled with contentment that Shri Datta Maharaj had blessed me with fruits from my earlier lives. I was also feeling surprised about how the Almighty plays games with devotees.

On returning to Miraj, I did 'Staphana' (put in place by conducting a holy ritual) of Shri Datta Maharaj's picture in my small house. From this day, it was the true beginning of my divine journey.

Because of Akka Jadhav, I was freed from a big problem. Because of her, I got the treasure of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj. So, she was my first Guru. Whereas Shri Ashok Jadhav was my senior at work, and he took me to the doorsteps of Shirke's Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Temple. It was his huge eternal favor on me. It's difficult to repay his debt.

As the days were passing, my mindset was changing. The recent period of my life had passed through turbulence and tension. My mind was becoming calmer and composed. In this calm mind, 'Chintan' (Reflection) had already started. This further resulted into continuous 'Sadhana' (meditating ritual) and 'Namasmaraan' (Chanting of God's name). A careful and meditative study had kicked off. I started to pay full attention to meditation. I started going to the Aarti in Jadhav's house in Bhui Gully. Sometimes, after night Aarti, I would spend time conversing with Akka Jadhav. One day, while talking to her, I requested her "Akka, please tell me about some stories from Datta Maharaj's holy life". On this, she humbly asked me to be seated and started narrating. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj was born in Nandani (Taluka Shirol, District Kolhapur) on 7 February 1836 (Marathi calendar – Shukla 1757, Magh Month, Vadya Panchami).

His father's name was Shri Appa Bhatt Joshi. He visited Shri Narsinhwadi (Narasoba Wadi / Narasimhawadi) every Saturday and on Purnimas (full moon days). His mother's name was Annapurnadevi. Shri Nrisinha Saraswati Datta Maharaj of Nrisinhawadi was pleased with the couple's deep devotion and worship and he took birth as their son. The baby was named as 'Shri Krishna'. He did not speak in his childhood. After the thread tying ceremony (Munj, Mouji Bandhan), he went to his family deity Khandoba (Lord Shiva's incarnation) in Mangasuli (Athani Taluka, District Belgaum, Karnataka) via Jaysingpur-Miraj-Bedag. While bathing in Bedag's public open well, a dog stole His food. At the same time, a woman had come to the well to fetch water. He grabbed her 'padar' (a long end of a saree that goes over the shoulder) and asked her in his childish voice if she knew who took his food.

ShriKrishna insisted Lord Khandera (Khandoba) that He should give Him Darshan in person. For this to happen, ShriKrishna started worshipping below a lemon tree. At first, Lord Khandera gave him Darshan by impersonating in the form of a Brahmin. Later, succumbing to ShriKrishna's childish insistence, Lord Shankar gave him Darshan sitting on a Nandi Cow (Lord Shiva's vehicle) along with Goddess Parvati. Lord Shankar directed Him to visit Akkalkot (District Solapur, Maharashtra) and told Him that "You are my form and Akkalkot's Swami Samarth (Narsinhbhaan) is Your Guru. So, immediately leave to Akkalkot". Upon blessing him with *Darshan*, Lord Shankar disappeared. The child yogi from Nandani was experiencing divine happiness due to Lord Shankar's *Darshan*. Rings of light started whirling around Him. He informed his parents that He will be leaving to Akkalkot for Swami Samarth Maharaj's Darshan. His father Appa Bhatt Joshi used to religious rituals like daily worships and chanting based on Vedas and shlokas, offering alms, charity, serving guests, studying shastras, etc. He had realized that his child was Shri Narsinh Saraswati's Avatar.

Once Appa Bhatt had gone to Jambhali (District Kolhapur) to Shri Abajipant Kulkarni's house for a holy ceremony along with Shri Krishna. Abajipant's distant grandmother desired to visit Shri Kshetra Pandharpur for Shri Vitthal's Darshan. But due to her old age, this was not possible. To everyone's surprise, Shri Krishna offered his closed fist to her and said: "Take this prasad". Initially, everyone thought this was a mischief. But after Shri Krishna opened his fist, there was a small packet of Bukka (Powder used for the auspicious marks on the forehead) and another of Lahya (White popcorn) Puthane (Dalia splits). From this incident, Appa Bhatt Joshi started addressing Him as a child who can make God's wishes come true.

Shri Krishna's parents were not ready to send their 10 – 11-year-old child all alone to Akkalkot. But Appa Bhatt Joshi had realized that this Child Yogi was born to grant favors to this world. So, to complete His mission, he granted permission to God Shri Krishna to go to Akkalkot for His Guru's Darshan. This was a divine moment for humankind.

God Shri Krishna left His parent's house and reached Akkalkot. Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj was affectionately and eagerly waiting for His student. Immediately after Shri Krishna praised Him and took His Darshan, Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj said: "Krishna, you are a part of me. Your and my work is the same". He then took Shri Krishna to a distant forest. The unbreakable eternal relation between a Guru and Student from previous lives was forged again. Shri Krishna God was submerged in Brahma Samadhi.

A high level of spiritual transformation started occurring in Lord Shri Krishna. Rings of light started circulating His body. After a few days, Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj brought Shri Krishna back to the monastery. He served a tasty meal to his beloved student Shri Krishna and blessed Him. He did not keep his favorite student with Him in Akkalokot for too long. Instead, He set Him free to serve the mankind. Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj assigned the holy land of Karveer (Kolhapur's old name) to Shri Krishna and bestowed the title of Saraswati upon Him.

In those days, Reverend Tarabai Shirke lived in Kumbhar Gully. On every full moon day, she visited Narsinhawadi from Kolhapur by foot to take Darshan of Shri Narsinh Saraswati. She would stay there and return the next day. Later, with ageing and frequent stomach upsets, she started worrying about how she will continue going to Narsinhwadi for Darshan. She expressed her concern in front of Shri Narsinh Saraswati with a sad mind. On the same night, she had a dream in which Shri Narisnh Saraswati ordered her: "Do not come here to Narsinhwadi. I shall come to your house at your door". Tarabai woke up and started trying to recollect her dream. She started waiting eagerly for that fortunate moment to arrive. The wait made her soak in the immense ocean of energy.

She started thinking that she had been bestowed upon with the pious blessing of Shri Dattatray



Shrimant Kedarrao
Shinde (Mhaisalkar)

Narsinh Saraswati Swami. And soon enough, the luck day arrived. One fine day, in His divine form, with a fair-skinned medium built body, eyes like a bright lotus, divine and soft fragrance, and rings of light around Him, Lord Shri Krishna came and stood in front of the reverend Tarabai Shirke's door asking for alms (Bhiksha). Reverend Tarabai brought some Bhiksha. But according to the ethos in those days, rituals, pantheism (cultism), holy traditions, and deeply rooted casteism, she thought that it would not be prudent to offer cooked food to a *Batu* (i.e., child) Brahmin standing at door and it would be appropriate to offer grains (dry alms). So, with this intention, she went inside her home to get uncooked food. Meanwhile, Lord Shri Krishna thought that Tarai didn't recognize me even though Prabhu Shri Dattatreya had given her such an intimation through *Drishtant* (i.e., divine appearance in dream). She failed to recognize me due to delusion. So, without taking any food alms, he

came to Mhaisal (Taluka Miraj, District Sangli) along with Shrimant Kedar Rao Shinde Mhaisalkar (Belonging to Mhaisal). He stayed for four days in Shrimant Kedar Rao Shinde's 'Wada' (Mansion). Shrimant Kedar Rao Shinde was Rajshri Shahu Maharaj's 'mavas kaka' (mother's sister's husband). He had a glorious reputation and was pious, merciful, and religious. He was a Sardar in Rajshri Shahu Maharaj's Darbar (court).

Here Tarabai came to the door with dry alms, but the child yogi had left. Tarabai felt very sad. Despite God's revelation, God had left. The divine incarnated Batu Murti had left. Her heart was filled with despair. She started feeling as if she would die. Time and again, she started remembering the divine dream she saw in Nrisinhawadi about Lord Shri Dattatreya. She thought that even if she was a simple human being, why did Lord Dattatreya forget her? She quit having food and water in repent. On the fifth day, she again had a 'Drushtanth' (dream/parable), "I had come to your house. But you didn't recognize Me because of ifs and buts in your mind. I am at Mhaisal. Come to receive Me." Such was the dream. So, on the fifth day, Tarabai went to Mhaisal in a Buggy.

She went to Shrimant Kedar Rao Shinde's palace and took the divine Darshan of Lord Shri Krishna. Thanks to her good deeds of previous life, she brought Him back to Kolhapur. Lord Shri Krishna said to Mhaisalkar, "Tarabai's house is like My own house. Do keep visiting".

Many devotees from Karveer (Kolhapur) and nearby places started coming to experience the miraculous acts and seek blessings of the free-from-life, Lord Shri Krishna. He stayed at Mother Tarai's house like a child until He finished His Avatar in the year 1900.

Time flew listening to Lord Shri Krishna's Avatar leelas (stories) from Akka Jadhav. She was a 'MarathMoli' (Genuine Maratha) widow. Her reverence and faith in her Guru had reached high levels. Her conduct and speech were royal and full of subtleness. She had inherited decent family values. It was evident after talking to her, that she used to have 'Drushtanth's of Lord Shri Krishna occasionally. Krishna Laad, Vasudev Dalvi were Lord Shri Krishna's disciples. Krishna Laad was also a devotee of Babu Jamal. He would take Darshan of Babu Jamal Pir (Pir is a tile in Sufism) every day before heading to work. Once, when he had gone to take Babu Jamal's Darshan, he heard a voice coming from the Babu Jamal's tomb, "You visit Krishna. Now, don't come here. He and I are the same". Krishna Laad thought he was imagining. So, he continued taking Babu Jamal's Darshan. A few days later, he had a fever. Babu Jamal gave him a 'Drushtanth' once again. He got scared and went to take Darshan of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj in Tarabai Shirke's house. Lord Shri Krishna gave him an indication, "Babu Jamal is My friend. He and I are the same." Krishna Laad from then on became a devotee of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datt Maharaj. His fickle mindset changed. He became one of the most close and favorite disciples of Lord Shri Krishna.

Once in the second 'prahar' (around 12 noon), when Krishna Laad was washing utensils of worship, it started raining suddenly. Clouds were thundering and there was lightening in the sky, even then he continued washing the utensils. Soon enough, a beam of lightning came in front of him and made a loud sound. He got scared and ran inside to Maharaj's resting place. The lighting had swirled Maharaj and had left. Krishna Laad used to collect 'Bhiksha' (food alms) and Maharaj would eat it with love. Lord Shri Krishna had tested him harshly in different ways. Krishna Laad had passed all His tests successfully. He had abandoned everything and lived near Lord Shri Krishna. This story was narrated to me by Akka Jadhav during one of our interactions.

Vasudev Dalvi was another such close disciple from Lord Shri Krishna's. He lived near Tarabai Shirke's house. He was a Brahmin by caste and worked in the King's Darbar. He was quicktempered and always had strife with his wife and after discords with her. He would express his anguish, complaints and frustration before Lord Shri Krishna whenever he would visit to seek Maharaj's *Darshan*. Lord Shri Krishna always said, "Give Me your shendi". (Shendi is braid). Vasudev understood its meaning and one day he called a barber and cut his braid and gave it to Lord Shri Krishna and accepted Sanyas (asceticism) from Him.

As per Lord Shri Krishna's orders, he conducted Sadhana by deserting food and only ate lime tree leaves. In the next three years, he ate only a fistful of Harbhara/Chana (chickpea) daal and conducted his religious austerity. Then he started going to seek bhiksha along with Krishna Laad. Lord Shri Krishna took his tests through various means. He passed all of those tests. This story too was narrated to me by Akka Jadhav.

My faith and belief in Lord Shri Krishna were increasing day by day. He had granted me rebirth and showed a new path of living. I started going to Akka's house every evening for Aarti. Normal public wasn't aware of the fact that Lord Shri Krishna had been blessing people and carrying his noble work in a simple house in a far and narrow lane of Miraj. Many suffering people would flock this lane hoping to get solutions to their problems and get rid of their agony. Needless to say, I was one amongst them. However, I was at peace and calm. This was because new dawn was about to begin.

Before heading to work, I started worshiping Lord Shri Krishna's picture that I had bought on Ganesh Chaturthi after taking Darshan of His Samadhi in Shirke's house in Kolhapur. Gradually, I started doing Aarti in the evenings. After a while, my friends Shivaji Jadhav, Jamdar, Mangal Shinde, Savanta Mhetre, Vilas Ghorpade, Ramesh Ghorpade, Chandrakant Kurane, Dattatray Pawar, Dr. Suresh Kamble, Dr. Mhetre, Anandrao Mandle, Lt. Shivling Anna Ghewari, Lt. Shankarrao Kamble, and Lt. Marutirao Kurane, etc started joining me for the Aarti. Everybody

continued with this initiative while managing our jobs and businesses. While others like Lt. Prabhakar Gokhale, Shri Ram Mahajan, Shri Balasaheb Kurane, Shri Krishna Gokhale, Shri Bhuyekar Patil, Dr. Shirdone, Shri Subhash Shinde, Shri Madhurkar Shinde, Shivappa Anna Yevare, Lt. Daji Patil, Shri Satish Shah, Shri Babasaheb Sheikh, Shri Janardan Tambakhuwale, Shri Madan Bongale, Madansinh Rajput, Pandurang Bhandare, Vitthal Vijapure and such devotees started aging pathways leading to divine destination and divine knowledge were in the making. Now, I started taking some of my friends to Kolhapur for Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Darshan. After Samadhi Darshan, I started sitting in front of it for a while. Gradually, I became acquainted with the Lt. Balasaheb Shirke, Lt. Maisaheb Shirke, Shirke Vahini (Vahini is a common term used to address brother's wife). My life was changing, and I was dedicating all my thoughts to Lord Shri Krishna.

Lt. Shri Balasaheb Shirke was a respectful personality. He was handsome and the sculpture of his face was well-drawn. He had the grandeur of aristocratic family descendants. He had dense hair and his eyes were full of affection and innocence. His voice was sweet and enchanting. He performed excellent Bhajans and they were played on radio channels. He was medium built and his height was accordingly. He was a singer, musician, humble, egoless and a family man. During those days, he was writing Lord Shri Krishna's Charitra (biography). He always talked about it.

He narrated many interesting miraculous stories like marriage of the twelve-year-old Rakhmai Purekar with a three-year-old toddler, and Balku Rashiwadekar's rebirth, etc. His writing style was simple and easy. With his tender and profound words, Lord Shri Krishna's Charitra (book) was being written. Lt. Balasaheb was the only son of Lt. Maisaheb Shirke.

Whenever I went to Shirke's Temple, I found two benches near the Audumber (Fig) tree. The small bench could accommodate one or two people and the large one about four to five. After taking Darshan of Lord Shri Krishna's Samadhi, people would take Darshan of Maisaheb Shirke. She used to sit on the small bench. When I first went for Darshan, she was more than 75 years of age. Her face was showing signs of aging. But her teeth were strong, and her excitement was phenomenal.

Lt. Maisaheb had a medium built, fair complexion, with large and powerful eyes. Her face would look affectionate. She used to wear a clean white saree, and she was a sweet talker. She told many leelas (Stories) of Lord Shri Krishna. Everyday Shri Krishna Swami used to visit the banks of Pachnganga River along with his disciples. On one such day, suddenly, He visited Daulat Mane's house in Shukurwar Peth (Part of Kolhapur) near Jain Monastery. Daulat Mane was a poor man. Yet, he welcomed Lord Shri Krishna with the best of his abilities. He took His Darshan and put his child Parshuram on His feet. Lord Shri Krishna observed Parshuram and said: "He is our's. This house is our's". Parshuram grew up to be a strong wrestler and started working in

Rajashri Shahu Maharaj's Darbar. He had two daughters and two sons. The elder daughter's name was Hira. She got married to Tarabai Shirke's grandson, Ramnath Shirke. After marriage, Hira was rechristened as Sitamai (Same as Maisaheb) in the Shirke family. In this way, Lord Shri Krishna's words came true. Her husband Ramnath Shirke was a calm and enlightened soul. He strongly believed that he had achieved divine and eternal treasure in the form of Lord Shri Krishna. Earlier in his life, Ramnath made some beautiful paintings. He was a reputed drawing artist. Sitamai did everything to preserve sanctity and values of Shirke family during her married life with Ramnath. In the play of her married life, four flowers in the form of children blossomed on their family vine. Eldest was Akka (Tarakka), the second was Malutai, third was Lilatai, and forth was Balasaheb Shirke.

Soon after, Ramnath passed away due to a heart attack. Disaster struck on their family. Sitamai was dejected and felt that everything in life was over. Bereavement and mental pain had not yet subsided. However, she recovered with comprehensive empathy, love, and support from her maternal family members and fatherly figure Raut Mama. She developed sibling-like relations with everyone and started doing Lord Shri Krishna's Pooja. She started connecting her soul (Jivatma) with the divine soul (Parmatma). Slowly, days started passing by. Tarakka, who had dedicated herself to Lord Shri Krishna got married to Shankarrao Bhosale. Malutai got married to Murlidhar Kadam and Lilatai got married to Madhukar Naik. Balasaheb got married to Satara's Viajayadevi Ghorpade. Many good people were born in Ramnath and Sitamai's generation. They ensured Temple's orderliness was established. Equality, brotherhood was maintained, and complete empathy was preserved. Now, Balasaheb's family vine had three beautiful kids namely, Babanrao, Shivajirao, and Maheshrao. While Sitamai was shouldering responsibilities of her family, she took image and reputation of Shirke family to great heights. She had bonded with conspicuous and righteous people for the appropriate occasions and responsibilities. As if God had arranged such people who could play different roles. It was an arrangement of support system and everlasting joy.

I started going to Kolhapur every Sunday for Samadhi Mandir's (Temple's) Darshan. I did Pooja of Lord Shri Krishna's picture in my small house every day before heading to work.

In the evenings, I would go for a walk towards Hirabagh, Vaddi (Village near Miraj) road along with Shri Annappa Sutar (Carpenter). After returning from the walk, I used to do Lord Shri Krishna's Aarti, name chanting, Pooja, and spiritual reading. Many people started coming for the Aarti. They started doing Lord Shri Krishna's Pooja and worship with devotion. The idea of constructing a small Temple of Lord Shri Krishna was born through this. Simultaneously, birth anniversary (Maagh Vadya Panchami) and death anniversary (Shrawan Vadya Dashami) were also celebrated at a small scale at Akka Jadhav's house.

I gave these celebrations a public form. They were now on a grand scale. The schedule included Bhajan, Kirtan, Pravachan (Preaching), and 'Mahaprasad'. Everybody was happy. Call it destiny or will of Lord Shri Krishna, as if it was planned to hand me over to a human Gurudev so that I can benefit with knowledge and divine experiences. It wasn't easy for me to understand the magical planning of Lord Shri Krishna who had scripted the web of events for a normal devotee like me.

Now, I had to wait for the dark days to be over and for a new dawn and day to begin. I started feeling that I was going to witness the time-cycles plays of the past, present, and future. I sensed that the day of taking me to the holy feet of that person was not too far. Till date, my virtual philosophy was based on the thought that the first priority should be given to job and money while God and devotion had lower priority. The day wasn't far away when I would meet a noble saint. It was a divine plan of the Almighty Shri Krishna.

The sky was filled with clouds. There was a cold breeze. The crowd in Miraj market was subsiding. It was probably the month of July in 1974. There were fewer customers in Ashok medical shop near Deval Talkies (Cinema Hall). It was 9 PM when I reached the medical shop. Shri Satishbhai Shah called me in the shop as soon as he saw me. There was a small table and bench inside. He asked me to sit on the bench. Transactions with customers were in progress. Satishbai said, "I felt good that you came. I was going to send someone to get you here for a few minutes". I asked "Why so? Is there some important work?" He answered, "No, it's not important work. But there is a Guruji who has come from Nipani. He is quite accomplished in spiritual matters. He tells the future of a person by looking at the person's face. I had got this message from Shri Milind Gosavi. After the shop closes, let us go to meet him". (Nipani is a small town in Belgaum District of Karnataka).

I said "ok" and sat in the shop. Traffic on the streets was decreasing. The rain was just starting. The breeze was cold, and my mind was filled with various thoughts like "Is it really necessary to meet that Guruji? I don't want to ask him anything about my future". But I chose to accompany Shri Satishbhai Shah. Shri Shah was a versatile and inquisitive person. His interests ranged from cricket to subjects like fortune-telling. If he was convinced of something, he would research that topic and arrive at a verdict. Such was his flair. Hence, he had informed me about this Guruji. It was in-line with his nature.

After the shop was closed, I and Shri Shah went to Hira Hotel on a bicycle. Guruji was staying at this hotel. It was about 10 PM. Hira Hotel was recently inaugurated, and it was considered one of the best travel lodges in Miraj. We knocked on the room door and a person opened the door. He greeted us "Please come, please come. I have just come myself." I guessed that he may be Satishbhai's Guruji. He was about five to five and a half feet tall, fairish complexion, and has

short hair. His eyes were distinctly bright. He was accompanying his Mother-In-Law who had come to seek treatment at Mission Hospital, Miraj. Hence, he was staying at Hira Hotel.

He and Satishbhai were engrossed in their talks. In the middle of it, he inquired about me. Satishbhai introduced me to him as a family member and a close friend. Guruji just nodded his head with acknowledgement. A few minutes later, he permitted us to leave. He came from the first floor to the hotel gate to see us off. He asked Satishbhai to come again and insisted to bring me along with him. It was about 11 PM when we left the hotel. There was hardly any traffic on the road. Cold air, and raindrops were gently embracing the body. My mind though was twirling by thoughts of this Guruji.

After this introduction, many days passed. Through conversations with Satishbhai, I came to know a few things about Guruji. Chaitra month (As per Marathi calendar year) had just started. The summer heat was starting. Mango trees had blossomed. Sweet sounds of Cuckoo birds could be heard in the evenings. On one such evening, I got a message from Satishbhai stating that I had to go along with his father (Commonly called as Bappa) to Nipani to meet Guruji.

Lt. Ratanchand Khemchand Shah (Also known as Aragkar or Ratnubhai) was a well-known person in Miraj. He was very well respected in the medical field. The villages toward the eastern side of Miraj are in a drought zone. Arag is such a village from this draught zone on the Maharashtra-Karnataka border. It is famous as a trading center. It was Shri Shah's native place. He would carry out all important tasks on auspicious times. He was a strong believer in astrology. He took directions and advice from Lt. Mangsulikar Shastri. Since Nipani's Guruji was an astrologer too, I thought that Satishbhai's message about this trip was related to it.

On a Sunday, at about 10 AM, Shri Ratnubhai, his wife and I started for Nipani in their new red colored Fiat car. In one and a half hour, we reached Ichalkaranji. We saw a restaurant in the middle of the town. I was very hungry. I did not know when we were going to reach Guruji's residence in the afternoon. I was not much acquainted with him either. We had a snack of Bhaji (Onion pakodas), Paav (Bread), Puri, and Bhaaji (Sabji/Vegetable). Their driver, Lt. Pandoba More accompanied us in the restaurant. Lt. Ratnubhai though chose to sit in the car.

After having breakfast, our further journey started via Ichalkaranji-Shivnakwadi-Shiradwad-Chand Shiradwad-Bedkihal-Galataga villages in Karnataka. The road after Borwad was in a bad condition. The car was moving very slowly due to big potholes on road. There was dark black land all around us. The farms were probably tobacco crop because some people were carrying the cut leaves while others were leaving them on farms. Intermittently, we noticed some mango trees. Some of them had blossom whereas others had small mangoes. The entire area was full of serene silence. Hardly a vehicle or two were passing by. In this road trip, we came

across small huts, 'wadis' (small habitations), and farmyards. Most houses were built in mud and their walls had whitewash (lime) design imprints made with human fingers and dots. There were holy basil trees in front of the houses. Metal water pots were queued near public water taps on the outskirts of villages. Children were jumping in open water wells for bathing and they were waving their hands at us saying Tata, Bye-bye. Our car was travelling through the hills, seasonal water streams and on winding roads. Approximately, at 3 PM we stopped after crossing a stream. There were some banian trees nearby. Since many branches of the trees looked like stems, it was hard to figure out the main trunk. A dense shadow of that tree had spread with utter seriousness. A beautiful and large Hemadpanthi style Temple was situated under the dense shadow of this tree. We could see some travelers stopping by, washing their hands and feet, and taking Darshan in the Temple. We too went inside the Temple. Someone had written detailed information about it outside the Temple. It was Tuljabhavani diety's Temple. Pleased with Nipani's king Siddhojirao Desai's devotion, Goddess Tuljabhavani had appeared at this location. A ten-day Dassehra festival is celebrated on large scale here at the Temple. Its courtyard is spacious and has Bakula (Spanish cherry) and Ashoka trees. At front, there is lare Nagarkhana (place where musical instruments are maintained) along with a passage built in stone. The Temple is quite ancient, and it is completely built in stones. It has delicate and marvelous artwork on its pillars. We were delighted to see the beautiful idol of Deity made of 'Shaligram'. We humbly bowed, took the prasad offered by the Gurav (priest), and left the Temple.

Our further journey resumed. After crossing some distance, Ratnubhai stopped the car and inquired about Guruji's Akkol village to some people. It was very close from the place we were at. We reached the outskirts of Akkol in half an hour. There was a small Temple at the entry point of the village. One road was going from outside the village whereas the other was through it. Some villagers were taking rest on the platform built around the Temple. Some children were playing nearby. We asked Guruji's address to one of those children. He told us to make a left from the square located on the road that went through the village. Our car started moving on the road full of potholes. We passed a bourn. Lush green grass pastures and some coconut trees could be seen on both sides of the road. Some Mango, Jambhul (purple grape-like fruit), Palas (*Butea frondosa*) trees were near the bourn. There were some huts and houses built in clay across the bourn. We crossed the market chowk (Circle) and passed through narrow streets. We came across an old Maruti Temple built in stone and came near the Shri Pant Temple. From there we came to the end of the narrow street and stopped in front of stone-built two-storeyed Wada (Mansion) with a front yard. It may have been the local Sarkar's (High ranking village official) house. There was a large sitting platform in front of the Wada. There were some Sitaphal (Custard apple) trees, some other bushes, and an Audumber tree (A cluster fig tree considered to be auspicious) standing proudly.

At this point, we were restless in our minds. Our curiosity had peaked. The tides of happiness were beyond our control. We were standing in front of the door at the center of the house. That Wada had become sacred due to presence of virtuous persons.

Soon after, the main door was opened by a woman. She was probably Guruji's mother. She was about sixty years old. But even then, it was difficult to judge her age. She was fair and appeared a bit bulky. But looking at her face, I felt she looked like a fresh, calm yet enigmatic individual. Even more elegant was the Kumkum on her forehead that emphasized she was a Suhasini (Married woman whose husband is alive). She had worn a nine-yard saree and ornaments in neck, hands and ears that are usually worn by Maharashtrian women. Overall, she looked like an ideal Hindu sared mother. As soon as I saw her, I bowed down to her feet with my forehead. She politely greeted us saying, "Please come, please come. Why are you standing outside? Has it been long since you arrived? I was resting a little due to this scorching heat. Please come...".

She called Ratnubhai and Bhabhi who were sitting in the car. We sat in one of the living rooms of that house. There was an Indian seating arrangement. Meanwhile, their maid Laxman arrived. He was dark, strongly built, and talkative. He suggested us to freshen up. We were literally exhausted due to the tiresome journey through burning heat. But after washing our hands and feet, we felt fresh. We were offered cold lemonade. Laxman insisted us to have a meal. I did not have it because I was not hungry, and I had plenty of snacks in Ichalkaranji. Ratnubhai and Bhabhi, however, had lunch.

The lunch menu included Warm Bhakri (Roti made from Jowar/Sorghum flour), Pithla (Dish made from Besan / Chickpea flour), a vegetable dish, and Papad. There was a large room inside. A dining table and four chairs were in the hall. It was clean everywhere in the house. A Diwan (Sofa) was placed on one side in the hall. An old man was sleeping on it.

It was now 2 PM. They offered a meal and displayed gratitude towards us. Based on their hospitality, they appeared to be a well cultured Hindu family. I could see them following the long-held tradition of Hindu religion to serve food to guests with earnest courtesy and cater them to the best of their ability. A certain type of peaceful environment was felt in their house. There must have been a cowshed on the backside of the house because I could hear cows mooing intermittently.

It was now 4 PM. A lady maid from their house came holding a child. Her name was Gangu. She was middle-aged, fair, and had a Kannada accent to her Marathi. Sometimes she mixed the two languages.

The child on her lap was Aniket. He was Guruji's youngest child. He was about two years old. Through the conversations, we came to know that Guruji and his wife had gone to Nippani to attend a marriage ceremony and that they were going to return soon. Gangu started preparing tea as the kids were about to return from school. Guruji had four kids. Two girls namely Aparna and Hemangini whereas Gurunath and Aniket were the sons. We came to know about this rurally settled family through Gangu.

Now, the wind had started blowing. The day was about to set. Laxman brought tea for us. He said, "Kaka is calling you". I went and bowed down to Kaka. He appeared to be a religious person. He had medium height, fair complexion, wore bright white dhotar (Dhoti), bright white baniyan, chain in the neck, and finger rings in two fingers of the right hand. He was calmly smoking bidi (Cigarette made from tobacco leaves) with closed eyes. As soon as he saw me, he greeted saying "please come, please come. What time did you arrive? Does Ramesh know that you were coming? Or else he wouldn't be so late. Come sit. What is your name?" I said "Bajrang. I am from Miraj". He then asked, "Who else has come?" I went outside and called Ratnubhai and Bhabhi. Kaka also came with me. Kaka folded his hands and did namaskar and said "Please come inside Shetji. Ramesh will come soon. He is late. Where do you stay?" Shetji introduced himself, "I am Ratanchand Khemchand Shah. Originally from Arag. But we have a medical shop in Miraj. So, we live in Miraj with all of our siblings, ". Laxman came and informed us that Guruji had come and indicated us to go upstairs from the staircase in the middle of the house. We went upstairs and noticed that there were two sections. On the right side was a clinic and the left side was a sitting place. There were some picture frames of Saints and Sadhus. A living room was attached to it. There, Guruji was sitting on a Mrugajin (Deer hide typically used for Pooja and meditation) on a chair. He greeted us "Please come, please come Ratnubhai. I am late to return. Did you have some tea and a meal or not? It is good that you came. Satishbhai had informed me". He said to me "Come, come, Bajrang, sit here. Is everything alright at your end?" After his conversation with Ratnubhai was over, he showed us his clinic, library of philosophy, literature, research, and other fat books. While we were listening to him, he appeared to be some Pandit, Doctor-Vaidya, philosopher, and a scientist. He didn't just know Shakuntal and Gynaneshwari, but he spoke volumes about philosophy and morals. We were coming down the stairs listening to him. I bowed down to his father's feet while departing. He came up to the main door to see us off and said: "Please come again". We too said "sure" and sat in our car waving goodbye to them. It was getting dark. Villagers were gathering in marketplaces. Our car was on our way to Nippani. However, my mind was full of thoughts about Akkol. As if a hurricane of thoughts had erupted. Many people we meet in our lives reveal their identities. Some are forgotten. A bond is formed with some, whereas some people reside in our hearts. I felt that these people from Akkol's Wada were from my mind, from my house and that they will be so in the future. Could they have been my family members? With these thoughts, my journey started. I was doing namaskar to Guruji's parents in my mind. These idols of sanctitude were appearing in front of my eyes.

This year, June's monsoon had not yet arrived. Usually, from Mrug Nakshatra, light rain used to begin in our part of the world. We used to call it 'Chitka Paus' (Chitka is small. Paus is rain). This rain grew until Ashad month. But this year, even in Ashad, rain fell only occasionally. My office was behind Abdul Karim Khan's Gavai Bungalow in the Sugandha building. After finishing work, I was heading to meet Satishbhai Shah. The crowd in the Laxmi market was increasing. I crossed street vendors selling roasted corn while beating their plates and making rhythmic sounds. 'Malinbais' (Women vegetable vendors) were chatting with each other after selling their vegetables. Cows were roaming freely on the road. I reached Ashok Medical Store through this rush.

During this period, Satishbhai had just recovered from an illness. His health was getting better. My purpose in visiting him was to casually meet him, enquire about his wellbeing and ask if Akkol's Doctor was going to come. As soon as he saw me, he said "I was going to send a message to you today. But your office doesn't have a phone. Akkol's Doctor has come for a health checkup of his father in Mission Hospital. He has asked you to meet him. He is staying in Bramhanpuri (Part of Miraj) in Chaburao Deshpande's house near Deshpande water tank, opposite of School Number One". I thanked Satishbhai and said, "I will first go and meet Doctor now" and I left. In front of Bramhanpuri School Number One is the chowk (circle) near the Ambabai Temple. The school is a two-storey building. Opposite to it is a public water tank. But it



Shri Ramesh Maharaj's picture at his residence in Akkol with Miss Hema, Master Aniket, Master Mayur and others

is closed now. Deshpande Wada was next to it. Its door was made of teakwood and was strong.

It's spacious front yard had Shahbadi tiles. The Wada had two main sections. On its left was Doctor's mama (mother's brother) Chaburao Deshpande's residence. I went inside and enquired. At the time, Doctor's father had just washed his hands and had arrived in the 'Diwankhana' (living room). I immediately recognized him. He was wearing a bright white dhoti and a bright white baniyan. This was our second meeting. He was panting while talking. Through conversations with him, I learned that he had come to Miraj two days ago and as per the physician's advice, he was taking rest. He

informed me that Doctor had gone out and was to arrive shortly. He asked me to be seated.

It was the month of Ashadh and there was a cool breeze in the air and a light drizzle, too. It had turned dark now. I bowed to him and told him that I would come back tomorrow. Our house was about three to three and a half kilometers from Deshpande Wada.

The next day, I finished my work and went to meet Akkol's Doctor. This time he was home. I touched his feet and did namaskar to him. He said "Come, sit" and continued "I came to know that you had come last night. I had gone to collect father's medical reports. Everything is okay. I am here for next four-five days. Please keep visiting." He took me inside where there was a dining table in the middle room. There Doctor's mother was preparing something to eat. A similar aged elderly woman was making tea on the kitchen counter. The doctor gave me tea and also introduced me. The host, Shri Chaburao Deshpande was an Agricultural Officer in the Brihan Maharashtra Sugar factory in Malegaon. His wife's name was Mrs. Mai Deshpande. Their granddaughter was Miss Anjalitai. All of them were close relatives and hence Doctor was staying with them. We came back to sit in the living room. Our conversation was around my job, family condition, education, etc. In a way, this was our first relaxed meeting and was an introductory one. The doctor was of expressive nature. His demeanor was serious, but his face did not show any indications of somberness. I had an affinity towards him. He asked me to come the next morning. I too left on my bicycle to my office.

I think that day, I did not enjoy working in the office. I kept wondering if Akkol's Doctor was my Guru and if he will give me Diksha (Initiation. A course in austerities or of the rites and ceremonies of some religious vow). Such thoughts puzzled my mind. It was about 4 PM. An auto-rickshaw stopped in front of my office. Much to my surprise Doctor had come to see me. I came downstairs to receive him and did a namaskar to him. He said, "I have to go to Akkol for some work. You visit Kaka every day". I indicated affirmatively to him. Perhaps it was from here that our close relationship began.

I started going to Deshpande Wada every morning and evening. I started considering his parents as my own – 'Matru Devo – Piro Devo' (Sanskrit version of Mother be a God – Father be a God). Since Doctor was a Vatandar (Government appointed village accountant) Kulkarni, he had plenty of land, wealth, maids, etc. at his disposal. This is why this family was called a Sarkar family. Amidst all such wealth, the family was polite, religious, principled, honest, and sinless.

The Datta Jayanti episode in this family is interesting. Lt. Dattatraypant Kulkarni and Lt. Ramabai Kulkarni (Great grandparents of Ramesh Maharaj) were childless for many years. So, some senior cousins in their family suggested them to adopt a child from their extended family. On hearing this, Lt. Ramabai took her husband Lt. Dattatraypant and reached Narsinhwadi (Narsobawadi) immediately and asked him to take a pledge in front of the Deity that they would never adopt a child under any circumstances. Akkol's Kulkarni family was a Datta devotee for ages. Lt. Ramabai and her mother-in-law, walked to Narsinhwadi on every Pournima (Full moon day). This tradition was carried over by the next generations. Once, while sleeping in Narsinhwadi, Lt. Ramabai had a Drishtaanth (God's dream) of Narsinhwadi's Lord Narsinh Saraswati Datta Maharaj. When she woke up, she found a coconut and flowers in her

saree. She narrated this incident to another woman near her and to the priest of the Temple. The priest asked Lt. Ramabai and Lt. Dattatraypant to accept the coconut as Prasad. A few days later, Lt. Ramabai became pregnant and on Datta Jayanti (Lord Dattatray's birthday), at 12.32 AM, she delivered a baby boy. This child was named as Narayanrao. For this reason, the village of Akkol celebrates Datta Jayanti at 12.32 AM.

When the baby was a month and a half old, Lt. Ramabai took the child and went to Sadguru Vasudevanand Saraswati's (Tembe Swami's) Darshan. He was staying at a small stream of Pandharodha in Bhimapurwadi near Akkol. Ramabai put the small child on Tembe Swami's feet. Tembe Swami threw a 'Chaati' (A piece of cloth) on the baby and uttered "Narayan". Hence the baby was named Narayan. This is how, as per orders from Tembe Swami, the Datta Jayanti festival began in Akkol at 12.32 AM. The next day in the afternoon, a 'Mahaprasad' (Holy meal as a blessing) is served. I have participated in this festival from 1974 to 2012 wholeheartedly. Until 1990, this festival was a private affair. Now, because of Param Puja (Most Reverend) Ramesh Maharaj, this festival has a public forum.

Lt. Aaisaheb's family was also pious, philanthropic, religious, and produced revolutionaries. Aaisaheb's name was Sonutai. In Belgaum city's Deshpande Galli, her big ancestral Wada is still present. Her father's name was Hanmantrao Deshpande. He was Majgaon's, Vatandar Deshpande. He had three sons and three daughters. Eldest of them was Malharrao, the second was Krishnarao (Kitanna), the youngest son was Rangarao (Ranganna - Deshpande lawyer). Whereas, in the sisters, the eldest was Sonutai, the second was Sarojini and the youngest was Lt. Manjula. I have seen all of them. Truly speaking, these were people of divine qualities. It is difficult and rare to meet such pious people in today's world.

When I was working in Kolhapur Irrigation Department from 1977 to 1980, I used to visit Lt. Sarojini Vasant Kumbhojkar's house every day because my office was close by, and these people were loving. Due to this, my relations with the Kumbhojkar family got stronger. I had developed a respect for family members of Lt. Vasantrao and Dattatray Kumbhojkar. I had met an educated and noble family. I always felt respect towards Arundada, Baludada, Girishdada, and their sisters.

A distant relative of Aaisaheb was Karnatak Kesari Gangadhar Deshpande. He was a great revolutionary in India's freedom struggle. Aaisaheb's maternal family had taken part in the 1942 revolution. Dignified patriots like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai used to stay in their house. It was home to many ultras and moderate revolutionaries and patriots. Aaisaheb had participated as a volunteer in the National Conference held in Belgaum's Congress Vihir locality. Such was the patriotic lineage of Aaisaheb.

Her spiritual lineage was also great. Shivchidambar Swami was Lord Shankar's Avatar. He lived in Murgod (Taluka Bailhongal, District Belgaum) from 1758 to 1815. One of Aaisaheb's ancestors was in the close company of Him conducting 'Seva' (Services) of Him. Shivchidambar Maha Swami had blessed this family with a saree as his blessings. The marriage ritual in this family is that this saree is worn by the bride and first Akshata (wedding mantras) are chanted in their prayer hall. Also, squash vegetable is never eaten in this family. In this way, this family is committed to offer services and faith in Lord Shiva's Avtar (Incarnation) Shivchidambaram Swamiji as a tradition year after years.

Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe Swami) used to come for Darshan from Mangaon, Sawantwadi – Chandgad - Belgaum – Nippani – Borgaon to his adorable deity Shri Narsinh Saraswati Maharaj in Narsinhwadi. In those times, he used to stay in a mango garden in a village called Sulage. It is on Hindalga road near Belgaum. That garden still has the Audumber tree that Tembe Swami had planted whereas the 'Chatis' (God's clothes) given by Tembe Swami are still in the Deshpande family. Now, this mango garden in Sulage belongs to Shri Atul and Uday Kalkundri family.

Lt. Kaka's father's sister was married to Lt. Harinana Kalkundri of Belgaum. Whereas, Kaka's elder brother Lt. Gurunath Kulkarni was married to Shri Datta Avatar Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar's younger brother Lt. Gopalrao's daughter. People from Akkol village were devotees of Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar Maharaj. Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar Maharaj has played 'Tiprya' (A traditional folk dance played with dandiya sticks) in Kaka's Wada and has enjoyed participating in the Bhajans here. Shri Pant Maharaj frequently visited Akkol. He had a loving relationship with this village. Due to this, Kaka worshiped Datta Sampraday (sect) and had reverence towards it. In this way, Doctor/Ramesh Maharaj's family had inherited divine blessings through Lt. Aaisaheb. The tradition of worshiping Lord Shiva's Avatar Shri Shivchidambar MahaSwamiji (Of Murgod – Kengeri), Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri (of Belgaum), and Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe Swami) was carried out through their good fortune. This stream of faith and worship was flowing fully in their family. Lt. Aaisaheb's maternal family were Deshpandes whereas her in-laws were Deshashth Brahmins.

Lt. Kaka and Lt. Aaisaheb's marriage took place in Belgaum in 1923. Both were of Satvik (Pure, honest) nature. Their marital life was full of love, cooperation, and peaceful companionship. Aaisaheb always helped the poor and the people looking after their farms. She was always ready to help during difficulties. Kaka too was innocent, compassionate, and charitable. He would give away any item to poor people based on their needs without even asking Aaisaheb. Such was his nobility.

Once there was a strife between Kaka and Aaisaheb. The old Wada (named Shri Laxmi Narayan Krupa) had a front yard, living room, and staircase room. Behind the staircase room was a storage room, another hall, a kitchen towards the end followed by cowshed and a small garden. Kaka used to sit in the stairwell room smoking bidis (A crude form of cigarette) while reclining against a pillow near a horizontal cabinet. He was strictly disciplined. Similarly, his conduct was also strict but simple. Every day, villagers came to meet him in the mornings and evenings. He would offer bidis and tea to all of them without fail. Until 1990, the locality around Akkol did not have enough water irrigation and hence the farms did not have horticulture nor were the people rich like today. People had to depend on the lone annual crop of tobacco to meet their both ends for entire year. Due to this, everybody's family situation was impoverished. Poor people would visit Kaka and always used to ask for jaggery, hot peppers, Jowar grains, daal, etc. Kaka would silently fulfill their needs. He used to track Aaisaheb and the chef's whereabouts within the house and secretly give jaggery, hot peppers, daal, Jowar, and even sometimes sugar and rice. He made efforts to try to avoid any detection of him giving these items.

Once I was there in Akkol for Nag Panchami festival. To make some polis (sweetened chapatti), Aaisaheb went to the storeroom to get daal, jaggery, etc. She was surprised to see that a lot of items from the storeroom were reduced in quantity. She came to know the facts behind it. Without getting angry, she said to Kaka "You give away a lot of items from the storeroom to people without asking me. If you had asked me, it would have been better. Charitable acts should have some boundaries and limits. You give but be little cautious". Kaka did not say anything to it. At his roots, he was serious but kind and generous. He was always engrossed in meditation with closed eyes.

Akkol's Kaka was known as a dutiful and an all-happy person. In the nearby villages, he was identified as a respectable individual. Even in government offices, he had an Honorable mention. Mamledars and other government officers would first visit Kaka's Wada. They would stay there, eat, and then go into the village for meetings. He was affectionately authoritative and was considered as a noble and good behaving person from a religious family.

We had our afternoon meal at second prahar, the overall environment during time between lunch and afternoon tea in the *Wada* was quiet. After having some tea, Kaka said to Aai "I have experienced poverty firsthand. Today our financial position is better. Some poor and unfortunate people come to ask for some money and some food items for their family needs and their meal needs. They are needy. If their situation was not like that, they would not have asked. I will not be able to send such people empty-handed. I am Vatandar Kulkarni of this village. I have to give half of my roti and whatever help possible to all poor people and I will do it". On this, Aai said "The other day that unfortunate lady came, and you did send a bullock-cart and some money, isn't it? I am not saying no. But this is a family woman's house. Just be aware when doing charitable deeds. This is my only request". This practical, yet clever handling of the

matter by Aai, taught me a lot of things. This is ideal culture of Indian women that has continued from ages. This strife also ended there. It had stopped. I thought that this is how a home becomes a family household.

Kaka's attire was a bright white shirt, white dhoti, and brownish coat with a cap. His hygienic standard of living illustrated his nature. His daily routine was very simple but disciplined. He would wake up at 6 AM, go to the cowshed and feed the cows and cattle and have tea. This was followed by listening to music and Marathi news. He would then meet the villagers until 11 AM. Then at around 12 noon, he would take bath, listen to radio, take some rest, another visit to cow shed, and feed the cows and cattle. He would then have dinner and listen to the radio at 8.30 PM. People would come to meet him. They felt very comfortable while discussing all kinds of matters ranging from their household to the Sheri (outskirts of village). This was again followed by listening to Sangeet-Sabha (Music program) on the radio until 11 PM.

Today was Nag Panchami day. Since morning, villagers preparing for the festival could be seen in all the houses. Daughters who had returned home from their in-laws came to Kaka's Wada in the evening to sing Panchami songs. They were playing traditional games like 'fugadi' and 'jhimma'. The entire Wada was full of energy and sound of happiness due to these activities. Kaka was reclining against a wall and enjoying this festive mood. Aai was bringing laddoos, popcorn, and other food items so that all of them would enjoy snacks. Kaka was distributing these food items among girls.

Kaka was fond of songs, music and always listened to 11 PM's program called 'Sangeet - Sabha' on the radio before sleeping. When he was sincerely listening to them, he used to close his eyes as if he was immersed in it.

His Wada had seen attendance from famous singers. Kaka would travel to Miraj and Kolhapur to attend singing programs of Lt. Pandit Bhimsen Joshi or enjoy Bal Gandharva's plays. When any guest came in the Wada, he/she would become an inseparable part of it. Even the domestic staff like Gangu, Laxman, and Vasanta had become part of it. Besides helping the poor, Kaka gave Ayurvedic medicines for minor issues like scorpion bites, cough, fever, etc. Many incidents like these take me back into the flashback like a movie. But the present day is trying to bring me back into reality.

The month of Shravan had begun. Nature was blossoming. Trees and vines were laden with greenery. It was lush green everywhere. In this beauty of nature, our car had crossed the Karnataka border and was entering Maharashtra's Bedkihal village. Kaka was sitting in the rear seat with his eyes closed. Aai was meditating using a rosary (108 beads on a string). Kaka asked to stop the car. I held his hand and got him out of the car and walked with him to a place where he could urinate. While coming back to the car he said "Zende Baba, who's who are you? You

serve us so much. The way you came to see me off today to Akkol, I want you to see me off until the end". I just said yes and stopped. But I did not understand the futuristic meaning of his words. Days were passing by. They do not wait for anyone.

I started going to Akkol on a weekly holiday. One day, I had been to Akkol, and clouds had formed in the sky. The weather was clammy and windy. Birds were flying back to their nests in the evening while chirping melodiously. I was having a conversation with Aai. We were lost in discussing old memories. As she spoke, her eyes became teary.

She said " The overall hectic routine and amount of work in this Wada never ceased. As the maids continued with their hard work, Ramesh was born. We didn't have children for many years after our marriage. I lived in a joint family in this village. The house was always hustled with people and the kitchen was always busy. I had to seek help from Laxman and do household chores starting from cooking. My trips to Narsinhwadi for the sake of children continued in all of this." Aai continued, "In Narsinhwadi, I used to stay in Baddu Pujari's house, take Darshan, and then return home. After twelve years, I had my first child. My daughter Shalan was born in 1935 followed by second daughter Manik who was born on 6 October 1937. And with Lord Datta's blessings, Ramesh was born on 17 November 1940."

"Everybody was happy with this news. Our Wada was filled with joy. Food, clothes, and other things were donated on Ramesh's naming ceremony. When he turned six, he started going to the local school in Akkol. I was worried until he came back home and was often restless. Sometimes he would return home from a playing injury. When he started using a bicycle, he would accidentally pinch his fingers. Every day, something or the other would happen to him and everybody in the family would get annoyed. For this reason, we started taking Ramesh to Narsinhwadi. At the same time, we started going to Sangavade – Narsinhwadi. Ramesh's primary education was in Kagwad under the guidance of Shedbalkar Sir. He stayed in a local hostel there. His high school education was at Vidya Mandir High School in Nippani. In 1958, he completed matriculation examination."

"After this milestone, we started thinking about his higher education. At this time, we were living in Sakharvadi – Nippani on a rental basis for our kids' education. Until Ramesh returned home on his bicycle, we were always worried. Falling off the bicycle, something bad happening while walking and such incidents were happening every day. So, we were getting irritated by it and also because of his frequent illness, mood swings, strange behavior, and loosing temper on Amavasya (No moon day) and Pournima (Full moon day). He used to threaten that he would jump from the terrace. He used to feel displeased, throw tantrums, and not talk to anyone. I got tired of it. So, we started taking him to Narsinhwadi and also to many saints to seek their blessings. Many such efforts were going on. Once on our way back from Narsinhwadi, we went to Mari Swami in Kagwad (District Belgaum, Karnataka) and put Ramesh on his feet. I prayed to

him for Ramesh to get better, become stable, and for his welfare. Shri Mari Swami was a Lingayat (A caste in Hindu religion) Swami and was sitting underneath a tamarind tree on the outskirts of Kagwad. He was dwarf and a Tapasvi (One engaged wholly in the exercises of devotion and mortification, an austere devotee, an ascetic). He just said, "Go, your son is a bank". I did not understand Swami's words. But after so many years, I started witnessing many Sadhus, Sadhakas, Sanyasis, and the future-seeking poor and distressed people coming to Ramesh in large numbers, I realized that he is a bank of spirituality."

"There was a gentleman in Akkol by the name of Dr. Hiremath. On his advice, Ramesh started his education in Ayurveda under the guidance of Hubli's famous doctor Lt. Damodar Halshikar. In 1964-65, Ramesh became an Ayurvedic Doctor and started his 'Damodar Clinic' in the Wada. Now Ramesh was stabilizing slowly, and I felt he needs to engage in family life. He got married to Nippani's Lt. Babanna Kulkarni's (Sankeshwar-Solapur) daughter Girija in 1967 in a pomp marriage ceremony."

"Girija as a good daughter-in-law was a good find. She was a higher education degree holder, looked after household chores, grocery shopping, maintaining accounts and running payroll of all farmworkers, etc. So, all of my concerns were met. With grandkids Aparna, Gurunath, Aniket, and Hema, we achieved grandeur. Seeing so many people from all strata of society visiting Ramesh on Amavasya (No moon day), I remember Mari Swami's words "Your son is a bank".

Lt. Mama Deshpande and Lt. Harikaka Gosavi (From Yamakanmardi, Hukeri Taluka, District Belgaum) also advised us to continue with Lord Datta's worship for Ramesh. Lt. Raghunath Joshi Sir treated Ramesh kindly and told him to read chapter 14 of Guru Charitra. After Datta Jayanti, I started going to Narsinhwadi on Pournimas (Full moon days) between the months of Margshirsh and Chaitra. I took somebody with me for company and we stayed at Baddu Pujari's house. On the full moon day, I would bathe in the Sangam (Where two rivers meet), take Darshan of Lord Dattatraya, conduct 108 'pradakshinas', and attend the Palakhi (Palanquin) procession ceremony at night. On the third day, I would return to Akkol. Sometimes, I would participate in Shri Kshetra (Holy place) Pant Balekundri (District Belgaum) festival and started visiting Shri Kshetra Murgod's Shiv Chidambar Swami's Temple for his Darshan. Only I know of all the gods that I did Pooja of and worshiped. Now, Ramesh has grown up. He has earned a name for himself and has taken many people on the course of progress. I consider this as my victory ".

It was now nighttime. We could hear the ringing of bells in Lord Bhairoba's Temple during the

Aarti. The dark clouds in the sky had overshadowed stars. Cool breeze was flowing across, and words said by Aai and many scenes were rushing before my eyes just like a movie. And our Gurudev was the main character in this movie.

Akkol's weekly market was assembled on Saturdays. Villagers from nearby villages brought loads of vegetables to sell them in the market. Some were bringing them in bullock carts. After selling their items, they would purchase groceries like sugar, spices, toiletries, etc. They would also buy clothes, sweets, 'chirmure' (Parched rice), etc. before returning to their villages and hamlets. The marketplace was crowded in the evenings and slowly go silent at the onset of night. I have been to this Bazar many times with Dr. Ramesh Maharaj.

As the harvesting season came to an end, Tamasha centers would popup. The stage for N. G. Balappa's Kannada plays would be setup in the ground adjacent to Patil's *Wada*. These were the sources of entertainment for farmers in those days.

Akkol's Lord Bhairobadev's yatra (Pilgrimage) is famous. It is believed that God Bhairoba grants the wishes of anybody who prays and vows. Many people from nearby villages came to participate in this festival. As per their affordability, they were offering food grains, clothes, and silver jewelry to the deity. Wrestling bouts were held during this festival. Maharaj and Kaka liked bullocks and animals a lot. Their cowshed had many good animals. For farmers, these animals were their assets. The number of animals one owns would determine a farmer's wealth and power. Such was that time.

I have seen Kaka and Maharaj wake up early in the morning and clean the cowshed. They did not tolerate the deterioration or carelessness of the animals. Along with Vasant, they would feed the animals at night and at odd times. On Bendur (festival of bullocks), these animals were decorated and taken out for a procession. Once these animals returned to Wada premises, Vahini (Ramesh Maharaj's wife) did their Aarti.

Maharaj's farm was about two miles away from Akkol village on Nippani road. It was called Kodi. It had Neem trees, Babhali (Thorny Gum-Arabic-tree, *Acacia Arabica*) trees and towards the lower side had islands of Kalak (Large bamboo) trees. Also, there were some big mango trees and Sitaphal (Custard apple) trees. There was a long plantation of grass reserved to feed the animals. Baloba's Mala (farm) could be seen in the distance and beyond that were winding roads formed in red mud. I have been to this Kodi many times with Maharaj.

I had been to Junglee once with Maharaj. There was Junglee Baba's Samadhi on the bank of a stream. It was a very quiet and secluded place. Maharaj was a family man, a farmer, and a doctor. He was a common citizen in the path of spirituality. He was knowledgeable. He was a Vatanadar from a rich family. Though he had earned quite a reputation and wealth; he was something

different for me. I would see a divine guru in him. In the very first interaction, he had said, "My name is Ramesh Krishnaji Kulkarni. I and my wife had to shoulder family responsibilities from a young age. We do our best to manage our farm, servants, labors, family life as well as Datta Jayanti festival."

Gurudev used to wake up before dawn and meditated on the bed lying down. Whenever I woke up to see him, he was always awake. So, it was hard to tell if he was sleeping or not. After waking up, he had a habit of yawning loudly. Then he would go to the cowshed and clean it. Once it was half cleaned, he would ask Laxman to bring a cup of tea and smoke a bidi (Crude cigarette). Then he would clean Wada's entire front yard. After sunrise, villagers would start visiting him to discuss their difficulties, seek his suggestions and guidance. This was followed by assigning tasks to the maids and another cup of tea.

He would roam around like a small child and when in mood hummed songs. In the morning, as per his wishes, he used to have lunch between 11 AM to 12 PM. In the meal, he ate one and half Bhakari, little rice, and buttermilk. Such was his limited food intake. He would travel by car to his house in Nippani and sometimes to Sangli, Miraj, and Kolhapur. He used to return very late at night. His favorite snacks were Chirmure (Parched rice), salted peanuts, and tea. Sometimes in Akkol, people visited him even in the afternoons. He never differentiated between the rich and poor and always guided them with his abilities. He made arrangements for meals for the people visiting him. Sometimes on Amavasya, about 400 to 500 people used to visit him. But he never showed weariness. Some people from faraway places would stay overnight in the Wada. He never gave any preaching lectures but talked a lot. His words were sublime, sometimes serious, and sometimes were intimating future events. When sleeping he would cover the blanket all the way. Gurudev never bragged about his supernatural powers of predictions/prophecies. But there was plenty of future hidden in his hinting words. He was of concentrated / intense nature but behaved quite freely. This openness resulted in people not realizing his imperceptible powers and miracles in the beginning. His appearance was simple. His conduct was also simple. His undergarments used at home were typically a green-colored under pant and a bandi (An angrakhá without skirts). He was always happy, chatting, and had a sense of humor. He spoke fluent Marathi, Kannada, English, and Hindi. Sometimes, we could hear him speak Sanskrit and Tulu. Using the right choice of words and language on the right occasion was his specialty.

He was very healthy. Other members of his family used to fall sick once in a while, but I have never seen him sick. But under the pretense of health, he used to visit Miraj and meet Dr. Mhetre frequently. Gurudev's students included a lot of doctors. He used to get his health checkup done from them.

When leaving the house, he used to wear vijar (Traditional Indian loose white trouser) and

Nehru shirt. But sometimes on impulse wore western styled clothes like a Pant-Manela shirt (Like a Bush shirt) and boots. But in all of this, his behavior was extremely straightforward. At first sight, anybody would become submissive to him.

He always praised and spoke respectably about my parents. He used to have conversations with them in our old three-room monastery (Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Mathi in Miraj). He appeared happy with my spiritual progress. But he never expressed that freely to me. He did mention that to my parents and some other people. My main drawbacks were my ego, self-importance, inattentiveness, indiscipline, occasional depression, and sometimes unknown fear. But he never spoke a single word about my weaknesses and faults.

Sometimes Gurudev would speak clearly and fearlessly and as if he was tremendously agitated. At that time, one could see the inside of his mind and realize the expanse of his knowledge. His wisdom was not easily understood. Many people would fruitlessly talk about his behavior without understanding his knowledge. But such critics became his disciples.

I remember the early days when I went to meet him, I could not speak freely with him. When I was walking on Bhakti Marg (The way of obtaining salvation through worship and obedience), he was a Gyaan Margi (The way to final emancipation through knowledge). As I started enjoying and engrossing in Bhakti Marg, he started lauding me and guided me with his natural thinking. When he came to Miraj-Sangli, he mingled with other devotees, laughed, joked, chats, and had conversations where he engrossed himself like a small innocent kid. At this time, if I entered the assembly, the happy group would go silent. Gurudev never gave me Anugraha (Favor, grace) by sitting next to me. But he gifted my life with high dignity and fulfillment. My Gurudev never succumbed to any attractions. He spoke freely with everyone. Basically, his behavior was settled on solid foundations of modesty and love. I don't know when he had studied religious scriptures, but he gave many pieces of examples and references from such books. And for someone like me it was an amazing experience. He never debated on anything that did not have an ending. But he argued like a small child with his mother sometimes. Such interactions between a dutiful son and his mother might be different than the usual interactions with others and probably it was the mutual right of the duo to engage with each other in such a fascinating manner. Such a mutual right might be strengthening interpersonal bond between the two even better.

Gurudev was married. Still, he was serving the humankind free from desires. He had the ingenuity to sacrifice the desires and ambitions inherent to married life of a normal human being. He always distanced himself from arid arguments. An important feature of his character was that he did not use any specific tools or methods. He never thrust his views on others. I never noticed him giving any philosophical lectures to anyone. He seemed to be a true yogi who practiced good karma in a determined way. He was a gentleman who was free from desires and ego.

Since he was an accomplished yogi with divine powers, he would sometimes illustrate unbelievable miracles. He was a Sakshatkari (Someone who has the manifestation of God), who had the capability to perform wonders and was also capable to do anything as per his will power (Ichcha Samarthya in Marathi). He had performed his duties in all walks of life in an ideal and peaceful manner.

Many aggrieved, sad, and distressed people came to meet him to seek guidance about their future. They would narrate their agony in front of him and empty their minds. Though he was disciplined, he always enquired about the devotees with an interest and help the common man with solutions to their problems. He offered them meals and snacks, and occasionally helped them financially before saying goodbye to them affectionately.

He was always available to meet anyone on Amavasya (No moon day). But on other days, he was involved in his household responsibilities like farming and running his clinic. He would treat everyone equally. Varkaris (Pilgrims / A person that performs Vari or a periodical pilgrimage to a sacred place) and Malkaris (A person wearing a sacred rosary/necklace made from beads of Ganitrus) always took his Darshan by touching his feet.

His life's peculiarity was that his devotees were not just Hindus, Muslims, or Christians but also Harijans, distressed, downtrodden, and poor people. His sense of humor would indirectly shed light on his affectionate nature.

If a person is dutiful, competent, humble, indrawn, and does not hesitate to make sacrifices, then that person easily makes a house in people's hearts. I sincerely feel that my Guruji had reached to that sacred level of respect and place in my heart.

It is because of my Guruji, I could walk on the divine path of prayers, worship, chanting of mantras, meditation and purification of my inner space.

Through my job, I was acquainted with a lot of people. I was trying to help people get jobs and daily wages and at the same time, I was preparing for MPSC (Maharashtra Public Service Commission) exam and LLB (Bachelor of Laws) graduation. I was also becoming popular in our department. This resulted in some people not liking it. They were laying accusations of various kinds on me. Through this job, I had found Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Guru-Marg (Pathway to Guru). But there was no job satisfaction in this job. So, for the peace of my mind and to get away from these chatters, I was visiting Kolhapur on every Sunday by train to take Darshan of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi and also to Akkol for Shri Ramesh Maharaj's Darshan.

The work related to main pipeline of water lifting and irrigation schemes allocated to our office was accomplished. Either due to this reason or my adversaries' efforts were successful, or because I was considered an extra resource or because of the interests of the opportunistic selfish contractors, or simply because of the grace of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta, I got transferred to the office of Executive Engineer, Warana Machinery Department Number Two in Kolhapur. I reported to this office on 1 June 1977. This office's operational area was Chandoli Dam. However, the physical office was in Kolhapur. Lt. Govind Madhav Deshpande was the executive engineer. He was a kind person. Shri V. V. Joshi was the head clerk. He too was a good man. He was Shridhar Swami's disciple. He frequently visited Varadahalli (Sagar, Karnataka). He always took care of me. I would board the 8.30 AM train from Miraj to Kolhapur and reach the office by 10.30 AM. We would have tea between 2.30 to 3 PM. In this break, I used to rent a bicycle from Shri Jayantrao Salokhe's bicycle shop and visit Shri Shirke's Temple for Darshan. I would board 6.30 PM train back to Miraj. Such was my routine. In those days, a railway ticket from Miraj to Kolhapur was two rupees whereas the monthly pass was 19 rupees and 20 paise.

Day by day, I was getting acquainted with many people in Kolhapur. Shri Ramesh Maharaj's 'Mavashi' (Mother's sister) Lt. Sarojini Kumbhojkar's house was close to our office. Her husband's name was Shri Vasantao Kumbhojkar and his brother's name was Lt. Dattatray Kumbhojkar. He was a personal steward of Kolhapur's Chatrapati. Lt. Dattatray Kumbhojkar was a Sai Baba devotee. He conducted Aarti of Shri Sai Baba on every Thursday. He had two sons namely Balvantrao and Girish whereas Papputai, Minatai, and Latatai were his daughters. Vasantao Kumbhojkar had only one son. His name was Arundada. He was an engineer in M.S.E.B (Maharashtra State Electrical Board). All these Kumbhojkar siblings were more or less of my age and hence we became good friends.

Lt. Sarojini Mavashi (called as an aunt out of respect for an elderly person) and her sister-in-law Mandatai were very kind. The family had a religious atmosphere. They carried out daily religious rituals, worship, donations, and were courteous towards their guests. This was a joint family. I visited their house every day on office days. Shri Arundada was married to Lt. Annasaheb Pant Balekundrikar's daughter Sumitra. Shri Baludada was a lecturer at Rahuri University Agricultural College. Shri Girishdada was a practicing lawyer. On occasions where I had to stay back in Kolhapur, I stayed at the Kumbhojkar family's house. This is where I got acquainted with Mrs. Chaya Kulkarni, Doctor Bapur Khot, Shri Sadashiv Khot, Mrs. Ratnavahini and Mrs. Nirmalavahini. I also got familiar with Lt. Arun Swar and Shri Mohan Shete. They both used to visit Akkol's, Ramesh Maharaj.

When I was working, I visited Kolhapur for Shri's Darshan even on Sundays. The train used to reach Kolhapur at 10 AM. I would reach Shri Shirke Temple by 11 AM. Gradually, my acquaintance with Shirke family was getting more and more cordial.

I was already familiar with Reverend Maisaheb Shirke. But now with her daily Darshan, I was feeling happy. She told me many stories about Gurudev that were lost in time. She narrated many incidents and surprises in the lives of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's close disciples like the vanishing of gold bangle from Ramabhau Farikh's house and its reappearance, Rama Maang's services, Palakhi (palanquin) ceremony on Gurudvadishi, uprooting an old lady's snake-gourd (Padaval) plant, Balku Rashivadekar's rebirth, destroying of Shri Haripant Siddhenerlikar's ego, the marriage of twelve-year-old Rukmini Punekar with a three-year-old boy, etc.

I used to feel delighted and equally amazed listening to stories of Kaliyug's Mahatapasvini (Great anchoress) Tarabai Shirke who took care of Lord Shri Krishna Saraswati like a small child and also the services by Raut Mama and Tai after Gurudev's Samadhi, etc. I used to get astonished too. It was a fortunate episode for the human race. This episode that was lost in time and narrated by Maisaheb was penned down and brought to life by Lt. Balasaheb Shirke. The book he wrote about Gurudev is called Shri Krishna Leelamrut. It was as if he brought Gurudev's free-flowing holy blessings like the river Ganga to a common man's house.

Until the year 2005, I used to listen to Lord Shri Krishna's nectarine-like uncommon, pious, soul liberating blessed exploits, feats, and achievements from Akkatai Jadhav and Maisaheb Shirke. The same Lord Shri Krishna, the supreme soul, had made not only Maisaheb Shirke's house but entire Karveer city sanctified by His live presence. He had manifested himself as an incarnation on this planet to bless it with heavenly showers. None of nature's laws applied to his Avatar body. During his Avatar period, he performed many miracles. The more I learned about this great personality, my faith, confidence, and belief as an Almighty in such an Avatar were growing tremendously.

My routine when I was on-duty in Kolhapur was to take Darshan in Shirke Temple every day and visit Akkol on Saturdays after office hours. I used to stay overnight in Akkol on Saturdays. I enjoyed my time with Ramesh Maharaj's children, namely, Aparna, Hema, Guru, and Aniket. I used to spend time carrying Aniket on my shoulders and playing with others, chatting with them, sitting on the swing, and push them as they sat on it.

I would accompany Ramesh Maharaj to his farms and nearby villages during daytime. In those days only tobacco was grown in the farms. All farming was dependent only on rainwater. August was tobacco plantation time, whereas in February the crop was harvested, cut through rotating cutters, bagged, and stored. When the rates were favorable, it was sold through the Kavale Bharmal trading company. The earnings made through sale of tobacco would be used to manage household expenses of the entire year.

Noble labors like Shankar, Vasant, Indurao, and Madhu took care of the farms. They were all honest and contended individuals. I sometimes used to sit and chat with Aai and Kaka and would accompany Vahini to the local market. In those days, Akkol – Nippani – Akkol bus travel was epic. But there was happiness to be found in it. It was a kind of homework for one's lifelesson's. Ramesh Maharaj's house was called 'Sarkar Wada'. This Wada had 3 parts. The middle part was called 'Laxmi Narayan'. Maharaj stayed in this part. It had a porch, storage room, clinic, and a kitchen. Kaka sat in the porch resting his back against a pillow. In the backyard, they had big cowshed and ample cattle along with a well, too. It was a busy and buzzing house for sure with a high frequency of visitors. There was a wooden cabinet on the right side of Kaka's sitting place. It had many different kinds of old and properly functioning fountain pens from brands like Parker to Paper Queen along with a beedi bundle, matchbox, some change in the form of coins, medicines, and a diary.

When he came to Miraj for medical visits, he stayed in Chaburao Deshpande's house and used to call me without fail. In this time, I would serve him as much as possible. Accompanying him to the Miraj market was my good fortune.

As Datta Jayanti approached, Kaka would become excited and busy. Everyone from housemaids to relatives and dignitaries were invited for the celebrations. Since Akkol's bus stand was on the outskirts, I was shouldered responsibility to carry the relative's belongings. Chef Shama and Laxman made excellent meals. Some local villagers were also in attendance on Datta Jayanti. Priest Shripad did Bhajan and sang cradlesongs. At midnight Shri Datta Jayanti was celebrated. 'Mahaprasad' (Major feast) was served the next day. Shama would cook Kheer, Rice, Vegetable dishes, and Ladoos. In the later years, I started carrying some people from Kolhapur who sang Bhakti Geets (Devotional songs), Bhaav Geets (Sentimental songs), Natya Geets (Action songs), and Bhajans. During initial days, Nippani's blind singer named Gagu sang Geet Ramayan and devotional songs.

One year, after the tobacco plantation was completed, Aaisaheb (Ramesh Maharaj's mother) said: "let's go to Giri's Venkoba this year". I too said yes. Their family deity was Lord Balaji of Tirupati. But for many years none of their family members had gone there. Maharaj though, went to Sangavade every month. That too was their family deity. (Sangavade is in Kolhapur District and has Narasimha Temple).

After Dassehra, we left to Tirupati for Lord Balaji's Darshan. Aaisaheb, Maisaheb Deshpande, Nalinitai Puranik, four children, Maharaj, Maniktai, and Shalutai were in our group. Kolhapur's Shri Kadam had a new Matador car. Our journey started by that car. At first, we had Shri

Raghvendra Swami's Darshan followed by an overnight stay in Srisailam (District Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh) before reaching Tirupati. We had to stay at the foothills of Tirupati. Unlike today, staying at the top of Tirupati hill was not as convenient. We boarded a regular bus and left for Venkoba's Darshan. The road in those days would be a single narrow lane. The tough ghat section and steep inclination would run shivers through spine. The bus ticket was only twenty-five paise. We were able to get Vyankoba's *Darshan* straightaway. It was not as crowded back then. Chaos was less too and not a lot of people lived around. We came back to the foothills in the evening. From there, we went to see Bangalore and Mysore cities. Aaisaheb's niece Sulutai stayed in Bangalore. Her husband was a jailor. We stayed at their place and from there we wanted to go to Rameshwar for Darshan. But because of the hurricane, Madras (Chennai) and Rameshwar region had severe rains. So, we decided to return and immediately started our return journey. The year was 1977.

My routine visits to Kolhapur and Akkol were ongoing. Job routine was stable and daily commute by train was also part of life now. But during this time, a new difficulty arose. My father (Dada as we used to call him) was already a diabetic. But now he developed kidney complications and started suffering from stomachache. So, he had to be admitted to Mission Hospital (In Miraj). After a bit of relief, we started Dr. P. K. Pradhan's prescribed medicines. But now he was always laying at home. The saloon shop had to be closed. There was no help from my brother and no income from farming. I had to arrange funds for my younger sister Bhamabai's marriage. At the same time, I had to shoulder elder sister Janabai's responsibility. Everything was chaotic. My total salary was Rs. 443.60. Its breakup was like: Basic Salary: Rs. 300 + Dearness Allowance: Rs. 104 + Project Allowance: Rs. 30 + House Rent: Rs. 9.30. (Deductions: Provident Fund: Rs. 20 + Withdrawal from Fund: Rs. 25, Insurance: Rs. 19 and Professional Tax: Rs. 2; Total: Rs. 66.60). In this way, my net salary in hand was Rs. 377 The chain of crisis was unending. But, due to my mother Laxmibai's and Gurudev's blessings, I kept my mind and intellect stable and kept going. Still, I was feeling extremely depressed at times. An unstable mind felt like a hurricane to me. But I was still stable.

Days were passing very fast. My spiritual enthusiasm has scaled new heights. I could sense that my earlier life was being halted permanently and taken over by a new form of life.

Sometimes, I used to earnestly solicit Lt. Balasaheb Shirke's Bhajan group to perform Bhajan at Miraj. They would perform Bhajan in the evening from 5 PM to 7 PM in Akkatai Jadhav's house and return to Kolhapur by the 8 PM passenger train. On this occasion, we used to take Shri Balasaheb's blessings and shared some fun with chats, stories, jokes, epigrams, etc. Sometimes, Lt. Maisaheb Shirke, Lt. Shivajirao Shirke, and Lt. Vahini saheb also came to Miraj. They would go to all old devotee's houses like Lt. Mathurabai Pandhare, Khade, and Jadhav. They used to stay either at Jadhav's house or at Rajaram Ghatge's house.

I used to participate in Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Punyatithi (Samadhi day) and Jayanti (Birthday) celebrations in Shravan (Marathi calendar month) Vadya (An epithet indicating a lunar fortnight) Dashmi (Tenth lunar day) and Magh (Marathi calendar month) Vadya Panchami (The fifth day of either half-month) respectively. After having some Prasad, I would go to Jadhav's house in the night for Prasad. In the early days, celebrations at Jadhav's house were on a large scale. Prasad was arranged at night so that all devotees could participate. In these seven days, Bhajan, Kirtan, Pravachan, Gayan (Singing of songs) were conducted. Day by day, the overall rush of devotees started increasing. Many people installed Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's picture in their houses and started worshiping through Pooja and reading of religious scriptures.

As usual, one day I took *Darshan* in the Shirke's Datta Temple and was talking to Balasaheb. It was rainy season, and it was pouring heavily outside. Rainwater started dripping at the place both of us were sitting. Seeing that, Balasaheb said, "This building has become old. It leaks in the Temple and here too. So, I am thinking of changing the rafters (Part of the roof) this year. Let's see after Diwali". On this, I said, "Dada, if rafters are going to be changed then let us buy the wood from Miraj. You let me know".

A few days passed and on one Sunday, Balasaheb, Shivajirao, Raghu carpenter came by train to Miraj suddenly. They had lunch in Vilasrao Ghorpade's house. Raghu carpenter gave the rafter measurements in Shri Anandrao Mandle's lumberyard and they to Kolhapur by the evening train. I used to visit Shri Mandle sometimes to know the overall progress of work. Wood was cut and the work was in progress.

I was getting more occupied at work, and it was getting irritating too. I was trying to counter the stress by visiting Shri Satishbhai Shah's Ashok Medical Store, Shri Vilas Ghorpade's Medical Store, Shri Anandrao Mandle's lumber yard, or go for a walk to Hira Bagh (Part of Miraj) followed by performing Aarti and general chitchat with friends and family.

When I was deputed to Kolhapur, I usually went to Akkol on every second and fourth Saturday and Sunday. Generally, I would go on Fridays for a stayover. Once Lt. Nivrutti Katkar (Tatya) accompanied me to Akkol. On Saturday, we spent time with Ramesh Maharaj on his farm and went to some other places. We had dinner in the evening and went upstairs to the hall to take rest. We were lying on our beds and talking. Tatya had altogether different perception and preconceived notions of Ramesh Maharaj's real Darshan. According to him, it was impossible to measure Ramesh Maharaj's behavior and actions. His mysterious conduct and real form were impossible to describe. But what was sure was that his spiritual path was simple. He had the apt

skill to carry out highly difficult task of transforming arrogant and egoistically overconfident people into polite, calm disciples using his simple spiritual pathways, principles and values.

My own nature was mainly based on Bhakti Marg (Path of devotion). But his nature remained ambiguous. It is true that I never tried to go to the roots of this aspect of his personality. However, I believed that he was a Sakshatkari (One who has enjoyed a vision or manifestation of God) Saint. At night, Ramesh Maharaj prepared his bed. At first, he would lay the 'Satranji' (thick cotton carpet), on that he would lay a 'Ghongadi' (A thick woolen, coarse and looselywoven cloth) and a bedsheet at the top. He would nap like a child and sometimes smoke beedis. I, however, would fall asleep and start snoring as soon as I laid on the bed. Whenever I woke up intermittently at night, I saw him sitting in his bed smoking beedis. I could never understand when Ramesh Maharaj slept or woke up.

Katkar Tatya and I went to sleep that night at about 11.30 PM. It was about 12.30 AM to 1 AM when I woke up from a dream. In that dream, Katkar Tatya and I were in Akkol and I said to him "Tatya, you owe me 135 rupees". In that dream, Tatya replied, "I have some relatives in this village. I will borrow some money from them and give it to you". This was the first dream. In the second dream, it was sunrise time and the morning had begun. Katkar Tatya and I had woken up and we were about to return to Kolhapur. So, in the dream I said to Ramesh Maharaj "Maharaj, we will return to Kolhapur now. I must get back to work". I feared that Maharaj would ask me to leave in the afternoon as usual. On this Ramesh Maharaj replied in the dream "If you are leaving to Kolhapur, go. But leave Sankashti and go". (Sankashti is the fourth lunar day of every dark fortnight. It continues until moonrise). I woke up from my dream and sat on the bed. It was 1 AM in the night. In the meanwhile, I heard Ramesh Maharaj "Why did you wake up Bajju?" He was sitting smoking a beedi. I replied "Nothing" and went back to bed.

I woke up in the morning. Nana gave us breakfast. I did Namaskar to Aai, Kaka, and Vahini and went upstairs. Ramesh Maharaj was calmly smoking a beedi. I informed him that I needed to return to work to Kolhapur. He permitted me. At that moment, I remembered the dream and I asked him "Maharaj, should I observe fasting on Sankashti day?" He replied, "Why do you want to get in trouble by doing Sankashti? Don't do Sankashti". I said "okay" and left Akkol along with Katkar Tatya.

Thoughts that we think of during the day subconsciously enter our dreams. Dreams and the dream world vanish automatically. The ideas, desires and entire world of fantasies created by the mind is an illusion. Dreams can connect heaven, death, and hell. They are a creation of Maya (illusion). Only a Saintly person can differentiate between the realities of an awakened life and abnormalities of a dream, and they have a command over this skill. Saints are the guiding lighthouses for devotees who are confused, distressed and longing for God's Darshan.

Actually, it had been a considerable span of four to five years that I was in touch with Ramesh Maharaj. I was aware of many miracles he had done. Still his astonishing life could not make me stable. Neither did he give me Diksha or mantra or a name. (Diksha is a course of austerities or the rites and ceremonies of some religious vow). So, in public perception, I was not his student/disciple. This thought used to cross my mind intermittently. But my reverence towards him was more than that on God. He sometimes said that I was his brother. While at times, he would plant some jewels of thoughts for my spiritual progress. Whereas sometimes he would say "See Bajru, so and so incidents will happen first". A prophecy was hidden in his simple words. I experienced an example of it soon enough in two months.

It was decided to change the roof rafters in Shirke's Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Temple. One day, all of a sudden, I got a message from Shri Anandrao Mandale that the wood was ready as per Balasaheb Shirke and Raghu carpenter's measurements. I started preparing to transport the wood from Miraj to Shri Datta Mathi (Monastery) in Kolhapur. But my financial situation was extremely adverse. So, I met fellow devotee Shri Tanajirao Ghorpade and hired his tractor. We loaded all of the wood, material (and Barges), etc. in the tractor on a Sunday afternoon.

I called upon Lt. Sambhaji Patil on a motorcycle. He was Kavathe Mahankal's former M.L.A (Member of the Legislative Assembly), Lt. Vitthal (a.k.a Daji) Patil's son. The tractor left Miraj at 3 PM. We reached Shri Datta Mathi Kolhapur on Sambhaji's Jawa motorcycle at 6 PM.

It was the hot month of May. We unloaded all the wood, and related material from the tractor, and arranged them properly in the monastery with help of Raghu carpenter. We conducted evening Aarti. Lt. Balasaheb gave us lump sugar and pedhas (A sweet composed of inspissated milk and sugar) as prasad. After having a cup of tea, we started our return journey. We could hear jackals making sounds from the sugarcane farms. Fireflies were glittering light in the darkness. We had come a long way from Kolhapur. Stars were also on display in the sky. Our Jawa motorcycle was traveling in the middle of the road. At that time, a white Ambassador car came from behind. Sambhaji Patil swayed the motorcycle towards the side of the road and let the car pass. But, because the road was under construction for some patchwork, one of the wheels of the motorcycle banged loudly against a stone kept on the side and we met with an accident. Since it was night, I could not understand what exactly happened. Because of the loud sound, people living nearby gathered. I had fallen and so had Sambhaji. We could not comprehend anything. My breathing had stopped, and my body had become numb like a stone. My hands and feet had become cold as I was frightened. My eyes were closed for quite a few minutes. I was very scared. The villagers splashed water on our faces and made us sit upright. I had a large impact from a blunt force on my body. My teeth had pierced in my lips. But I was

worried that Sambhaji may have been more injured than me. He was an M.L.A's son. But he sat up quickly. He had minor injuries. As soon as the front wheel of the motorcycle hit the stone and Sambhaji saw a bridge right in front of us, he left the motorcycle from his hands immediately. The motorcycle had fallen from the bridge, and it had made a loud sound.

The poor helping villagers brought the motorcycle from underneath the bridge. They supported and consoled us. In the meantime, Tanaji Ghorpade arrived with his tractor. He too was scared. We all lifted the motorcycle and placed it in the tractor-trolley. We thanked the villagers from the bottom of our hearts and left. We arrived in Miraj at 11 PM and enquired about each other. Sambhaji Patil went back to his house on the motorcycle. Tanaji Ghorpade went back to Mhaisai in his tractor. I came back to the Miraj monastery. This was the first accident in my life. I was scared and dejected. It was about to be dawn of next morning. New day was about to rise. However, my distressed mind was not in a position to accept this.

I rested the next day. My body was aching due to the blunt force. In the evening, I went to Lt. M.L.A Daji Patil's house and enquired about Sambhaji. He had gone to his village. So, the fear that I had in my mind was uncalled for. He had a negligible impact in the accident. Meanwhile, Sambhaji arrived. I asked him, "Sambha, did you have a heavy impact?". He replied "I did not have any impact on my body. But I did not realize that the motorcycle had left my hands. I just recall that I was standing on the ground without holding the motorcycle. The motorcycle is not much damaged either. Only the headlight is broken. Nothing else". Sambha narrated all of this with a smile. I was at peace now. I thanked Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj in my mind because he had pulled us through the first accident of my life. Still somewhere deep in my mind, a doubt was creeping regarding this accident. I was thinking that we were doing a noble work for Mathi's construction by arranging someone's tractor and someone's motorcycle. Further, we didn't miss the evening Aarati performed in Mathi. Still, we met with that accident. Why so? Was that our fault? Truly speaking, this accident should not have happened. I kept analyzing these thoughts. When I was in deep sleep that night, I started hearing voices in my ears. "Whom are you offended with? Are you in your senses? You were told to leave Sankashti and go. Which illusion are you under?". I heard these words in a firm and serious voice. I was unable to understand what to do. I was totally clueless about that dream and that serious voice. I woke up hurriedly and sat on my bed. I stood up and saw the calendar. I was shell shocked to know that the day we had gone to Kolhapur to deliver *roofing material*, was an Angarakhi Sankashti (A *Sankashti* that falls on a Tuesday and it is treated as a major *Sankashti* as compared to other *Sankashtis*). Now, I remembered the dream I had in Akkol. In that dream, Ramesh Maharaj had told me "If you are leaving to Kolhapur, go. But leave Sankashti and go to Kolhapur". But I had forgotten about this. I took the meaning of "Leave Sankashti and go" as break the Sankashti fast (by having a meal). However, my mind was not stable, and I didn't pay enough attention. Due to

oversight, I had done exactly the opposite of the instruction and that led to the unfortunate accident.

My eyes were in tears now and my mind was full of severe pain. Since I was not completely stable in the spiritual path, this accident had happened. I got out of the bed and stood in front of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's photo frame with folded hands. That spot was filled with a blinding bright light. I asked for forgiveness in my mind from Maharaj and Ramesh Maharaj. It was 2 AM in the night. I laid on the bed again. Ramesh Maharaj had performed many miracles before. But he had never boasted about his divine powers. He had eradicated diseases and distress of many people through his miraculous divine powers. Further, he had made many miracles that were eternal, too.

I remember, Lt. Annasaheb Kulkarni's Wada is next to Ramesh Maharaj's Wada in Akkol. Lt. Annasaheb was a Chitnis (An officer of the State / Secretary of correspondence) in Shri Kshetra Pant Balekundri. His brother Shri Krishnaji Kulkarni (Appa Doctor) stayed in this Wada. Whenever ShriPant Balekundri came to Akkol, he stayed in this Wada. Once Ramesh Maharaj told him, "Today, ShriPant Balekundri will come to your house for a meal". Shri Krishnaji Kulkarni could not understand what Ramesh Maharaj was saying. This was approximately in the year 1975-76. Ramesh Maharaj was not famous at that time. Ramesh Maharaj clarified to Krishnaji Kulkarni again "Shripant will come to your house for Bhiksha (Collect Alms)". Further he said, "keep a wooden plank and place a silver bowl with milk in it in the deity room". Stay awake the whole night and don't sleep". Shri Krishnaji did exactly as advised. He washed a wooden plank and placed a silver bowl with milk in it and stayed awake.

It was midnight. Shri Krishnaji Kulkarni started feeling sleepy. Still, he was trying his best to stay awake. At last, he slept. After some time, he woke up all of a sudden and he saw a very bright light. A fragrance had spread. Shripant Maharaj had touched that silver bowl. Shri Krishnaji clearly saw ShriPant Maharaj's hand touching the bowl and the edges of his dhoti. He was shocked and stood still. He was scared, confused, and did not understand what to do. It was pindrop silence. He wanted to meet Ramesh Maharaj as soon as possible.

In the morning, Shri Krishnaji Kulkarni met Ramesh Maharaj. Ramesh Maharaj asked him to do a Pooja of the wooden plank. An 'Abhishek' (a religious rite of sprinkling holy water, milk and some other items considered sacred) of the plank was done. And what a surprise? There were beautiful footprints of ShriPant – Shri Datta Avatar, imprinted on the wooden plank. Everybody was full of rejoice. Villagers started coming to see this miracle and they gathered in large numbers. The very simple looking Ramesh Maharaj became an everlasting Saint / Mahatma of extremely high stature. I have also seen this wooden plank and the footprints of ShriPant Maharaj on it.

My progress on the spiritual path was slow and full of doubts. I had not comprehended Ramesh Maharaj's divine stature. Neither did I comprehend his vast knowledge or mysterious behavior. I had seen many wonders of his. But I was not completely surrendered to his feet. But due to the experience of this dream, I became his slave. This incident had enlightened me of his immense knowledge, and I now had my personal experience. For once, I could see an easy spiritual path of a perfected apostle – messenger of God.

Now the night was over. It was past dawn. I was worshipping Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's photo frame with utmost devotion. The last night's dream was still lingering in my mind, and I was still in a state of confusion. I had taken a different meaning of Ramesh Maharaj's words "Leave Sankashti and go". In fact, the accident had occurred due to my unstable thought process, yet I was trying to be upset with Maharaj.

Not just this dream, but the other dream where Katkar Tatya owed me 135 rupees also unraveled later. Sambhaji Patil's motorcycle repair cost was exactly 135 rupees. This was miraculous! I had the everlasting company of a living saint in the form of Ramesh Maharaj. This is why, even after my vitality was attacked, my mind kept turning towards complete realization and to the Almighty. Ramesh Maharaj was a big-hearted, great saint who took care of his people even in their dreams, informed them of their future, and made their future. He always gave significance to others. This quality is becoming rare in spirituality. From this experience, I started considering Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj and Ramesh Maharaj as the same. My faith in them started growing intensely. I started visiting Akkol on weekly holidays, i.e., second and fourth Saturday and every Sunday. Apart from this, I was keen on visiting Shirke's Temple during afternoon break between 2 to 2:30 p.m. every day while I was deputed at Kolhapur office.

Even if my office was in Kolhapur, the actual work was on Chandoli dam. So sometimes, I had to go to Chandoli along with my senior Lt. V. V Joshi for office audits. In a way, my workload was tremendous.

Now the year 1978 had begun. It was time for my Department's 'Lower-grade clerk' (L. G. C) exam. This exam's training was in Kolhapur's Tarabai Park during office hours in the Irrigation building. An employee would be promoted only after passing this examination successfully. Time flew and the exam date approached. The training was also over. I and my friends Shri Mohan Remane and Nadgouda stayed in the Warana colony.

One day, as usual, I took Darshan of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datt Maharaj's Samadhi and was going to have a meal in Swami Canteen across Pudhari (A popular newspaper in Kolhapur) office. At that time, I heard bad words and some people talking in an auto-rickshaw. The

autorickshaw was traveling fast. There was not much traffic on the road. We came near the canteen. The auto-rickshaw turned and came near us. And what a surprise? It was for real Paramhansa Chile Maharaj. I bowed down to him. My friends also did the same. There were no bad words, shouting, or loud talking. He asked me calmly, "Did you go to meet Dada (elder brother)?" I said "yes" and took his Darshan again. The auto-rickshaw started and again we heard bad words. Shri Remande and Shri Nadgouda were new to this kind of experience. I told them everything that I knew about Shri Chile Maharaj. We had a full meal in 10 rupees and returned to the colony. Shri Chile God had blessed us the previous day. With those blessings, all three of us passed the exam with flying colors.

I was getting tired in Kolhapur now. On top of that, my father's health was deteriorating. His kidney problems were ongoing. Our living expenses were met through my salary. But medical expenses were increasing. In all of this, from 14 December 1977 to 5 February 1978, State Government's employees went on a strike. It lasted for a total of 54 days. During this time, I went to Savantwadi along with one of Shri Ramesh Maharaj's disciples, Shri Bal Korgaonkar, and stayed with him at his residence there. He had recently visited Shegaon and had taken Darshan of Shri Gajanan Maharaj's Samadhi. He gave us all information about it.

The next day, we went to Mangaon (District Sindhudurg, Maharashtra) and took Darshan in Shri Tembe Swami (a.k.a Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati) Temple. We saw his place of birth and the cave in which he meditated. We then went to Danoli and took Shri Satam Maharaj's Darshan. On the next day, we went to Akkol for a stayover.

During this period of strike, I went from Akkol to Belgaum. Ramesh Maharaj's sisters Maniktai and Shalutai Kalkundri lived in Ramdev Gully (Galli) in Belgaum. Their kids were Milind, Manisha, Sangita, Santosh, Shrungar, and his brother-in-law were Bodhrao and Rajabhau. All of these people were loving. When I went to Belgaum, I stayed with this family. Bodhrao had a jewelry shop whereas Rajabhai had a cloth shop.

After taking Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami's Darshan in Shri Kshetra Murgod (Kengire), I took Darshan of Shri Pant Balekundri and stayed there overnight. Ever since Aisaheb showed me the spiritual pathway, I used to visit Shri Kshetra Balekundri and Shri Kshetra Murgod every month between Pornima to Panchami. I followed this routine with immense faith and sincerity for twelve years without any break. Of course, this was only possible because I was bestowed with the blessings by these sacred places. Even though my financial situation was different and troublesome, these visits were possible.

When I stayed over in Belgaum, I would visit Bodhrao Kalekundri's cousin brother (Father's sister's son) Lt. Vasantrao Kulkarni Kanbargikar's house. Their family consisted of Lt. Vasantrao,

his wife Lt. Chaya Kaku, Arun, Suresh, and Meera. They were all loving people and were devotees of Shri Chidambar Maha Swami. Swami's worship was a hallmark of this family. They were of Vaishnav sect (Devotees of Lord Vishnu). Their house had pictures of Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami. These pictures produced ashes. Similarly, ashes came from Raghvendra Swami's picture. This was an astonishing miracle.

Lt. Vasantrao was a senior officer in R. T. O (Road Traffic Office) in Bijapur (Vijayapura, Karnataka). Lt. Chaya Kaku in those days would walk for a pilgrimage once a month from Belgaum to Murgod to seek Darshan of Shri Shivchidambar Swami. At that time, a group of Shri Shiv Chidambar devotees was formed in Belgaum. This group was planning to visit Shri Shiv Chidambar Maha Swami's disciple Shri Das Rajaram Maharaj's native place Shri Kshetra Babhulgaon Ganga (District Nashik). From there, the group was planning to visit Shirdi, Shikhar Shingnapur, Gondavale, Nashik, and Trimbakeshwar for Darshan. This information was given to me by the Lt. Chaya Kaku when I went to meet her. The expenses for this pilgrimage were estimated at two hundred rupees. She requested me to come. But I could not afford this much of an expense. I still joined this group and our pilgrimage started.

Shri Das Rajaram Maharaj's Babhulgaon Ganga is 30 miles away from Shrirampur on the banks of river Godavari. There is a Temple of Shri Shiv Chidambar Mahaswami's there. This Temple's operations are managed by a descendant of Das Rajaram Maharaj, Shri Rajput Pardeshi. We stayed there. After Bhajan and Darshan, we went to holy places like Shirdi, Nashik, Shikhar Shingnapur, Gondavale, Trimbakeshwar, and came back to Belgaum after eight days.

It had been fifteen days into the strike. But it was not over. In the next fifteen days, Lt. Vasant Kaka and Lt. Chaya Kaku came to Miraj along with Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami's descendant Lt. Bapu Dixit of Madihal (Dharwad). Bapu Dixit had brought Shri Shiv Chidambar Mahaswami's Padukas (Footwear) and Gindi (A metal water-vessel used by Swami for Pooja). It was improper of me to make arrangements for Shri Dixit's stay in my old little house. So, his stay arrangements were made at Satishbhai Shah's house. 'Mahaprasad' (Big feast) was arranged. All devotees from Miraj benefited from this Pooja, Darshan, and 'Mahaprasad'. On the third day, we went to Narsinhvadi with the Lt. Vasant Kaka, Lt. Chaya Kaku, and Bapu Dixit. We took Shri Darshan and came up. At that very moment, we had Shri Chile Maharaj's Darshan. This was a joyous moment.

The labor strike lasted for 54 days. During this time, I visited at least one holy place every day. It was a golden period for me, and I feel that it was a time of emergence of my destiny. During this time, I went to Belgaum again. As usual, I took Darshan of Shri Pant Maharaj and Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami and went to Lt. Chaya Kaku's house in the Kelkar Bagh area of Belgaum. But the house was closed. After inquiring, I found out that this family had left to Pandharpur for

Shri Vitthal Darshan. That day, I stayed over at Kalkundri's residence. On the next day, they came from Pandharpur. After doing house chores, they were sitting in the living room. I took Darshan of Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami and Raghvendra Swami's pictures and sat with them talking. We had Kanda Pohe (Onion poha) and tea etc. I casually asked Lt. Chaya Kaku, "What did you bring for me from Pandharpur"? She laughed and said, "Maharaj, what can I bring from Pandharpur? This is a Tulsi necklace for you." She gave me the Tulsi necklace. For a moment, I could not understand what just happened and what to do next.

With Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's blessings and my previous fortune, 'Ashtasiddhis' (eight divine powers) that are commonly talked about in the field of spirituality were already bestowed upon me. I had started understanding the past, future, and present. But now I had to let go of all these powers. Wearing Pandharpur's Tulsi necklace is the main ornament of a Vaishnav. Pure devotion is given importance in Malkari (devotees wearing Pandharpur's Tulsi necklace) – Varkari (devotees visiting Pandharpur to seek *Darshan* of Lord Vitthala every year) Sampraday (Religious Doctrine). I too wore the Tulsi necklace given by Lt. Chaya Kaku without thinking. I felt that I had started journey on the spiritual happiness blessed by Pandharpur's Pandurang. In my family, my mother and grandmother were not Varkaris but my father was a Malkari.

When people from my grandmother's native place went to Pandharpur from Kekale village, they used to stay at our house in Miraj overnight. My father used to happily make arrangements for their stay, food, etc. Our family deity was Pandharpur's Vitthal and now I was also wearing a Tulsi necklace. This was given by Lt. Chaya Kaku. It was not given to me on any 'Phad' (A place where Varkari's stay during their pilgrimage to Pandharpur), nor by any Guru, nor by a Maharaj, and nor by any Mauli. My grandmother and mother never wore the Tulsi necklace. I don't know in which 'Phad' my father started wearing the Tulsi necklace. Our family's 'Vrat' (Self-imposed religious observance) was to observe Ekadashi (The eleventh day of the waxing or waning moon) once every two weeks. Overall, in these 54 days of strike, I did a lot of religious activities. I had the companionship of Saints and virtuous people. This was all because of my predestination.

On the holidays, I used to visit Dr. R. B. Kulkarni's (Yedurkar) house. I knew him since I was working in the New Ashok Medical store. His house was in Brahmanpuri on Khadilkar Street. The house had a Dattatray Temple at their house. His' was a loving family consisting of his mother, wife Pushpa Tai, son Dr. Ravi Kulkarni and daughter Dr. Shubhangi. His late mother had taken 'Diksha' (initiation) from Chimad Sampraday's (sect) great Saint Amburao Maharaj. Whenever I went to their house, I saw her doing 'jap' (Silent name chanting or reciting of a mantra). Her religious practice was strict. One day she said to me, "Maharaj, why don't you do Ekadashi?" I replied to her "Ajji (Grandma), I visit a village/town every day. My job requires me to travel. Who will make the snacks for me?" She said, "Today is Ekadashi. You wash hands and

sit for snacks". Interestingly, I had not eaten anything since morning on that day. From that day, because of Ajji, I started doing Ekadashi 'Vrat' and started taking steps towards Lord Vitthal devotion. Lt. Pushpa Vahini passed away due to an illness on Tripura Pournima in 1985. Whereas Ajji passed away on Vaikunth Chaturdashi on 19 November 1998 at the age of eightyfive. Even today, my relations with this family are like a silk thread. All of Dr. R. B. Kulkarni's family members are 'Dixit' (Engaged in a course of austerities or ceremonies / initiated) disciples of Shri Gulavani Maharaj. Saints like Shri Gulavani Maharaj, Shri Avadhoot Swami, etc used to visit their house.

On 5 February 1978, the 54-day strike finally ended. Now, I reported back to work. In these 54 days, many tasks were postponed. All Departments started working on them. I was tasked with creating an account of two months and reporting it to the Accountant General's office in Nagpur. I left for Nagpur from Kolhapur by Nagpur Express train. The train was not crowded. A person named Naik onboarded the train after it crossed Daund-Manmad. He borrowed Gondavalekar Maharaj's book that I was reading. We introduced each other. The next day, I went to his house in Naik Galli in Nagpur. I had a shower and went to Shri Saint Gulal Baba's Ashram near his house. I was fortunate to be able to seek Darshan of Shri Saint Gulabbaba. I was blessed. Shri Naik took me to the Account General's office. I handed over the accounts and received their receipt. Shri Naik saw me off to a bus going to Shri Kshetra Karanja (a.k.a "Lad'anche Karanja"). I thanked Shri Naik for his hospitality and reached Shri Keshtra Karanja in the evening and saw Shri Narsinh Saraswati Datta Maharaj's birthplace in Ghude Wada followed by 'Guru Mandir' (Guru Temple). The Temple was undergoing renovations. There wasn't much rush and overall ambiance of Temple was quite quiet. After visiting other places like Akola and Karanja, I headed to Shri Kshetra Shegaon for Shri Gajanan Maharaj's Darshan and came to Balapur at 9 PM. I had missed the bus to Shri Kshetra Shegaon. So, I stayed at a lodge in Balapur. The next day early morning, I reached Shri Kshetra Shegaon. Since it was not crowded, I was able to take Darshan to my heart's content. My mind was pleased and became calm. In the afternoon, I had Pithala Bhakari (Jowar roti) Prasad as lunch and again had Shri Darshan. After taking the blessings, I wanted to visit Mahurgad. However, later on I boarded Nagpur-Kolhapur express. I left Shegaon at 2 PM by Maharashtra Express and reached Miraj the next day at 1 PM. I felt feverish and sick in this journey. I could not understand what was happening. I reached home.

My family members were happy to see me. They all seemed frightened. On the morning of the day that I reached Shegaon, a section of our little house had caught fire. The 'Gadi' (Pillow) on which Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's picture was worshiped, the 'Takya' (Thick cushion pad) next to it, and the wooden 'Tipoy' (Tea table) were burned. Pictures of other deities had also burned. So, my parents had thought that my life was in danger. They did not have meals for two days and were relieved to see me hale and hearty. I heard entire incident from them and rushed to the first floor. Shri's 'Gadi', 'Takya', Pooja garments, and religious books were

burned. Shri Krishna Saraswati's colored photo frame that I had ritually established four years ago was also damaged. I could not understand what to do next. My eyes were full of tears. I sat there calmly for some time. After freshening up, I collected the damaged picture, half-burned religious books, and Pooja clothes and immersed them in Krishna River with a heavy heart. I came home dejected. I was awake for a long time. Why did Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's, who was my heart and soul, picture burn? Why did the 'Gadi' burn? What mistake did I make? Am I missing something in my services to God? Many such questions were in front of me. Was I saved because I went to Shri Kshetra Shegaon for Shri Gajanan Maharaj's Darshan? These questions were storming my mind and I was not at peace. I had got a fever and the state of weakness became even worse. I became worried because of fear, and I couldn't sleep for the entire night due to these thoughts and my state of vulnerability.

The next morning, I got up early and reached office. I submitted the acknowledgment issued by the Accountant General, Nagpur in relation to acceptance of accounting books and headed towards Shirke Datta Temple without further delay. I sought Darshan of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj with teary eyes. I thanked him from the bottom of my heart for safeguarding me from the calamity and I expressed by gratitude for whatever I owe to him. And it was time for the afternoon Aarati in the Shirke Datta Temple.

After the Aarti, I met Punyashloka (a salutation used for a pious & noble person out of respect) Mai Saheb and Balasaheb and narrated the incident to them. They gave me the much-needed support, fearlessness, and a piece of loving advice. They gave me a new picture of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj, holy ash, and lump sugar as prasad. On the same day, I established Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's picture in my small house. Once again, I thought to myself, what is this invisible path and where is it going to take me?

Even though I was not feeling well, I went to Akkalkot in the morning. Unlike these days, it was not crowded at that time. I had Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj's Darshan and returned to Miraj at night. I consulted Dr. Madhukar Mhetre the next day for my health and took medicines as per his advice. I took rest for two full days. I was feeling tremendous weakness.

I learned that Shri Ramesh Maharaj had come to Miraj and was staying in Bhagyashree Lodge owned by Shri Deshpande near Shivaji Stadium. I went to meet him in the evening. But he had returned to Akkol in the afternoon. Shri Vasantrya Bhosale lived close to this lodge. So, I decided to pay a visit to his house. Vahini (Mrs. Deshpande), Asha, and Nina were in the front yard. So, I called them. At that moment, a dog came and bit me. I screamed due to the sheer force of this bite. Vahini and the kids came out and they chased the dog away. My clothes were soaked in blood. The dog had torn a mass of flesh from my thigh. I started having vertigo and I was losing my balance. They made me sit, comforted me, and gave me tea. Shri Vasantrya Desai's son-in-law Shri Kumar Desai dropped me off to my house. In the evening, I met Dr.

Madhukar Mhetre and took some injections. According to the guidelines in those days, I took injections for the next three days in the municipality hospital. Now, my health was deteriorating. Fever was not subsiding. It was hard to eat a meal and I was feeling tired. So, I was checked again by Dr. Mhetre. I was diagnosed with jaundice. So, jaundice medicines were started immediately. I took some locally made medicines from a neighbor. I was taking rest, but I was not feeling enthusiastic.

For about fifteen days or so, due to health reasons, I could not go to Kolhapur for Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi Darshan. However, I was doing regular Pooja of the picture given by the reverend Maisaheb Shirke.

That day in the morning, one of my friends, Lt. Ganpatrao Shirsat came to inquire about my health. While we were discussing my health, the glass on Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's picture shattered all of a sudden making a loud sound. We both were scared and surprised. I felt that this incident was inauspicious. In the evening, I got a new glass for the picture from a store and started doing Pooja again. Two days later, the glass broke again. I could not understand what to do next. But I guessed that a big calamity was going to strike me. I went to Akka Jadhav's house at night for the Aarti. Mrs. Ratantai had the Sanchar of Shri Swami Samarth. In that Sanchar, He gave me an indication of the danger. He asked me to read Shri Goraksha Kimayagar Pravah book and do name chanting. "The photo is burned but not Me. Do not fear, I am with you". Such was his blessing.

I was bedridden for the next one and half months. Since jaundice had spread throughout my body, I was not recovering fast enough. I was taking prescription medicines as well as local herbal medicines. But they were not making a significant difference in my health. My friends and 'Guru Bandhus' (Co-disciples / spiritual brothers) were coming to meet and support me. Ramesh Maharaj and Vahini also came and inquired about my health. After a few days, with everybody's well wishes and blessings, I started recovering. In this period of one and a half months, I read biographies of many saints. Reading was my only entertainment. The office staff was also inquiring about my return to work. At last, after two months, I went to Kolhapur and took Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi's Darshan in Shirke Temple by offering fruits, flowers, and a garland. My eyes were full of tears. I had a rebirth because of Him. This favor on me was never going to end. After a persistent chanting of His name for past few months, I was standing before His Samadhi – totally surrendered. He was the Swami (Master) of my life going forward. I dedicated the rest of my life to the services of His feet. I had become his devotee as well as a slave in true sense. I ended my desires of normal materialistic life and my family/married life. I took Punyashloka Maisaheb's and Balasaheb's Darshan. I was exiting the 'Vairagya' monastery, taking Vairagya from there. (This Kolhapur's Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta

Maharaj's Temple is also called as Vairagya Mathi/Monastery. Vairagya is the renunciation of all sensuous delight or gratification).

They were summer days, but the weather was that of a diversionary rain. Clouds were forming in the sky. The wind started blowing. I could hear the thundering clouds. A new stream of my life had begun. A drop or two of the rain began.

After resting for three to four long months, I started visiting Shri Vilas Ghorpade, Shri Ramesh Ghorpade, Shri Anand Mandle, Shri Chandrakant Kurane, and Shri Rajaram Ghatge's houses on holidays. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's picture was getting ritually established at many people's houses through the auspicious hands of Punyashloka Maisaheb Shirke. Many families got bathed in this spiritual river stream. Places like Udgaon, Mhaisal, Krishna Ghat Miraj, and Sangli became pious in Datta Sampraday through 'Bhakti Marg' (Path of devotion). Lt. Maisaheb Shirke wanted to visit Mhaisal. Mhaisalkar family was devotee of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj. Punyashloka Tarabai Shirke had not recognized Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj when He came in front of her house in the form of a short child asking for alms. This episode was described earlier.

The Mhaisalkar family has a mention in the fifth chapter of Pothi written by author Mujumdar. Shri Shrimant Kedarrao Shinde – Mhaisalkar was the head of Mhaisalkar dynasty. He was Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj's mother's sister's husband. He was very close to Shahu Maharaj. He was known as a valorous, diplomat, brave, righteous, and religious person. He was very well respected in Kolhapur's royal courthouse. He was given a palace to live in Kolhapur. He would visit Mhaisal sometimes. The British Government constructed Mhaisal Railway Station specifically for him, so that he could get visit his native place from Kolhapur. One can understand his stature based on this. He had a palace in Mhaisal and one thousand to two thousand acres of land. Kedarrao loved the people of his realm, maids, and farms. His period of administration was at the same time as that of Shahu Maharaj.

According to her 'Drushthaanth' (Godly dream), Punyashloka Tarabai Shirke had come to Mhaisal to take Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj to her house. He had even stayed at this palace in Mhaisal for two days. Maharaj used to tell Mhaisalkar that Shirke's house is our own house. Maisaheb Shirke strongly wished to visit Mhaisalkar's Wada one more time and build a relationship of love with the Mhaisalkar family. She had even asked me about it. But because of my hectic office schedule, this did not happen.

Devotees of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj were increasing in Miraj. Shri Shivaji Jadhav, Shri Munna Bhojmalpani, Shri Subhash Shinde, Shri Tatoba Landage, Shri Laxmanrao Pawar, Shri Dattatray Pawar, Shri Dr. Mhetre, Shri Anandrao Mandle, Shri Mangal Shinde, Shri Chandrakant

Homkar, Shri Madan Bongale, Shri Datta Udapi, Shri Shailesh Sindhagi, Shri Shankarrao Kamble, Shri Shivling Anna Ghewari, Shri Kitavdakar Pawar, former M.L.A Daji Patil, and Shri Bapusaheb Jamdar, etc. formed the devotee group. Some of them started visiting Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi in Kolhapur for Darshan on every full moon day. Shri Balasaheb Pareet, Shri Kuber Magdum, Shri Bhupal Suryavanshi, Shri Karvade, all Kulkarni brothers, Shri Narayanrai Varekar and his brother, and Shri Vasantrao Bhosale joined from Jaysingpur and Udgaon, whereas, Shri Raghunath Ghodke, Shri Bhanudas Padalkar, Shri Nivrutti Katkar, Shri Bhimrao Katkar, and Shri Baburao Suryavanshi from Sangli started going to Kolhapur. Today, I feel immensely satisfied that the eternal pathway of faith and devotion continued in the next generation of these families. I looked at this as my small contribution to the society and as a religious work. I did this work without any hesitation and am continuing to do so. It is my determination to continue this in future.

A 'Mathi' (Temple/Monastery/Hermit/Hermitage) was started in Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi's house in Sangli so that the devotees from Sangli could get together. Pictures of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj, Shri Swami Samarth, Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami, and Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri were ritually established by the auspicious hands of Lt. Punyashloka Maisaheb Shirke in this 'Mathi'. Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi and Punyashloka Laxmibai Suryavanshi were the in-laws of my friend Shri Rajaram Ghatge. This family lived a very simple life and worked hard to run the family. This Suryavanshi family was a simple, hardworking middle-class family having a simple lifestyle. They had a restaurant and pan shop in the Patel Chowk, Sangli.

Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi was Lt. Vasant Dada Patil's (Ex-Chief Minister of Maharashtra) close confidante. He was elected as a Corporator three to four times. Due to some misfortune, his financial situation collapsed. His second son Rajaram's untimely death worsened their family situation.

<Photo: Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar and others with Lt. Shri Balasaheb Bharade (Speaker, Legislative Council, Maharashtra State) at Lt. Chandrakant Jadhav's house>

He started coming to meet me along with his son-in-law Shri Rajaram Ghatge. Shri Baburao



Survavanshi's situation started improving over time. His bad days were over. Our bond grew strong, and a loving relationship was formed. He started going to Kolhapur's Shirke Temple every week and started considering me as his son. I did not realize when we became so close. I considered him and his wife as my parents and started addressing them as Dada and Aai. Now, in Sangli, Shri's work continued from Survavanshi's 'Mathi'. Shri's devotees started gathering on Tuesday evenings and did

Aarti, Jap (name chanting), reading, and 'Mahaprasad'. I too started going there on Tuesday evenings. This 'Mathi' was established in 1980 in a simple residential house.

I worked in Warana Mechanical Division Number Two from 1977 to 1979. Because of my transfer to Kolhapur, I was able to reap the benefits of daily Darshan of Shirke's Samadhi Temple. But because of my father's health issues, financial troubles, and daily commute between Miraj to Kolhapur, I grew tired of it.

When I had joined service, our Public Health and Irrigation Departments were combined. This combined Department was called Irrigation Power (I and P). In 1979, it was split into the Irrigation Department and Maharashtra Drinking Water Supply Department. Thanks to Shri M. N. Shevade (of Sangli) and Shri G. S. Ghanekar (of Irrigation Department - Kolhapur), I was transferred to the office of Executive Engineer, Environmental Metal Engineering Works Division Miraj, Sub-division Number Two. Its office was in Gothan Galli. I reported to work on 1 June 1979. In those days, my take-home pay was Rs. 450. My base salary was Rs. 320, allowance was Rs. 167, house rent allowance was Rs. 32. So, gross salary was Rs. 519. The deductions from my salary were as follows: Rs. 20 provident fund, Rs. 25 withdrawal from provident fund, Rs. 20 Diwali advance, and professional tax of Rs. 4. So, the total deduction was Rs. 69. The reason for stating these figures here is to give a glimpse of the affordability and salaries of those times. Though my salary was quite less, I did not complain or whine about it. My journey of life was ongoing by trusting and relying on Maharaj and facing any difficulties that arose. At this time, my younger sister Bhimabai's marriage topic was on our mind. Our old house had become weak and was unstable. My father's sickness was ongoing. The financial situation was very weak indeed. In these circumstances, my younger sister Bhimabai got married to Shri Subhash Sakpal on 28 March 1977 in Kavathe Piran (Taluka Miraj, District Sangli). As of yet, my elder brother Shri Vasantrao was still not married, and my parents were always worried about him. Vasantrao had left for Mumbai in 1966 and was not in touch with us. My parents frequently asked me to contact him and bring him home.

I used to go to Krishna Ghat all the time since 1974-75. I had a 'Drushthaant' (Dream with instructions from God) and according to it, I had searched and found Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's close disciple, Shri Krishna Buva's Samadhi there. It was close to the Water Works – Head Works compound. I thought of constructing at least a stone raised wall on it and hence ordered four truckloads of stone at Rs. 200 per truck. I started doing Samadhi's Pooja. Devotees like Shri Suresh Gore, Shri Maruti Aldar, Shri Annappa Ambi and Shri Shankar Ambi come together and formed a Bhakt Mandal (Board of Devotees).

On holidays, I did Pooja of this Samadhi. Shri Krishna Buva is mentioned in Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Charitra (Storybook) authored by Balasaheb Shirke in chapters 10 and 14. [And more details are available in a Marathi book called "Samudra Bharla Aahe"]

authored by Shri Zende Maharaj. As of this writing, an English version of this book is not available]. As advised by Maisaheb Shirke, I borrowed Shri Krishna Buva's picture from Amte Mavashi (Aunty) who lived near Padma Raje Girls High school in Kolhapur, and got a new picture made. Until then, only one picture of Shri Krishna Buva existed.

Due to financial difficulties, I was not able to construct a platform or a small Temple on Shri Krishna Buva's Samadhi. On top of this, I was transferred to Kolhapur. Later on, after I was transferred back to Miraj, I started going to Krishna Ghat again and started dreaming of constructing the Temple. During this time, on every second and fourth Saturday, I started visiting Shri Balu Kaka Ghorpade's house in Mhaisal. He was Shri Vilasrao Ghorpade's father-in-law. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's picture was ritually established in his house by Shri Shivajirao Shirke. I became friends with Mrs. Sunanda Ghorpade's brothers namely, Shri Tanaji Ghorpade and Shri Datta Ghorpade. Sometimes, I used to stay overnight in Mhaisal with Shri Vilasrao Ghorpade and Shri Mangal Shinde.

During my stay, I would talk about Maharaj's experiences and incidences. Sometimes, I stayed in Shri Tanaji Ghorpade's farm. The affection and bonding with Ghorpade family started growing and we started living like a family. Because of my transfer to Miraj and Shri Tanaji Ghorpade being my neighbor, we went to each other's houses more often. Whenever Maisaheb Shirke, Balasaheb Shirke, Vahinisaheb Shirke, and Shivajirao Shirke visited Miraj, all Ghorpade family members like Shri Vilasrao Ghorpade, Mrs. Sunanda Vahini and Shri Ramesh Ghorpade lovingly made arrangements of their stay and food. My trips to Mhaisal increased during this time and somewhere deep in my mind, I had started feeling good about those visits. In reality, it was only because of Shri Vilasrao Ghorpade, that I started visiting his in-laws in Mhaisal. The locality of Mhaisal was full of lush green fields, evergreen crops, ranges of tamarind and Banyan trees, coconut trees dispersed across fields and dancing peacocks. So, I started liking Mhaisal because of the serene nature and peaceful atmosphere.

On the left side of the road, one can see Shinde Sarkar's bungalows, Wadas, and Rayat Shikshan Sanstha's High School on Narwad road. On the right side of the road there are small houses, two-storey houses with English style shingles, Temple domes, marketplace, and hardworking people. So, I was very fond of Mhaisal village. In one of these narrow streets was Shri Balu Tuka Ghorpade's simple mud-shingled house, and his friends Bhagle and Thorat's houses.

Renuka Devi's 'Mahaprasad' was carried out on large scale in Mhaisal. This festival was held under the leadership of Kishor Baba Shinde – Mhaisalkar. I got acquainted with Balu Tuka Ghorpade, Lt. Kishor Baba Shinde, Dr. Shashi Baba Shinde, Dr. Jaysingrao Shinde, Shri Deepak Baba Shinde, Shri Manoj Baba Shinde, Shri Ratan Baba Shinde, Shri Parshu Baba Shinde, Lt. Kedarrao Shinde, respected Patil family, and Kabure, etc.

I was visiting Akkol and also Kolhapur once in a while for Shri's Darshan on Sundays. Days were passing by happily. Guru Bandhus (People bonded together by the same Guru) were increasing. I was getting lot of love and warmth. But my financial situation was moving towards bankruptcy. However, my trust, faith and devotion to Maharaj was never compromised. I was confident that better days were going to come.

On one such day, I had gone to Akkol. Shri Ramesh Maharaj and Girija Vahini had gone to watch N. G. Balappa's theater play called 'Kittur Rani Chennama' at night. This show was played in a temporary tent near the school. Kaka, Aai, and Laxman were sleeping at home. I was sleeping in the living room. I woke up in the middle of the night from the sound of 'Khadava' (wooden sandals worn by Saints). Somebody came walking down the stairs wearing 'Khadava' making a 'khad khad' sound. The sound was slowly getting louder and louder. I was scared and could not think anything. I was not able to understand who was standing in front of me wearing 'Khadava'? The entire room was filled with bright light and a fragrance had spread. It was either Shri Datta Maharaj's manifestation or some Saint person's presence. I had covered my face with a blanket. But I could see a beam of very bright light through it. However, it did not occur to me that I should bow down to His feet or submit myself to Him. This was either because I was frightened or maybe because I was unfortunate. In a nutshell, I was very unlucky in this incident. I did not take off the blanket from my face or get up. In a few moments, Datta Maharaj left through the door near the living room and the sound of footsteps from the wooden 'Khadava' faded away. I kept listening to those sounds on the bed. I stayed in that position for a long time, and I did not make up my mind to get up. Later, I heard somebody knocking on the door. I somehow managed to get up and open the door. It was Shri Ramesh Maharaj and Vahini. I touched his feet as soon as he came in. He saw me sweating and asked "Why are you so frightened? Are you scared? What happened?" I narrated the entire incident to him. On this, he said, "Looks like Swari had come. You should have taken His Darshan?" Upon hearing this, I did not say anything about it. Later, I laid on the bed but was unable to sleep that night.

In the morning, I met Shri Ramesh Maharaj. He said I had Datta Darshan opportunity last night. However, we can say that I wasn't lucky enough to grab that rare opportunity. I used to visit some nearby holy places sometimes. But at such a young age, I had the opportunity to visit Shri Kshetra Kashi. I had heard of many of Kashi's Saints, Sanyasis, Satpurushs (Godmen), Dandi (Stick bearing) Swamis, life essence bearing Ganga River, and the motherly reverence of this Ganga River, all of which originated from Kashi since the beginning of time. The prospect of going to Shri Kshetra Kashi came because of Chaya Kaku Kulkarni's elder son Arun's marriage.

Shri Arun Kulkarni's marriage was fixed with Dehradun's Major Basuri's daughter. Lt. Shri Vasantryao Kulkarni (Kaka) had given me an invitation for this marriage and insisted me to come. On the evening of 14 April 1980, I, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Girija Vahini, and Smt. Manikta Kulkundri boarded the Sahyadri Express train. In the morning, we went to Shri Mandke's house in Pune. At 4.50 PM, we started the next leg of our journey in the Jammu Tawi Express train. We reached Delhi on 14 April 1980 at 6.30 PM, via Daund, Manmad, Itarsi, Bhopal, and Ranchi. We stayed in Shri Arun Kulkarni's house in Delhi. On Thursday, 17 April 1980, we reached Dehradun by Delhi – Dehradun train. I had read that Dehradun was a cold place. But it was very hot there. On Friday, 18 April 1980, we visited Masuri. It is about 40 to 50 Kilometers from Dehradun. Masuri is in the footsteps of the Himalayan Mountain range and it was very cold there. This is truly a tourist place. We could see the peaks of the snow-laden tall Himalayan mountains. God must have painted His beautiful thoughts in the golden Himalayas. I felt as if the Himalayan peaks were calling me, but I had to return.

In the evening, after wrapping up Arun's marriage ceremony, we left for Rishikesh and stayed there. On 19 April 1980, I bathed in river Ganga for the first time in my life. Ganga's water is very cold. I felt that Rishikesh is a heaven on earth. The long-running Ganga River, its riverbanks, small Temples on its banks, visible mountains and cliffs on one side, dense trees, infinite number of devotees, sunset and its golden rays falling on the Ganga river summarize the Godly form of Rishikesh. The scenery is truly mesmerizing. The winding road to Badrinath – Kedarnath from the other side of the river, Swami Shivanand's Ashram, Laxman Jhula, small but beautiful hamlets near the mountains, smoke and fog over these communities, and a mix of silent and fiery appearing flow of the river, was a dream creation of the Almighty. Many people were walking along the banks of Ganga River.

We stayed in a Dharmshala (Caravanserai – A lodge built for travelers) built by somebody named Baba Kali Kamlewala. We left Rishikesh on 20 April 1980 at 10 AM and reached Haridwar at 11 PM. Haridwar is a District place and is densely populated. There is a bridge on the river and iron chains are hanging from it. The riverbank is stretched long and has equally long railings, chains, and cement barricades. Ganga River has strong currents in Haridwar. So, one has to hold the chains while bathing. In the afternoon, I bathed on the Hari steps. Very soon, Kumbh Mela was going to be organized there. So, many Sadhus, Saints, Sanyasis, Yogis, Atmagyaanis had started coming to Haridwar in groups for Darshan of Ganga River and other deities. It was a big crowd of spiritual enthusiasts. Many were dipping in Ganga River to wash away their sins. Some were conducting Pooja, pande and other religious rituals. Many spiritual devotees were offering flowers, fruits, and food to Sadhus and Saints, and were thus expressing their faith and devotion.

Decorated camels and elephants could be seen at places. Nagna (Naked) Sadhus were walking around holding gold and silver batons in groups. Some Sadhus were wearing only a 'langot' (A

piece of cloth worn around the loins covering the privities) whereas others were wearing saffron clothes. Many were bald, holding flags, carrying batons, and some were covered in ashes. In many places, long-haired Sadhus could be seen sitting in front of a Dhuni (Fire pit).

One could sense the Godly bliss of the humble Sadhus, Brahmacharis (Celibates), and Yoga Mudra Sadhus. The Hari steps were crowded by people wanting to bathe in the Ganga River. Loud and indistinct sound from this crowd and from the Temple bells had occupied the entire surrounding. We took bath in such a mystic and energetic environment. At 7 PM, Aarti of the Temple and Ganga River on Hari Ghat started. We saw people dressed in various costumes and colors. We also got an opportunity to see different kinds of Sadhus, Bairagis, Sanyasis, Brahmacharis, Hathyogis, and Naked Sadhus from all over India during this Aarti. We left Haridwar after the Aarti was over.

Our further journey resumed. On 21 April 1980, we reached our country's capital - New Delhi. We visited various sightseeing locations in and around Delhi the next day. It cost only Rs. 25 to visit these tourist places. On 23 April 1980, at 7 AM, we left to visit the world-famous Taj Mahal. The bus fare was Rs. 30. We also visited Fatehpur Sikri, Samadhi of Sheikh Salim Chishti, Dargah, and Lord Shri Krishna's land - Mathura Bazaar. In the evening, we boarded the Banaras Express train towards Kashi. The railway fare in those days was only Rs. 36. On Saturday, 26 April 1980, at 9 AM, we bathed in the 'Sangam' of Allahabad - Prayag. In this 'Sangam', three rivers namely Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati meet. (As per legends, Saraswati River flows secretly without any physical form). We did a regular Pooja and a Ganga Pooja. In the evening, we saw Pandit Nehru's birthplace called Anand Bhavan, Samrat Chakravarti Ashoka's fort, and the Akshayavat (Sacred fig tree) within the fort. We stayed in Allahabad that day. The summer heat was intensifying. On Sunday, 27 April 1980, at 5 AM, we boarded a train and reached Kashi at 11 AM. The importance of Shri Kshetra Kashi and the holy bathing in the Ganga River is described in many religious books and scriptures. Hindus believe that bathing at this place in Ganga River erases all sins from one's human life and the person lives happily. And, if one dies at this place, then that person goes to heaven.

There were many narrow streets in old Kashi with small, sweet shops on either side of the streets. We could smell fried jalebis, mustard oil's slightly musty smell, fried puris, pakodas, milk products, tea, and Bhaang (A popular drink made from milk and special leaves). It seemed as if these shops existed since many years.

Our overnight stay was at Maharashtra Bhavan. Shri Dev Guruji and Pitre Guruji, both Maharashtrian, oversaw the management of Maharashtra Bhavan. We bathed in the Ganga River in the afternoon. The steps on the riverbank were hot because of the sun. This place has many Ghats (Constructed riverbanks). An infinite number of people and groups of Sadhus from all over India come on the steps of these Ghats to bathe in the river and make themselves pious. The

sights of umbrellas made from grass and cloth, religious rituals carried out through small boats and the baths going on in the river were all-encompassing and lively. Bathing in Ganga is considered a pious ritual. This importance of bath in Ganga River has been established in Indian culture since many eras. Indians across villages, towns and cities are aware of the sacredness and significance of this bath in Ganga River. Such sacred places need to be visited so that all the good karma performed during the journey of a person from the lifecycle of past, present, and future results into meaningful gain for that person. Any human being always tries best to ensure that all personal desires are fulfilled during the lifetime. However, it is equally true that it's not necessary that all of them are realized. The struggle between sins and goodness always keeps occurring in the human mind. The human life is always engrossed with the fear about death, its touch and tries to do anything to avoid an encounter with death. It is said that a bath in Ganga River and Shri Kashi Vishwanath's Darshan needs to be done to achieve progress in the spiritual journey of human life and set the soul free from the fear of death.

After bathing in Ganga, we took Darshan of Shri Kashi Vishwanath and did a religious ritual as well. In the evening, we visited Kashi – Banaras, Banaras Vishwavidyalaya and some religious places. Our overnight stay was in Shri Kshetra Kashi. On 29 April 1980, at 11 AM, we left for Shri Kshetra-Shri Ram's birthplace, Ayodhya by a train and reached there in the evening. There too we stayed in a Maharashtra Bhavan. The next day, we bathed in the Saryu River. This river is very wide, and the water has very strong currents. The national highway going to Nepal passes over a two-mile-long bridge on this river. We took Darshan of Shri Ram's birthplace and Babari Masjid. Both are close by. Further, we had the Darshan of Hanuman Garhi (A Temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman). The small Shri Ram Temples in every house, tiny Temple domes, and the sounds of bells ringing during Aarti were unforgettable. Hindus and Muslims live happily in Ayodhya. The railway station premises near Hanuman Garhi is filled with red-faced monkeys.

After staying in Shri Kshetra Ayodhya, we said goodbye to it and started our return journey to Shri Kshetra Kashi – Banaras on 30 April 1980 at 12.30 PM. We reached there at 4 PM. After bathing in the Ganga River and taking Shri Kashi Vishwanath's Darshan, we purchased small bottles of Ganga water and black thread bundles as Prasad. In the evening, we stayed in Chandrashekhar Swami's apartment in Shastri Nagar.

Dr. Chandrashekhar Swami was the 'Pithacharya' of Adimal's Shri Kshetra near Nippani. (Adi is a small village in Belgaum District in Karnataka). In 1972, I was introduced to him at his student Shri Chandrakude's house in Nippani. Dr. Chandrashekhar was a professor at Banaras University. He was a 'Dixit' (One who has taken Diksha) student of Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj and he was a Brahmachari. He was a Sanyasi personality from a rural village in Belgaum District. I was meeting him after many years, and I was looking forward to it. Dr. Chandrashekar was Shri Ramesh Maharaj's relative, Shri Kitannama (Krishnarao) Deshpande's Guru. Whenever he visited Adi Mathi (Monastery), he would stay in Kitannama's house in Belgaum's Deshpande

Galli. I had heard that he worshipped Goddess Raj Rajeshwari. Kitannama had given diksha to many disciples. One of those disciples was Shri Ramesh Maharaj's mother. We stayed in Swami's luxurious apartment and relaxed there. The summer heat that day had almost burned us.

His housemaid made us comfortable in the living room and turned on the fan. There were many pictures on the wall. Some of them were of Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj and his disciples. The maid informed us that Swamiji was soon to arrive. Swamiji wore saffron clothes, had dense hair, medium height, and a dark complexion. We bowed down to him. He lovingly enquired about us.

I refreshed my memories. I could not believe that I was meeting Swamiji in-person and not in a dream. Even after so many years, I have not forgotten his personality and this meeting with him. I spent some time talking to my Guru Bandhu (Brothers bonded through a common Guru) Shri Sitaramdada Pandey, Dadi, etc. Girija Vahini and Smt. Maniktai slept early as they were tired from the travel. I and Shri Ramesh Maharaj entered Swamiji's room. Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj's picture and his Padukas were kept there. We bowed down to the Padukas. Sitaramdada Pandey and Swamiji were Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj's close disciples. In our first meet, I had thought that Swamiji was a simple and common man. But through our conversations, I started realizing his divine powers. I started developing surprising respect and faith in him. Indian culture is very old. It is the best. Even though this culture has been attacked through ages, it has persisted. It is preserved because, Saints, Mahatmas, and such jewels were born here in many generations. This nation was formed through Jivatma, Parmatma, Parmeshwar, and enlightened Mahatmas.

Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj was awarded Padma Bhushan, Padmashri, Mahamahopadhyaya, Doctorate, and many such titles. He was a loving and humble person. He knew many languages. His Gurudev was Bengali Swami Vishuddhananda. Swami Vishuddhananda's Guru was MahAvatar (ParamAvatar) Babaji. This was a Tantrik Sampraday within Yog Sampraday. In those days, there was not a single book about the lives of ParamAvatar Babaji, Swami Vishuddhananda, or Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj. At least, I did not have any information about them. During our meeting, Swamiji and Sitaramdada Pandey spoke about the meaning of God's words, devotion, soul, divinity, life's ultimate goal, body's heavy form, yog Sadhana, Goddess Raj Rajeshwari's worship, human mindset, cosmology, and meditation perception, etc. I just listened.

Now, midnight had passed. We said good night to Swamiji. I slept thinking about his childlike innocence, gentle posture, and loving yet mysterious Sadhana that had filled his divine life. Thanks to my predestination, I was now familiar with a 'Satpurush' (Godman, Righteous person)

and through whom I was introduced to an 'Adhikari Purush' and famous scholar, Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj.

After some years, from the year 2000, through the company of Siddh Yogis, Swami Yoganand's storybook, and Dr. Ram Bhosale's 'Divyaspārshi' book, I became familiar with ParamAvatarī Babaji's 'Yog Marg' (Path of Yoga).

On 1 May 1980, at 11.30 AM, we bowed to Param Pujya Chandrashekhara Swami and boarded the Varanasi - Dadar Express train for our return journey. The fare from Varanasi to Pune in those days was only Rs. 63. We reached Bhusaval and thus entered the land of Maharashtra on 2 May 1980, at 11 AM. At night, Nagpur - Kolhapur Maharashtra Express train compartments were attached to the Nagpur-Kolhapur train. We reached Pune on Saturday, 3 May 1980, at 7 AM and arrived in Kolhapur at 3.30 PM. Shri Ramesh Maharaj's Aunt (Mother's sister) Sarojini Vasantrao Kulkarni lived near the Kolhapur Railway Station in the Sykes Extension area. After freshening up at her house, we took Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi Darshan and completed our three-week journey. Our entire trip was filled with Shri Kshetra Darshans and meeting 'Satpurushs'. All of this happened because of Shri Ramesh Maharaj and through his blessings. That day we stayed in Kumbhojkar Aunt's house in Kolhapur. The next day, on 4 May 1980, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Girija Vahini, and Smt. Manikta Kalkundri left to Akkol in the morning, and I headed back to Miraj by a train.

I took some rest in Miraj. I was worn-out from the travel and with the summer on top of it, I fell sick. My one month leave for Shri Kshetra Kashi's journey, was now over.

On 15 May 1980, I reported back to the office. I continued visiting Kolhapur, Akkol, Shripant Balekundri, etc for Shri Darshan. On every 'Purnima' (Full moon day), I followed my rule of going to Narsinhwadi for Shri Darshan. In those days, on 15 July 1980, Param Pujya Dr. Chandrashekhara Swami had come to Adi Math (Adi monastery near Nippani) from Kashi. I went to take his Darshan, but I could not meet him. He had gone somewhere for some work.

My job was consuming a lot of my time. The number of devotees coming for Aarti was increasing. Due to this, some people had to stand on the road during the Aarti. So, I decided to construct a new 'Mathi' to make Shri's Aarti more convenient and make my 'Guru Brothers' and fellow devotees comfortable. This new 'Mathi' was also going to help me reduce my life's travel and stabilize myself. In those days, my base pay was Rs. 585.80. After deducting Rs. 20 for the providence fund and Rs. 4 professional tax, I was getting only Rs. 561.80 in hand. So, constructing a new Temple was difficult. During this time frame, one of the walls in our neighbor, Shri Bedage's house was about to fall. Hence, we decided to demolish the old house and started constructing a new 'Mathi' on Tuesday, 5 August 1980.

Between Friday, 15 August 1980 and Monday, 18 August 1980, I had Darshans of our family deity Shikhar Shinganapur, Shri Shambhu Mahadev, Shri Gondavalekar Maharaj, and Shri Sai Baba. After the Darshan, I stayed in Shirdi. On 27 August 1980, I had a holy bath during the Kumbh Mela festival in Nashik. In the evening, I had Shri Dnyaneshwar's Darshan in Alandi (District Pune, Maharashtra) and stayed there. I returned to Miraj the next day.

Soon enough, Shravandhara and Shravan were over. Bhadrapad month began. The rains were heavy. All farming-related activities had begun. On Friday, 26 September 1980, the 'Kanyagat' festival began in Narsinhwadi. This festival is held when the planet Guru (Jupiter) enters Kanya Raashi. About 100,000 to 150,000 people had gathered for the holy bathing. Crowds were expected to grow in the next month. After bathing in this 'Kanyagat' festival, I went to Akkol and after meeting Aai and Kaka, I returned to Miraj.

Bhadrapad month was half over. Black clouds were forming in the sky. Due to the strong cold winds and frequent rains, the atmosphere had become clammy. I was not feeling well and was staying at home. Shri Ramesh Maharaj had come along with Kaka to Dr. Mudholkar's hospital in Miraj. Kaka was feeling weak and was panting while breathing. So, he was admitted to Dr. Mudholkar's hospital. Aai had accompanied them. I went to the hospital early in the morning. Kaka was sitting. I bowed down to him and enquired about his health. He said, "I am better" and asked me "Did you sell the white bull from your cowshed? Are you done breaking the wood"? I did not understand what he was asking. I just sat there. Shri Ramesh Maharaj had gone out to get some medicines. Aai was preparing Kaka's lunch. Kaka's sentences and talks though felt weird to me. Kaka and Aai had decided to go to Shri Kshetra Pant Balekundri after doing a health checkup. So, they had brought clothes, jewelry, and cash accordingly. But since Kaka had to be admitted, Aai gave me some cash and jewelry to keep safely. In the beginning, I did not dare to accept it and keep it my little house. Even then, I accepted all of the things she gave and kept them at my house. I took a leave from my job so that I could conduct some services to Kaka. He was not getting any better as the day progressed. In the evening, at 4 PM, under the guidance of Dr. R. V. Mudholkar, we admitted Kaka in the better equipped Mission hospital. The next steps of investigations were carried out under the guidance of Dr. Lomte. Kaka climbed the steps by himself and got admitted. Shri Ramesh Maharaj went down to get some medicines. Kaka drank the tea made by Aai with his own hands and he asked Aai to make some coffee for herself. Aai had coffee and was washing the utensils. I was sitting near Kaka's feet. At that moment Kaka laid down his body silently.

It was Tuesday, 7 October 1980 – (Bhadrapad # 14), evening 8.20 PM. I had a loud outcry. Aai fell unconscious. Shri Ramesh Maharaj arrived at that moment. Nobody could figure out what to do. Who should steady whom? Who should console him? But sitting there and crying was

not the right way. It was not the time. I steadied myself and started preparing for the next steps with tears in my eyes. We left Miraj at 11 PM, after informing every one of the sad news and reached Akkol at 2 AM with Kaka's body, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Aai, and Kolhapur's Kumbhojkar Aunty. At 4 AM, Kaka's body was cremated with mantra chanting. We returned home at 7 AM.

Time had taken away a loving fatherly figure. Old generation's honest, selfless, generous, merciful, compassionate, innocent, and devout Kaka had left us and merged into the infinity. The house was filled with relatives, farmers, and villagers. The Sarkar Wada was insufficient to accommodate the crowd. Shri Ramesh Maharaj's sisters, Maniktai, Shalutai, Kalkundri were consoling Aai. Ramesh Maharaj was sitting numbed. His fatherly umbrella was gone. He was crying like a small child in front of the people who came to console the family. Days started passing by. On Tuesday, 21 October 1980, Kaka's 13th-day rituals were performed. About 1000 to 1500 people had prasad. Relatives started returning to their homes. Slowly, Sarkar Wada started emptying. I returned the cash and Aai's jewelry that Kaka had given me to Shri Ramesh Maharaj. I took Kaka's leather chappals (Footwear) as a blessing and left the Wada with teary eyes. Even today, those chappals are in Miraj Mathi and I do their Pooja.

After Kaka's death, I was depressed. It was due to our previous life's loving relations that I met a Godly-quality person in the form of Kaka. He was Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri's devotee. His elder brother Gurunath Kulkarni was married to Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri's brother's (Shri Gopalrao's) daughter. Shri Pant Maharaj frequently came to this 'Sarkar Wada'. He used to sing Bhajans and dance using 'Tipris' (Small dandiya sticks). He considered Akkol as his mother's place. He had love, affection, and blessings on this village. Many people from this village were his 'Dixit' students. Now, between Saturday 25 October 1980 to Monday 27 October 1980, Maharaj's Amrut Mohastav (Festival) was held in Shri Pant Balekundri. Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri's father was Shri Ramchandra Balkrushna Kulkarni, and his mother was Godakka a.k.a Sitaai. Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri was born at his maternal grandfather's house in Daddi (District Belgaum, Karnataka) on Shravan Vadya Gokul Ashtami 3 September 1855 at 3 PM. Because there was no school in Balekundri in those days, Shri Pant Maharaj's elementary education was completed in Daddi village in Kannada language from 1864 to 1872. His English education was in Belgaum in London Mission School. During his education, he worked there as a teacher. In 1875, due to his predestination, he was amazingly blessed by the grace of Paramhans Siddh Purush Saint 'Huchh Ballappa' (Bal Mukund Balavadhut. Huchh in Kannada is a mad person. Ballappa is a short name for Balavadhut).

Shri Pant Maharaj's spiritual life's progress started because of Shri Saint Balavadhut. In the early 19th century in the year 1818, 'Peshwai' finished. (Peshwas were the prime ministers of Maratha kingdom. Peshwai means the rule of Peshwas). Maratha Empire was sunken and thus Britisher's full control of India began. Hindu religion was disregarded. Signs of immorality could

be seen everywhere. Dualism, sensory pleasures, undesired customs, 'Karmkand' (The section of the Vedas that gives importance to religious rituals), caste discrimination, 'Sowala' (a belief that only bathing makes a person pure for carrying out religious rituals), etc had gained prominence and made the religion obstinate. Saint Balavadhut was born in such an era. His real name was Balaji Anant Kulkarni. He was born in Parishwad (District Belgaum, Karnataka). His financial situation was decent. He had a family life. His children were Gopalappa, Rangappa, and Tungavva.

But due to his predestination, he did not enjoy his family life. He instead spent time in the company of Buvas, Bairagis, and Saints. As a result of his Penance, tough Yog Sadhana, and the fellowship of Saints, he had the grace of Shri Ramavadhut. Shri Ramavadhut had the grace of Shri Dev Dattatray. Shri Ramavadhut gave diksha of the eternal Siddh Avadhut Pant to Shri Ballappa and showed him the way of the world's emancipation and upliftment of society. Balavadhut (Ballappa) now started remaining in his own pleasure of consciousness of being. He left his family and started roaming around in the farms and hills. Because of his external appearance with a long beard and hair, people started calling him Huchh Ballappa (Mad Ballappa). His frequent destinations were Daddi, Belgaum, Malaprabha, and Kabri-ban (a garden near Parishawad in Belgaum District of Karnataka).

Once, Saint Balavadhut went to Shri Pant Maharaj's mother's brother's house in Daddi. Through his curses and blessings, He gave 'Diksha' of Avdhut Panth through a religious ritual to Shri Pant Maharaj. Thus, Saint Balavadhut assigned the tasks of Avadhut Sampraday to Shri Pant Maharaj. It was the day of Ashwin Vadya Dwadashi (a.k.a Guru Dwadashi). For the next 25 years, Shri Pant Maharaj continued the tasks of Avadhut Sampraday and thus kept its flag waiving as per the instructions from Shri Sadguru Balavadhut. His brothers Govindpant, Gopalpant, Vamanrao, Narsinhrao, and many of His students carried this flag on their shoulders and showered the blessings of Avadhut on everyone. Shri Pant Maharaj was married to his mother's brother's daughter Yamannaka on 18 April 1882 in Raibag (District Belgaum). Even though he lived in married family life, he had many spiritual experiences. He worked as a teacher for 22 years from 1881 to 1903 in London Mission School. In 1877, Kartik month, Saint Ballappa went to 'ShriShailya' (Took Samadhi). Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri wrote 'Shri Datta Prem Lahari' (2757 poems) and spread the curiosity of Bhajans, love towards the Guru, 'Advait' (The doctrine of the identity of the human soul and the divine essence) and narrated experiences. He thus made Bhajans all-encompassing. He made the world 'Avadhutmay' (Separated from sensuous or carnal affections).

Shri Pant Maharaj ended his Avatar in Ashwin month Vadya 3 Shake 1827 i.e on Monday early morning at 3.30 AM of 16 October 1905 in Shri Kshetra Pant Balekundri. In the year 1980, the Amrut Mahotsav (Festival marking the 75th year) of such a great Saint, Shri Datta's incarnation,

Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri was to be celebrated in pomp. It was to be held under the guidance of Shri Appasaheb Pant Balekundrikar, Annasaheb Pant Balekundrikar. To make this happen, their whole family and devotees worked tirelessly for a year.

On Saturday, 25 October 1980, at 8 AM, devotees started a large procession with Shri Pant Maharaj's photo frame from Shri Pant Wada in Belgaum. With elephants, horses, camels, musical bands, large drums of Bhajan groups, 'Halgis' (small drums), and 'Tutaris' (A wind instrument like a horn), the city of Belgaum was mesmerized in the atmosphere. At 9 PM, a flag symbolizing love was raised followed by big fireworks. The main day of this festival was on 26 October 1980. Palanquin procession is the most important service of the day. A very large crowd had gathered for it. The whole 'Ambrail' (Mango garden) area of Belgaum was filled with light from the fire-works and sounds from the Bhajans. On 27 October 1980, prasad distribution was done in a disciplined manner. At noon, a ceremonial cannon was fired, and everybody started taking the prasad. This was my life's unforgettable festival. I believe that everyone should participate, feel satisfied, watching this festival and palanquin procession, once in their lifetime. Lt. Kaka wanted to participate in this festival. But that did not happen. So, I and Shri Ramesh Maharaj were sad about it.

I did not realize how quickly the year 1980 passed. Time flew through my job, daily commute, visiting 'Guru Brothers' houses, attending festivals like Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj 'Jayanti' (birth anniversary), 'Punyatithi' (Samadhi anniversary), 'Gurudwadashi', 'Mahaprasad' and Darshan, etc.

It was not possible to take all 'Guru Brothers' and devotees to Kolhapur with me. Hence, we gave a public form to the festival held in Akkatai Jadhav's residence in Miraj and did a 'Mahaprasad'. Execution of all tasks of the Jayanti and Punyatithi festivals was handed to Shri Anna Ghewari, Shankarrao Sakharam Kamble, and Shivajirao Jadhav. The Jayanti and Punyatithi were 7-day festivals. In these 7 days, programs like Bhajans and Kirtans started. Due to many 'Guru Brothers' and innumerable devotees, Jadhav's house was very small to accommodate all of them. The rain on Shravan Vadya Dashmi (Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Punyatithi) and Gokul Ashtami, was making the prasad programs difficult. Even if 'Mahaprasad' was carried out in a temporary canopy over Pawar's big yard in front of Jadhav's residence, it was still inadequate. The troubles due to insufficient land were not resolving. In the meantime, I demolished the old 'Mathi' and built a new one using baked bricks and mud. It was inaugurated by the auspicious hands of Punyashlok Maisaheb Shirke and Shri Balasaheb Shirke. They had brought a 4 feet x 3 feet picture of Maharaj. The 'Mahaprasad' was carried out from this place, but even then the space was inadequate to accommodate everyone.

Thinking of the next 25 years and after consulting with 'Guru Brothers' and fellow devotees, it was decided to purchase Shri Madhukar Khade's half-acre farmland on Malgaon road for this purpose. Their family members were devotees of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj even before me. The contract was signed, and money was handed over. But due to difficulties in construction permits, official land measurements, etc., this topic was closed.

The next two-three years passed. It was unlikely to get a big piece of land in Krishna Ghat. I was doing Pooja of Shri Krishna Buva's Samadhi in Krishna Ghat. During this time, our Miraj Mathi had to be repainted. Paint for this project was purchased from Shri Shrishailya Shindgi's store. He introduced me to a painter named Shri Shankar Dhavale and fixed him for this project. As I became more familiar with painter Dhavale, I casually asked him, "Painter, where do you come from"? He replied, "From Mhaisal Station". Out of curiosity, I then asked him, "How is the area of Mhaisal Station"? He answered, "All the people living near the Station are farmers. They are poor people and are dependent on agricultural income. It is a calm area and is close to both Mhaisal and Miraj. I came in 30 minutes from there to here on a bicycle". I too wanted such a peaceful place for Datta Mathi. But all of this was dependent on Shri Datta Maharaj's blessings. I asked the painter, "Look for a place for Shri Datta Mathi for me". Painter agreed and said "Ok. I will see". A few days passed and one day painter came in the morning to Miraj Mathi. As soon as the Pooja and Aarti were over, he said "My cousin father-in-law's 6.5 Guntha land is for sale. See if you want it for Datta Mathi". I told him, "Bring the 7/12 extract record and map of the land and also ask the rate".

Within the next two months, Shri Dhavale brought the 7/12 extract record, map, and conveyed a rate of Rs. 2,000 per Guntha. I was very happy that a land for Mathi was going to be available. I started feeling that I should buy this land through some bank proposals and arrangements. But my salary in those days was Rs. 899.60. After all deductions, the in-hand amount was Rs. 851.60. It was already hard to pay for home expenses and my father's medical expenses. One part of my mind was saying that it was difficult to purchase land for the Mathi, whereas the other part of my mind was saying that I should at least see the land. Because I could not arrange the money, I was hesitant to see the land even after Shri Dhavale painter asked me to check it out. Through his persistence and eagerness, I went to Mhaisal Station along with my engineer friend Shri Ajay Bhokare on a scooter. This was in the year 1983. The road wasn't meant for a scooter. It was for a bullock cart and was full of dust and potholes. It was narrow in some spots while broad in others. The extensive land on either side of the road was yellow and grey colored. It was filled with 'Babhal' (A wild tree with sharp pricks) and lime trees. There were green bushes in the troughs. The land appeared red because of the sun. After walking for some time, I could see a few farms, communities, small huts, tents, kids playing in the front, stacked firewood, stones arranged together as stoves for cooking, and old people consoling their crying kids. Bullock carts were lying on the roadside and the dogs were intermittently

barking on each other. I could not see many crops in the farms. The community was of 30 to 35 dwellings. The only source of income for the people here was working as laborers in the farms. Most of these houses did not have any walls. Their roofs were covered with sugarcane leaves. The tents did not have any doors or locks. Now, we crossed this community and reached Mhaisal Station. There were no people at the Station. Trains though stopped here and went on their way. Any passengers on this Station were merely an exception.

Shri Shankar Dhavale, the painter, had come to receive us at the Station. He took us to his home. It was not really a house but a small hut. The heat from the sun was immense. We were tired of walking and that had made us thirsty and hungry. But there were no restaurants etc. The land was in front of Shri Dhavale's house. It was neither plowed nor cultivated. Since it was unused, neighboring farmers were using it for processing their crops. A round stone rail was seen lying on the ground. The land was approximately 6.5 Gunthas. There was an unpaved road in front of it. Dhavale painter showed us the land and gave information about it. After having the 'Pohe' (beaten rice) and tea offered by him, we started our return trip to Miraj. About 20-25 small huts could be seen. Some were built in unbaked mud, some had mud-shingle roofs. But every house had a holy basil tree in the front. Cowsheds and bullock carts were right next to the houses. The road did not appear to be from a village or town. There were some 'Babhal', lime, and mango trees near the road. Only an unpaved road leading to Mhaisal was there. A small elementary school could be seen on the other side of this road.

Now, we were returning. Shri Dhavale had come to see us off until a place called 'Haroticha Mala'. The sun was setting, and the horizon looked orange. Wind from the east had started blowing. I and Shri Bhokare were on our way to Miraj. We both had liked the land.

While sleeping at night, I reflected on the land. I was already looking for a calm and peaceful place near Miraj. Earlier, I had seen Shri Madhukar Khade's land on Malgaon road and Shri Gaikwad's land near the water tank near 'Haroticha Mala'. But the later had quoted a high price for it. Dr. Jaisingrao Shinde (Mhaisalkar) had also tried looking for a piece of land in Mhaisal village, but it was not working out. Will I be able to get this land? Such questions were coming to my mind. And because of such doubts, many more questions were piling up in my mind. After I am gone, will all of this continue? I did not know anyone there. Shri Dhavale painter was not native to this place either. I knew of Shri Tuka Ghorpade (Anna) who lived in Mhaisal. He was Shri Vilasrao Ghorpade's father-in-law. I thought about all of this until late-night that day and did not realize when I fell deep asleep after the day's travel and the walking. When I woke up, I felt that I should keep laying down some more. It was late in the morning and Shri Dhavale painter was already at the door.

He said the land belongs to the three brothers Shri Ramu Shinde, Shri Gunda Shinde, and Shri Banda Shinde. They were ready to sell it for Rs. 2,000 per Guntha. I told him that I will think about it and let him know. Soon after, I reached my office.

Some days passed. Shri Ajay Bhokare was asking about my thoughts of purchasing this land. Shri Dhavale painter was also asking about it. I too had liked the land. But I was not able to arrange the money.

One day, I went to see this land again by myself on a bicycle. Those were rainy days. The clouds had formed and everywhere around was green. The farms were wet and muddy. Some farmers were laying seeds. It was the right time for seeding of the pulses. The communities appeared to be calmer than before. There were no bullock carts or kids playing in front of the houses. After crossing the railway tracks, I sat down and observed the school across the road, huts around, mango and lime trees in the distance, and simple people living in simple houses. There was no traffic on the road. Everything was calm and peaceful.

I was feeling the cold breeze. Shri Dhavale painter was not at his house. So, I could not meet him. I went to the school. But it was closed as it was a Sunday. The school had four classrooms built in white mud. Some of them did not have doors. The school trusses were made from tree trunks ('Melia dubia' trees). Some proverbs were written on these trusses with chalk. All of the rooms had sparrow nests and these birds were chirping as they came and left. The school had a large playground. There was a banian tree on one side of the ground.

I waited for the painter and left. The sun was setting. A herd of sheep was passing by. The sheep's peculiar voice and the shepherd's loud calls could be heard. The sheep were walking with their heads down. The dogs were barking. I saw some tents near the bourn. The bourn didn't have any water in it for a couple of years. 'Nivdung' (Cactus), 'Kenjaal', and 'Nirgundi' (Chinese chaste tree, *Vitex negundo*) plants had sprung near the bourn. I reached Miraj at night.

Miraj to Mhaisal Station distance is not much. It is 8 KM from the middle road, 7 KM through 'Haroticha Mala', and 5 KM by train. It is a peaceful village. Most people lived on farms. On my second trip to this village, I fell in love with it. I liked the place from the bottom of my heart.

That day I could not sleep for a long time. Many thoughts were coming to my mind. When should I buy the land? I should construct a Temple of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj. Who will look after the Temple? My job requires me to travel. The most important of all was, how to arrange the money to buy this land? Nobody from my circle lives there and I will be lonely. There wouldn't be anyone showing that I belong to them. I did not realize when I fell asleep with these thoughts.

That night, I had an amazing dream. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj was standing on that land saying, "Tanaji is there. Don't worry." I woke up immediately. I was sweating throughout my body. I sat on the bed thinking about the dream. Maharaj had shown me the path of that land, the Temple, and its further management. I slept with a ripple of happiness in my mind. I woke up early in the morning and after completing the daily Pooja, I left for the office. On that day, I met Shri Dhavale painter, and finalized the land.

In those days, my total salary was Rs. 1085.40. I decided to withdraw some money from my providence fund and borrow the remaining amount from 'Bhishi' (Bhishi is a popular social money pooling mechanism. A pre-decided amount is contributed by a group of people and given to one person). Its interest was 5% every month for every 100 rupees borrowed.

On 21 October 1985, an official land measurement of 'Gat' number 279 was conducted by the Sangli District Survey office. (The literal meaning of 'Gat' is a group. It is used to identify a piece of land in official records). After a month on 21 November 1985, this 6.5 'Guntha' land was purchased from Shri Rama Ganu Shinde, Shri Gunda Ganu Shinde, and Shri Banda Ganu Shinde of Mhaisal for Rs. 13,000 through an official purchase deed. On 18 October 1985, a Pooja of the land was conducted in the morning by the auspicious hands of Param Puja Govind Maharaj Kulkarni of Sangli and Lt. Keshavrao Chougule of Miraj. The building plan was created by my friend Shri Ajay Bhokare. It was Shri Gondavalekar Maharaj's Jayanti day. The budget for the Temple for Rs. 30,000. The construction material and expenses for the Temple were as follows. 5 trucks of stone at Rs. 240 per brass totaling Rs. 2,400 were purchased from Shri Rambhau Pawar; 20 bags of ACC cement at Rs. 65 per bag totaling Rs. 1,300 were purchased from Shri Nivrutti Khade; 3 trucks of sand at Rs. 350 per truck totaling Rs. 1,050, and steel of Rs. 2,500 were purchased from D. G. Sales Miraj. Labor for digging trenches for the foundation was Rs. 10 per person per day, totaling Rs. 80. Mohan carpenter's labor was Rs. 400. Total expenses added up to Rs. 7,645 by the end of December.

For the foundation stone laying ritual, the main guests were my 'Guru Brothers' namely Lt. Shivaling Anna Ghewari, Shri Shankarrao Kamble, Shri Balku Mama Handifod, Shri Sangappa Mali, Shri Anna Balu Shinde, Shri Baburao Survyavanshi, Shri Shivajirao Jadhav, Shri Chandrakant Kurane, Shri Ramesh Ghorpade, Shri Mangal Shinde, Shri Madhu Pawar, Dr. Baburao Shirdhone, Shri Pandurang Ramchandra Shinde and engineer Shri Ajay Bhokare Sir.

This work that I undertook started moving forward. I had no prior experience in construction. Foundation trenches were dug. Shri Bislappa Naik and Shri Ananda Bhosale were working tirelessly. Lt. Sangappa Mama Mali and Shri Anna Shinde used to visit to inquire about the work.

Shri Ajay Bhokare Sir came every day and gave instructions to the construction worker Lt. Bapu More. I visited daily after my office hours along with Shri Chandrakant Kurane on his Royal Enfield Bullet that had license plate number 636. Whenever there was a need for cement, sand, nails, screws, steel rods, etc. I came to Miraj and dispatched them immediately. I forgot my sleep, thirst, and hunger in this work. I did not go to my house for days. Construction was the only thing in my mind. Shri Dhondiba Shinde sprayed water on the constructed cement. Everybody called him 'Dev' (God). He brought pots of water from the irrigation chamber all day long and watered the cement. His pay at the time was Rs. 10 per day. The building was completed in no time. Now, Shri Yallappa Gavandi, Shri Mallu Gavandi, Shri Vilas Gavandi, Shri Parsu Gavandi, Shri Basavant Gavandi, and Shri Mallappa Gavandi completed the cement plastering work and Shri Dhavale painter started the paintwork. Shravan month was starting. The surrounding land started looking green. Bajari, Moong, Mataka (Muth) pulses were seen in the farms. Nature had spread its graciousness everywhere. The atmosphere was pleasant. I managed to carve out some time to visit the houses on the farms and informed the people about opening the Temple. Lt. Sangappa Mama Mali and Lt. Anna Shinde gathered all of the residents from the community and decided their responsibilities for various tasks. All of them started working. Shri Chandar Kurane, Shri Mangal Shinde, Shri Vilas Ghorpade, Shri Ramesh Ghorpade, and Shri Tanaji Ghorpade worked diligently. Lt. Shivaling Anna Ghewari, Shri Shankarao Kamble, Shri Shivaji Jadhav, Shri Munna Bhojmalpani, Shri Subhash Shinde, Dr. Madhukar Mhetre, Shri Anandrao Mandle, Shri Shrikant Jadhav, and Lt. Kisan Gokhale managed the activities in Miraj.

The responsibilities of Bhajans, Kirtans, and conducting the festival, etc. were picked up by Lt. Prabhakar Gokhale, Shri Suresh Kamble, Shri Savanta Mhetre, Shri Ram Mahajan, and Shri Vilas Shinde, etc. The unpaved road in front of the Temple was repaired and the trash-yard near the Temple was moved with everybody's agreement. All the trash and litter were cleaned. All residents cleaned their own premises. The festival's 'Veena' (a musical instrument) was stood up on 14 August 1986. Bhajans and Kirtans were arranged every day. On 20 August 1986, Shravan Vadya Dashmi, oil paintings of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj, Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar, Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot, and Shri Shiv Chidambar Mahaswamiji of Murgod were ritually established in the Temple. A 'Vastu Shanti' was done. (Vastu Shanti is a ceremony towards the composing of evil spirits observed on entering into a house/Temple that either is just built or has long been untenanted). Approximately 5,000 to 7,000 devotees had 'Mahaprasad'. Multiple pious men like Shri Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni (Akkolkar), Shri Keshavrao Gokhale of Miraj, and Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni attended the opening ceremony. Dr. Jaysingrao Shinde Mhaisalkar, Shri Balasaheb Kulkarni, and Shri Shankarao Mali were also present. The presence of regular devotees, 'Guru Brothers', and people like Anna Balu Shinde and Sangappa Krishna Mali who worked tirelessly for the Temple and conducted tasks like bringing water and 'Murum' (fissile shale rock) in a bullock cart was unforgettable. A person like Shri Chandar Kurane also worked for the Temple. They stayed day and night with me and

helped in constructing the Temple. I came to Mhaisal because of Shri Vilasrao Ghorpade and to Mhaisal Station because of Shri Shankar Dhavale painter. It was because of them that it was possible to get the 6.5 Guntha land for the Temple. I had come to Mhaisal Station because of the instructions and promise of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj.

According to His promise, in no time, Shri Datta Mathi was stood up. His life's divine work had started. My only wish was that humanity should be benefited through His Darshan as He had taken care of my life. He was my savior, God, and everything. I was very happy after this Temple was ready. Going forward, this was my village and I had to stay here. I needed to forge a strong relationship with the people as if I knew them not just since many days or many years, but many lives.

Days were passing by. I was very busy at work. At this time, I was a junior clerk in Miraj Water Works. I was staying in Mhaisal Mathi on every Saturday and Sunday. On Monday morning, I would go back to the office. I used to commute back and forth on a bicycle. Shri Shahaji Pawar looked after the Temple in its early days. He used to commute from Miraj to Mhaisal Station every day. Soon after, he came back to Miraj Mathi. Shri Bislappa Naik then started taking care of the Temple. At that time, I used to pay him Rs. 200 per month. In the early days, people were curious about what was going to be built on this land. Some questioned, why would anyone build a Temple? They guessed that perhaps a hotel, grocery store, or flour mill, etc. was going to be constructed. But now their misunderstanding had gone away. People were unaware of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj, Shri Pant Maharaj Balenkundrikar, Shri Shiv Chidambar Maha Swamiji, and Shri Swami Samarth's existence and their work as incarnations.

All they knew was that there was Datta's place in Narsinhwadi. When I came to Mhaisal Station stay on Saturdays, I used to read one of the Satpurush's (Pious person's) stories from a religious book to the people at night. People started gathering to listen to these stories. Since I did not know the people here, I used to bring Bhakari (Jowar roti) along with me. In the mornings, I used to wrap up Pooja and Aarti. Slowly, I started getting to know the people here. Shri Sangappa Mama Mali and Shri Anna Shinde's familiarity was very important. In my absence, they visited the Temple and looked after it. Later, I started coming for a stay over on Fridays and Saturdays. During this time, Anna Shinde and Chandar Shinde also started to come for overnight stays. On Sundays, devotees and 'Guru Brothers' from Miraj brought their meals and stayed here during the day. They too started liking this area, the clean air, and simple people. There was no road as such in the beginning. Member of Legislative Assembly (M.L.A) Shri Mohanrao Shinde built the road from the Mhaisal side, whereas M.L.A Shri Vitthal Daji Patil built an unpaved road with gutters on both sides from the Bedag side. This was an old 80 feet wide military road from Belgaum to Tasgaon which continues to Vita, Dahiwadi, Natepute, Bhigvan, and Pune. In those days, there was no bus to Mhaisal Station. One had to come by train, bicycle, or motorbike from Miraj to Mhaisal Station. There were some huts and mud

houses of the farmers on the east side of railway tracks. This area got water from the 'Dhadak Irrigation Scheme' which led to sugarcane and grapes farming. The school on the small hill conducted classes up to seventh grade. A happy and satisfied community was forming. On the other side of the railway tracks, in the area called 'Haroticha Mala', there were huts and mud houses of farm laborers that came from other villages. Their level of education was extremely low.

Sometimes, I visited Mhaisal too. Shri Tanaji Ghorpade used to accompany me. I would walk along with him to the farms near 'Hatti Laxmi' (A small Temple of Laxmi Goddess). A carnival used to be held for this 'Hatti Laxmi'. People celebrated the carnival by playing musical instruments and offering 'Ambil' (A nutritious drink made from food grains mostly from Nachani) to the deity. Before me, Shri Bhagwan Maharaj had visited here. He used to live near Sangappa Mali's house in a small hut. He was a Bhagwat devotee and had given Pandharpur's necklace and titles to some fellow devotees living around. Later, he took Samadhi in Govardhanwadi in Paranda Taluka (District Osmanabad, Maharashtra).

Days were passing by. The work of uplifting human life's happiness and welfare had begun in Mhaisal Station.

As mentioned earlier, I had discovered Shri Krishna Buva's old Samadhi in Krishna Ghat according to the 'Drushtanth' (Godly dream) I had. But the renovation of Samadhi was delayed. However, Samadhi's Pooja was done by Shri Suresh Gore and Shri Shankar Ambi, etc. Due to my work, I could not visit there for months. But soon enough there were plots for sale in that area. The rate in those days was Rs. 4,000 per Guntha. Knowing that Shri Krishna Buva's Temple was going to be built and that good work was going to be accomplished, the Gore brothers namely Shri Krushna Dattu Gore, Lt. Mukund Gore, Shri Shankar Dattu Gore, Shri Prakash Dattu Gore, and Shri Vilas Dattu Gore purchased two Guntha land each and gave it to me. The Water Works - Head Works was next to it. Water needed for Miraj city was lifted from the river here. There were many Samadhis of Saints like Raul Baba, Raghunath Niranjana, etc. in the Head Works premises.

Krishna Ghat is a farming community. The Ghat (Riverbank) constructed here is considered one of the finest in Maharashtra. It has a Markandeshwar Temple amongst other small and big Temples. Many people from Miraj come here to bathe and do Pooja on every Monday of the Shravan month. A carnival is held on the last Monday of Shravan. Local people made Kheer and Rice as 'Prasadam' (Food offering) for Anna Buva with devotion. The community here mainly consists of surnames like Gore, Patil, More, Shishte, Kurane, Yevare, and Ambi. These people were hardworking and devout. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's younger brother Shri Mallam Bhat lived on this Krishna Ghat. I had read that Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj

had visited Krishna Ghat to meet His brother and to take Darshan in Shri Datta Avatar Anna Buva's Temple. So, I had decided to build a Temple of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Gurudev, Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot at this place. For this purpose, I got the premises cleaned and put a fence around it. Since it was a river shore, there was no hard rock underneath for the foundation. So, a pile foundation was laid and a concrete structure of 12 feet x 12 feet and 8 feet in height was erected as a foundation. Shri Swami Samarth Mathi was built on it. Oil paintings of Shri Swami Samarth and Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj were ritually established in this Temple. The Mathi was inaugurated and prasad was distributed by Shri Krishna Dattu Gore and Lt. Dhondiram Ambi. Both oil paintings were made by Shri Maruti Dalvi painter of Mumbai. Shri Suresh Gore, Shri Shankar Ambi, Shri Gore (a.k.a Malak), Shri Dinkar Kamble, Shri Maruti Patil, Shri Maruti Aldar, and Lt. Gajanan More, etc started looking after the Pooja and Aarti. This occasion was my life's trying time. It turned out to be an important one in Gurudev's services.

The total cost of constructing this Mathi on 'Krishna Ghat' was Rs. 35,000. The Mhaisal Station Mathi was established on 20 August 1986, whereas the Mathi on Krishna Ghat was established in October 1988. Due to the back-to-back construction, my financial loans had piled up. But I had full faith in Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj who had made the 'Drushtaanth' dream a reality. My belief was extreme. I had the trust. This was my devotion. I had dedicated my whole life to His feet.

My salary at that time was Rs. 1,503. After Rs. 210 deduction, it was Rs. 1,293. Even if my current net worth was negative, my earlier savings were Shri's blessings and my extreme faith.

The troubles in my job were increasing and so was the loan. Sometimes, I was getting scared when I thought about the loan. Shri Bapusaheb Jamdar trusted me. After the first loan was repaid, I would apply for another loan and meet Shri Balasaheb Kurane. He was our senior trustee. These people loved me. Once, Shri Bapusaheb Jamdar said, "Maharaj, tell me how much loan you have? We will make some arrangements and repay it." On this, I replied to him "Bapusaheb, you approve my loans through the bank. This is your eternal favor on me. I will repay the loan by myself for sure." Truly, when he was, and even when he wasn't the Chairman of Miraj Urban Bank, he helped approve my loans and I kept repaying them.

Due to the construction in Mhaisal Station and Krishna Ghat, and father's illness, I was afraid of the loan. But my faith in Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj was supporting me. He had shown me many experiences from death to living life. I was confident that my faith in Him will lead to some way out of this situation. And eventually, it happened like that.

Around 1975 – 1977, one of my acquaintances, Lt. Baburao Chougule and I had started the Shantisagar Housing Society behind Miraj Medical College in an area called 'Nimajga Maal'. It

was his farmland. Official measurements were completed, and plots were laid out. But approvals to make it a non-agricultural (N. A) land were pending. He had given me a plot here at 1 Rupee per square feet. Shri Baburao used to borrow 500 – 1000 rupees from me when he was in trouble. Seven years had passed, and he was still trying to get approvals for the N. A permit. But he was not successful. When I was transferred to Miraj, I paid attention to this N. A process and got the needed approvals from Shri Gulabrao Patil when he was a Minister of State. The plot rates had increased by this time. Later, Shri Baburao Chougule gave me a plot that was different from the originally agreed one. Even then, I was satisfied. The reason behind this satisfaction was that I believed after selling this plot, I could repay my financial loans. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj had given me this support.

In the meantime, Dr. Madhukar Mhetre had registered 'Gyaan Sadhana Shikshan Sanstha' (Education Society) and had decided to educate the children of nomadic tribes and the less fortunate. Dr. Mhetre and his friends were working tirelessly towards it. They rented a building in this area and started conducting classes from eight through eleventh grade. But the building owner was asking them to vacate the premises. Dr. Mhetre had also grown tired of this. He came to know that I had a plot nearby. He and I had a discussion, and it was decided that this plot would be purchased by his 'Gynaan Sadhana Shikshan Sanstha' for a high school. We agreed that I and the education society shall construct the building and that the education society's contribution would be deducted from the rent. The construction began slowly. There were many difficulties. The primary hurdle was the unavailability of cement. So, we got two truckloads of limestone from Shri Pimpale of Sangli. Shri Ajay Bhokare who was the engineer on this project and Lt. Bapu More who was the bricklayer, completed the building. The high school started. For the first 5 to 7 years, it ran fine. But after that due to some difficulties, Dr. Mhetre decided to close the Gyaan Sadhana Education Society. So, for the next 1 to 2 years the building remained vacant. Later, the building was handed over to Lt. Mrs. Malatidevi Patil's Bachelor of Education College. Dr. Mehtre incurred financial loss and faced hardships. Even then he vacated the building that I gave him for rent without any conditions. For this, I will be ever grateful to him.

Now, my steps were falling towards repayment of the loan. The frequent fear that I had about the loan started being out of place. I had never dreamed of getting a plot in the Shantisagar Housing Society. I got the plot but there was no guarantee that it would get the necessary NonAgricultural permit. Eventually, the plot became a N. A plot. A building was constructed on it. But there was no assurance about making any money from it. All of these events happened because of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's promise in the dream. The plot that I had purchased for 4 to 5 thousand rupees was now in demand for 300,000 rupees along with the building.

It must be mentioned that in those days, Shri Shrikant Jadhav was a regular visitor. In reality, he used to visit due to his brother's Lt. Chandrakant Jadhav's work. Later, Shri Chandrakant Jadhav recovered, got a job, and got married. He became busy with his family life and stopped coming. But Shri Shrikant Jadhav came regularly for the evening Aarti in Miraj's Mathi. He was working at a senior post in Sangli Bank. He was a very honest, trustworthy, and diligent worker. He was of a sweet and engaging nature. I was introduced to him through my friend Shri Kumar Shankarrao Desai. I am grateful to the people who have introduced me to other good people, more than to the ones who donated money.

A Trust by the name of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Seva Mandal E543/1989 was registered. The trustees and their designations were as follows. President – Bajrang Bhimrao Zende, Vice – President – Lt. Dadasaheb Ramchandra and Bapusaheb Jamdar, Caretaker – Lt. Vitthal Krishnaji Gokhale, Members – Lt. Shivaling Anna Ghewari, Lt. Shankarrao Sakharam Gokhale, Lt. Prabhakar Mahadev Gokhale, Lt. Madhukar Yashwant Khade, Lt. Baburao Jyotiba Suryavanshi, Shri Ramesh Ghorpade, Shri Mangal Narayan Shinde, Dr. Mahadev Ganpati Mhetre, and Shri Anandrao Mahadev Mandle.

All financial matters, writing, ledger, and accounts presentation were assigned with faith to Shri Shrikant Jadhav. He successfully handled all of these responsibilities. He started becoming my very trusted friend. He too needed a plot and was looking for one. As soon as I came to know about it, I informed him about my plot and the building in the Shantisagar Housing Society. All of my life, until today, I have given importance to people and humanity. I stood up people. People are my support and breath. The love of these people has given me the strength to walk on this path. These people have shown me kindness, love, and the way of living life. These people are my strength and my hands. Even though I had a demand for a much higher amount for the plot and the building, I still chose to give it to my good friend Shri Shrikant Jadhav for Rs. 200,000. I laid one condition though. It was to establish Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's picture and do Pooja and Aarti of it in this house. Shri Shrikant Jadhav and I were both happy about it. This deal within our two minds was completed soon.

Thus, Shri Shrikant Jadhav helped me become loan free. I deposited the personal loans and bank money in Miraj Urban Bank in a money doubling scheme. I was liberated from the loan repayment anxiousness. My faith in Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj was getting stronger. The crowd in Miraj's Datta Mathi was increasing especially for the evening 8 PM Aarti. People were even standing on the road for the Aarti. I was staying in Mhaisal Station's Datta Mathi on every Saturday and Sunday, and in Miraj for rest of the week.

Lt. Shivling Anna Ghewari, Lt. Shankarrao Kamble, Lt. Kitwadkar (Pawar), Lt. Ram Hari Kharade (Tatya), Lt. Mahadev Gavkar, Lt. Vidya Wadd, Shri Dattatray Pawar, Shri Shivaji Jadhav, Shri

Ramesh Ghorpade, Shri Chandrakant Kurane, Dr. Shri Madhukar Mhetre, Shri Anandrao Mandle, and Shri Shashikant Kurane used to come for Aarti. Whereas, Dr. Shri Suresh Kamble, Lt. Maruti Kurane (Kaka), and Lt. Kore used to stay in Shri Datta Temple. Lt. Jamdar (Mama) and Shri Govind Bargale came for morning 'Kakad' Aarti. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Jayanti (Birth anniversary) and Punyatithi (Samadhi anniversary) were celebrated in Lt. Chandrakant Jadhav's house. I used to visit Kolhapur and Narsinhwadi for Datta Darshan on every Monday and full-moon day. Sometimes, I would visit Shri Kshetra Balekundri, Shri Kshetra Murgod, Shri Kshetra Akkalkot, Shri Shikhar Shinganapur, Shri Kshetra Gondavale, Shri Kshetra Shirdi, Shri Kshetra Dehu, Shri Kshetra Alandi, Pandharpur, and Ganagapur for Darshan along with fellow devotees.

So, for this reason, I needed to make overnight stay arrangements for the people coming to meet me from out of town. At the same time, it was essential to construct a new building to avoid devotees having to stand in sun and rain during the Aarti in Miraj's Shri Datta Mathi. So, we all started thinking about it. The Bedage family were our neighbors at this time. Lt. Maruti Bedage, Kisan Bedage, and his wife were fighting for their share of the house in court. At the time, nobody lived in this collapsed house built with mud. Only Lt. Maruti Bedage and Lt. Kisan Bedage's wife were alive as the court case continued. Shri Dhondiba Keshav Mhetre and Shri Savant Keshav Mhetre were close relatives of the Bedage family. Due to their mediation, the Bedage family members withdrew their case from the court and the land was purchased for Mathi from Lt. Kisan Bedage, Lt. Maruti Bedage, Lt. Akash Mali, and Shri Sidram Kumbhoje.

This land was purchased on 30 April 1990 for Rs. 32,000. Everybody was happy as the land was now secured. However, everybody started feeling the need for a new Shri Datta Mathi. A meeting was held in the old Shri Datta Mathi on this topic. It was decided that all devotees shall contribute every month towards it. An account was opened in the Miraj Urban Bank. Money started getting deposited slowly in this bank account every month. Everybody believed that this Mathi should accommodate devotees and students coming from out of town. Coincidentally, I was introduced to an engineer, Shri Jaysingrao More Sir through Dr. Baburao Shirdhone. This introduction turned into a friendship. All responsibilities of planning and overseeing this new Shri Datta Mathi were assigned to him. 'Bhoomi Poojan' (Land Pooja) was done on 20 February 1993. The following people were present on this occasion.

Lt. Govind Maharaj Kulkarni, Lt. Keshavrao Gokhale, Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi, Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar, Lt. Chandrakant Jadhav, Lt. Shankarrao Kamble, Lt. Ghewari Anna, Lt. Balku Handiphod, Shri Laxmanrao Pawar, Shri Shivajirao Jadhav, Shri Madhukar Pawar, Shri Pramod Basarge, Shri Chandrakant Kurane, and Shri Savanta Mhetre.

Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Mathi became a central building in Miraj. All of us were working towards constructing this building. The construction cost for this building was Rs. 1,100,000 at that time. Money for this project was gathered using contributions from devotees, cash from my providence fund, from the deposit I had made in Miraj Urban Bank's money doubling scheme, and the rest from bank loans. When Shri Balasaheb Shirke came to Miraj for Bhajans, he stayed in this Mathi to take some rest. On those occasions, he frequently said, "If Maharaj needs space, He shall build a big building". My faith and loyalty towards Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj were useful for this second building. The centering work for this building was done by Shri Jaysingrao More Saheb, Shri Chandu Savant, and Shri Ganapati Savant. Construction workers like Shri Vilas Laad, Shri Bhau Redekar, Shri Mallappa Navgekar, and Shri Mohan Sutar completed the construction work.

These people worked very hard because of which this building came to fruition. I thank them from the bottom of my heart. The Mathi's inauguration and 'Vastu Shaanti' was conducted from Friday, 28 July 1995 to Thursday, 3 August 1995. 'Guruvarya' HareRam Pant Bodas, Govind Maharaj Kulkarni, Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni, Vitthalrao Bhosale Buva, Shankarrao Satpute (Master), Pundalik Singh Rajput, Chandrakant Jadhav, Sitarambuva Kumathekar, Babulal Sheikh, etc. were present for these rituals.

Kirtans were sung by H. B. P. Shri Banda Maharaj Karadkar, Shri Ramakant Bongale, Shri Vishwesh Bodas, Shri Balkrishna Muley, and Shri Ramesh Maharaj Shivapurkar. Whereas, songs were sung by Miss Mangal Joshi, Shri Rishikesh Bodas, and Mrs. Manjusha Kulkarni-Patil. Pravachans (Preaching / Recitals) of Shri Rudrapashupati Vijaykumar Kolekar Swamiji and H.B.P Shri Gurunath Kotnis Maharaj were conducted. 'Vastu Shanti' and entry into the Temple was done on 3 August 1995. Shri Ramesh Maharaj Akkolkar, Shri Sureshpant Balekundrikar, Shri Sakharam Maharaj, Shri Chandrashekhar Kelkar Maharaj, Shri Gurunath Kotnis Maharaj, Shri Pradip Pant Balekundrikar, and Shri Mahesh Shirke were in attendance for this program. The 'Kalash Rohan' (Installing of the metal dome) was done by the auspicious hands of Lt. Govind Maharaj Kulkarni and Lt. Keshavrao Gokhale. After the palanquin ceremony, 'Mahaprasad' was distributed. About 10 to 11 thousand devotees had the 'Mahaprasad'.

Now, Gurudev's work started from this new Miraj Mathi. Days were passing by and I was busy with my job. I stayed in Mhaisal Station on every Saturday and Sunday. A significant portion of my time was now spent in Mhaisal Station's Datta Mathi. Now, I knew a lot of people from there. Initial acquaintances had turned into friendships. Lt. Sangappa Mama Mali, Lt. Anna Shinde, and other people came to the Temple every day. H. B. P. Appasaheb Shinde (Mokashi) started coming from Mhaisal for overnight stays and did the Bhajans. Shri Sadu Shinde, Shri Pandurang Shinde, Shri Vishnu Shinde, and Shri Vasant Shinde started joining the Bhajans. In the 'Chaturmas' (Holy period of four months from July through October starting on Shayani Ekadashi and ending on Prabodhini Ekadashi), Lt. Annappa Mama Kumbhar started reading

religious books and did 'Pravachans'. Whereas Shri Bisalappa Naik and Shri Tukaram Dhondiba Shinde did Aarti and Pooja.

The Mhaisal Station Mathi premise was quiet and serene. Some Nilgiri, Suru (Cypress), Raintree, and Coconut trees were planted there. Now, Shri Datta Mathi became a resting place for the 'Dindis' (A group of people walking together) from Karnataka to Shri Kshetra Pandharpur. These 'Dindis' started staying overnight in Datta Mathi. It was important to provide shelter and water to these devotees. The space was insufficient to accommodate them. So, I met Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar and requested him to grant me a loan through Miraj Urban Bank. He had helped me with the loans in the past from time to time. However, this time, it was difficult to get a big amount sanctioned based on my salary. Even then, because of his influence, Miraj Urban Bank granted me the loan. A two-acre and two Guntha (1 Guntha = 1089 square feet) land (83 R Gat Number 2115) belonging to Mrs. Sakhubai Takawade was purchased by the Trust. Some money was borrowed from people and the rest was arranged through a bank loan. Mr Ramesh Ghorpade's efforts were of significant help in making this happen. The next step toward public service was hence taken.

Now, my workload was increasing. I was spending a lot of time in Mhaisal Mathi. My friend, Shri Allabaksh Kotwal Sir, was the legal advisor of the Trust. The land for the Trust was purchased from Mrs. Sakhubai Takawade as per his guidance. Shri Ramesh Ghorpade, Shri Tambavekar, Shri Balu Hingmire, and Shri Nadaf Diwanji had helped a lot to get this done. I thanked all of them. By digging a tube-well, the next steps of public service were undertaken.

When I was staying in Mhaisal Station, I used to wonder if the work that I was doing will lead to completion. Who will take care after me? These unnecessary thoughts were crossing my mind. But my faith in Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj was firm. He was my life-boat's guardian. There was no tar road leading to Mhaisal Station and the unpaved road did not have any streetlights either. People lived on their farms and slept early in the night. There were no televisions, and neither was there any place to sit. The residents faced many difficulties in the rainy season. The tube-well was helpful to people as it provided a drinking water source. The 'More' family members living in a hut near the school started coming to the Mathi for water. The traffic in Mathi was now increasing.

One day, Shri Anna Shinde had gone out of town to attend a marriage ceremony. Since he did not return that night, his nephew Shri Tanaji Shinde came to stay with me for company. The four brothers, namely, Lt. Shankarrao Balu Shinde, Lt. Anna Shinde, Shri Yashwant Shinde, and Lt. Jayant Shinde were an ideal farming family. They lived in Mhaisal Station, were always helpful to everyone, and graciously solved people's problems. Tanaji was Shri Yashwant Balu Shinde's elder son. Ever since he came for the stayover, I started getting to know him better. He

started doing Aarti and Pooja in the Temple. He participated in all of the Mathi's tasks and worked tirelessly. Eventually, Tanaji became an inseparable part of Shri Datta Mathi.

Earlier, to answer my frequent questions like, should I construct the Mathi in Mhaisal? Who will take care of it later? Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj had appeared in my dream and told me to construct the Mathi and also mentioned that Tanaji would take care of it. I kept faith in this dream and constructed the Mathi.

The space in Miraj was inadequate for Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Jayanti and Punyatithi festivals. Hence, from 1986 onwards, it was decided to conduct these festivals in Mhaisal Station's Datta Mathi. Initially, the scale and scope of these festivals was limited. Eventually, these festivals took a grand scaled. The leftover stones from the construction in Miraj were used to construct a hall and two platforms in Mhaisal Mathi. (In 'Gat' number 2115).

This new construction was helpful for the festival's prasad and also for 'Vaishnav Dindis' going from Karnataka to Shri Kshetra Pandharpur for their bathing and meals. When this Datta Mathi's land was purchased, there was no road to Mhaisal Station. There was only a foot trail on the other side of the school. Shri Kutwade's land was on the north side of the Datta Temple. He obstructed the traffic going to Mhaisal Station. There was not a single house near Shri Datta Mathi and nobody lived near it. My friend from Malgaon, Shri Appasaheb Pujari, and Shri Shivgonda Patil (Takali) created the plots on Shri Kutwade's land. My friend, Shri Chandrakant Kurane was Shri Appasaheb Pujari's relative. Shri Chandrakant Kurane purchased 19 Guntha land for Shri Datta Mathi on 22 September 1992. This land was purchased for public festivals.

Due to Lt. Kedarrao Shinde's (Mhaisalkar) efforts, the east-west road connecting Mhaisal Station to the main road in front of Shri Datta Mathi going from Tasgaon to Belgaum was constructed. The villagers benefited from this road. Due to multiple factors like the Datta Mathi, newly constructed East-West Road leading to the Station, and our plot touching the road, the demand for other plots increased and so did their prices. In those days, the plots were priced at Rs. 3,000 to 4,000 per 'Guntha'.

The said plot that we bought for the Trust was a farmland. However, it was unused. The villagers used to litter this place. So, I decided to construct a library for the people to instill a good culture in them. Hence, the next step towards public service was taken. This land was in front of Shri Datta Mathi. Also, for most of the people who had faith, it was decided to construct a Shri Ganesh Temple. Furthermore, it was decided to install Shri Hanuman and Shri Shivaling idols in it. My engineer friend, Shri S. M. Sannake who was extremely religious and devout prepared the Shri Ganesh Temple plan. Hence, the construction began on the land which was used by the villagers for morning defecation and garbage disposal. In no time, the

Temple stood up with everybody's efforts. Some mango and coconut trees were planted in the premises and a small waterfall was installed. A dirty plot was transformed into a pious land. The inauguration ceremony was conducted from Tuesday, 16 June 1998 to Thursday, 18 June 1998. The opening ceremony was started by H. B. P Shri Bapusaheb Pujari, Shri Gurunath Kotnis Maharaj, Shri Pradippant Balekundrikar, Lt. Ramesh Sheth Agrawal, Shri Balasaheb Nargunde, and Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar. Kirtans were performed by Vitthalrao Bhosale, Sitaram Kumthekar Buva, Nana Buva Joglekar, Ramesh Buva Salapurkar, Vitthalrao Suryavanshi, Vishwesh Bodas, and Chandrakant Kumbhar. Whereas, songs, Bhajans, Bhaavgeet, and Bhaktigeet programs of Mrs. Manjusha Kulkarni-Patil, Shriram Shirke-Adulkar, Miss Mangala Joshi Patan, Anjantai Jadhav, and Ghogale Buva were held.

On this occasion, as a payback to the society, I sowed the seeds of Shri Sane Guruji series of lectures. The inauguration of this lecture series was done by respected industrialist, Shri Pravin Sheth Lunkad (Owner of Chakan Oil Mill, Kupwad, Sangli) and Shri Deepakbaba Shinde (Mhaisalkar). Shri Babu Jadhav (Mhaisal) and Shri Vilas Ashtaputre delivered beautiful lectures. On Thursday, 18 June 1998, 'Vastu Shaant' of Shri Ganesh Temple was done by Shri Ramesh Maharaj Akkolkar, Shri Keshavrao Gokhale, Shri Sureshpant Balekundrikar, and Shri Sakham Maharaj. The 'Kalash Rohan' was done by Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni. The 'Mahaprasad' was served by Baburao Suryavanshi, Bapusaheb Jamdar, Prabhakar Gokhale, Shri and Sou. Mandhana, Shri and Sou. Balasaheb Kurane, Shri and Sou. Balasaheb Nargunde, Shri and Sou. Sambhaji Kumbhar, Shri and Sou. Kabure, Shri and Sou. Vitthal Vijapure, Shri and Sou. Madhukar Mhetre, Shri and Sou. Tanaji Shinde, Shri and Sou. Chandrakant Kurane, and Shri and Sou. Anandrao Shelar. Thousands of people had the pleasure of having 'Mahaprasad'. We all were happy. This program had diverse participation. Shri Ganesh, Shri Hanuman, and Shri Shiv Temple were built with Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's blessings and devotees' efforts. The lecture series has continued every year thereafter.

There are many shrines from Himalaya in the North to Rameshwar in the South. Passionate devotees have taken care of them with faith for thousands of years. Even though every shrine's importance and history is different, the commonality between them is that Hindu people's faith in these shrines is enormous. It is fathomless and non-perishable.

In the year 1980, on the occasion of Shri Arun Kulkarni's marriage, I had visited pious places like Shri Kshetra Kashi, Prayag, and Ayodhya, along with some historic places like Delhi and Agra. I had also seen the cold places like Dehradun and Mussoorie. In Mussoorie, the northern mountain ranges were calling me. I had seen the yellow and golden peaks, jungles, variety of birds, culture of the people, the tribal (Adivasi) people living in jungles, and felt the cold air. But exploring all of this further was not possible due to lack of time. I had decided to visit the Himalayas again in the future. Shri Ramesh Maharaj's mother ('Aai') had completed Badrinath –

Kedarnath pilgrimage sometime between the years 1950 to 1955. Her brother and other people had completed this 40-day difficult trip. But 'Aai' longed to take Darshan of all major shrines one more time.

Shri Ramesh Maharaj informed me about this. I also decided to accompany them for Badrinath – Kedarnath pilgrimage. But instead of traveling on our own, we decided to join the trip arranged by Shri Datta Digambar Yatra Company, Pune.

On Monday, 14 June 1982, Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Lt. Aaisaheb and I left from Miraj by the Sahyadri Express train at midnight. We reached Pune the next day and stayed at Rajanitai Mandake's house during the day and had our meals. We continued our journey and came back to Pune Railway Station at 10 PM. At 11 PM, the train compartment of Shri Datta Yatra Company was attached to the Mumbai bound passenger train. On Wednesday, 16 June 1982, we reached V. T railway station at 9 AM. We stayed there all day and at 9 PM, our passenger compartment was attached to Mumbai – Howrah Express train. We reached Bhusawal Railway Junction the next day at 7 AM, Bhopal at 4 PM, Jhansi at 9 PM, and Delhi at 8 AM on 18 June 1982. After freshening up, we started on a tour of Delhi city by bus.

In 1980, we had done a Delhi tour. But it was too hot at that time. This time though, a cyclonic rain had fallen because of which the climate was comfortably cold. After seeing Kutubminar, Redfort, Rajghat, Vijayghat, Gandhighat (Shantighat), Birla Temple, and Indian parliament, we stayed in Delhi that night.

On Saturday, 19 June 1982, we reached Delhi Railway Station at 8 AM and Haridwar at 4 PM. We saw Hari's steps and bathed in Ganga River. After doing Ganga's spectacular Aarti in the evening, we had dinner and stayed overnight in Haridwar. On Sunday, 20 June 1982, we bathed in Ganga River again and took some rest after lunch. We left the railway station at 4.30 PM and reached Rishikesh (Also known as Hrishikesh) Railway Station. Since both Haridwar and Rishikesh are two great shrines, these places were crowded with devotees. We could see large groups of devotees everywhere. We stayed overnight in Rishikesh. The weather was quite cold and we could feel it.

At 6 AM, on Monday, 21 June 1982, we left in a small bus for Badrinath – Kedarnath Darshan in the Himalayas. The entire road was winding, narrow, and full of treacherous ghat sections. With deep valleys on one side of the road, mountains on the other, and a spectacular mountain range in front, I closed my eyes and started thinking about earlier years of my life.

My birth was in a small farming family. We were happy as our necessities of food and shelter were met. We lived in Miraj. Even though it was a Taluka place, it was neither a city nor a

village. Miraj benefited from the Krishna River. It flooded every year. I grew up going to school, visiting the farm on holidays, hanging around in the town, and touring the Dandoba or Ramling hills which were the only hills I knew of. In my previous trip to Mussoorie, I had seen the Himalayan Mountain range from a distance.

But now I was traveling in a small 20-seater bus to Badrinath – Kedarnath in the Himalayas. The yellowish, golden, snow-clad Himalayan Mountain peaks were alluring me. The weather appeared loving, caring, and sometimes monstrous. I liked the integrity, faithfulness, and loving nature of the hilly people. The beauty of the wide expanse of the Himalayas, the variety of plants, trees, vines, landscapes covered with flowers, and the rivers scattered all around had mesmerized me.

Himalaya is captivating and enticing. It changes its nature suddenly. Clear skies transform into dark clouds abruptly. Its extreme cold turns into heavy rain with severe lightning and the scary sound echoes in the mountain range. Within no time, water rushes through the mountain streams forming overflowing waterfalls. The heavy rains feel like stopping and allow the rainbow to appear. It feels like Himalaya is not stable at all. We reached Gouri Kund via Rudra Prayag at 4 PM while watching all the scenery. Carrying our luggage, we checked-in in the wooden Dharamshala provided by the travel company. After having some tea, we bathed in Gouri Kund. It is approximately 15 feet x 20 feet pond surrounded by stones. Himalaya is full of surprising and astonishing places. Gouri Kund got its name after Sridevi Parvati bathed in this pond. Shri Ganesh was born here and hence bathing in it has religious significance.

Although situated amongst tall snowcapped mountains and strong cold winds, the water in Gouri Kund is yellowish and warm. Of its four corners, one has very hot water, the second has a little less hot water, the third has warm water, and the fourth has warm/cold water. Devotees can bathe in any corner as per their comfort level.

Shri Ramesh Maharaj, Aai, and I bathed in this pious Gouri Kund. We were tired from the day's travel, and it was night now. It was cold and windy. The next day's travel was of Shri Kshetra Kedarnath. It is 14 Kilometers from Gouri Kund. We had to walk this distance as no vehicles could go beyond this point. The distance between Rishikesh and Kedarnath is about 298 Kilometers. We travelers from the travel company were the only ones who stayed in Gouri Kund.

I woke up in the morning from the cold wind. It was Tuesday, 26 June 1982. After having some hot tea, our real travel to Kedarnath started. Our guides from the Shri Datta Yatra Company, Shri Kale, and Shri Kulkarni gave us instructions about the commute. We took some dry fruits like cashews, dried dates, and almonds, etc. in a plastic bag. I wore a lightweight pant, shirt,

sunglasses, sweater, and a raincoat. Other lightweight things were in a 'Shabnam' bag that I carried on my shoulders. We rented some sticks from the travel committee. Shri Ramesh Maharaj and I walked while Aai was carried in a 'Dandi' (A small palanquin) as she could not walk. Its rental charge depended on the passenger's weight. The rent for these 'Dandis' was approximately Rs. 350 per person. Another mode of transportation here is a 'Kandi'. In this type, a traveler is carried on someone else's back for Rs. 100 per person. A mule or horse could be hired for about Rs. 80 to 90.

Our commute started on this Godly land as we watched the tall Himalayan peaks, mountains covered with trees, and clouds playing hide and seek. The weather was cold. There is a big difference between walking on a normal trail versus walking on rocky hills. As we were climbing, we started sweating and felt out of breath. The rain would fall abruptly and that made us feel cold suddenly. The trail was narrow. There were deep valleys on one side and tall mountains on the other. The tall mountain peaks were competing with the skies. Winding trails going to these peaks were sometimes visible and sometimes not. Lush greenery was however seen everywhere. The scenery was breathtaking. As we were walked on the narrow trails, some travelers on 'Dandis', 'Kandis', and horses passed us by.

The devotees returning from Shri Kedarnath's Darshan were chanting "Jai Kedarnath, Kedarnath Baba Ki Jai, and Jai Bholenath". We too were chiming in. Their faces revealed happiness from a successful trip to Shri Kedarnath. River Mandakini was flowing at the bottom of the deep valley. But since we were walking at a high elevation, the river appeared the size of a thumb. The walk



Delhi Darshan 18 June 1982
with Shrimati Indiraji Gandhi

was very steep. We crossed small settlements like Rambada and Garudchatti. The people here were simple. Small children were selling biscuits and other edible items. Their primary source of income was to transport the travelers back and forth. They were happy even in this hard life. There were small Temples on either side of the road. Some wooden, as well as permanent houses with shingle roofs, could be seen on the slopes. After crossing the monstrous and frightfully tall hill in the front, we saw Shri Kedarnath from a distance. Small houses were also visible. Now we were tired of walking. Carrying our aching legs and in an exhausted condition, we finally reached Shri

Kedarnath at 2 PM. We had some juice and sat down in the travel lodge waiting for other travelers. Wooden houses of the private priests were at a short distance from the Temple.

Many people had come to Shri Kedarnath's Darshan. But there were no hotels, lodging or boarding in those days. Only Kedarnath and His devotees were present. Shri Kedarnath's priests would come here to stay on 'Akshaya Tritiya' in their houses. They would return down to

Gourikund on 'Dassehra' (Dussehra). This means that Shri Kedarnath Temple is opened for Darshan to devotees only from 'Akshay Tritiya' to 'Dassehra'. Snow falls after this period. The priests here are very honest, and their source of income depends on the devotees. It was 3 PM now. The skies were full of clouds and a strong wind started blowing. After a bolt of lightning, heavy rain started falling. The tall Himalayan Mountain peaks were hiding behind the clouds. Mandakini River could be seen flowing unrestrained at the bottom of the valley through its winding path. Small and large waterfalls were falling on the road. We could not even hear each other due to the loud sound of the rain. All of us travelers and priests were standing in front of the travel lodge. Tall mountains were standing in the front and back of us. There was a flat plateau in front of the Temple. Everybody was waiting for the rain to stop. At about 7 PM, the rain stopped, and sun rays could be seen in the evening at a distance. The snow-clad mountain peaks now started appearing golden yellow. All travelers were standing near the Temple. As usual Shri Kedarnath Bhajan started. All of us travelers were chanting "Om Namah Shivay". Some were reciting mantras. Prasad in the form of peanuts and lump sugar was distributed after the Aarti.

Shri Kedarnath is Lord Shankar's place in the Himalayas. The 'Shiva Linga' (Lingam) here is not like what we see normally. It is narrow at the bottom on the three sides and tapers at the top. It is approximately 4 to 5 feet tall.

It is believed that Pashupatinath in Nepal is the face and Shri Kedarnath is the back. The Darshan for which we had come and worked hard towards, was satisfactory. Our minds were full of joy. After the Darshan, we came back to the travel lodge and had a meal. We had 'Phulkas', potato Sabzi, 'Usal' Sabzi (A dish made from pulses and spices), rice, and peanuts. We slept listening to the sound of the rippling Mandakini River and had a deep sleep after all the exhaustion.

I woke up in the morning from the cold. We had rented two comforters from the priest at night. But in the morning, all of the bedding had fallen cold. So, everybody woke up early at about 4 AM from the sounds of birds, bells ringing in the Temple, Aarti preparations, and loudspeakers playing devotional songs.

The air was fresh and cold on the morning of 23 June 1982. We went to River Mandakini's starting point. It is about 10 to 15 kilometers from Shri Kedarnath. On returning, we did Shri Kedarnath's 'Abhishek' and had the Darshan repeatedly. After wrapping up an early lunch at 10 AM, we started our return journey on horseback. Shri Kedarnath is Lord Shankar's delightful place. There is no permanent settlement of people here. Only the priests live here during 'Yatra' (pilgrimage) time. It is nature's generously gifted and affluent land. We reached Gouri Kund at 2 PM and stayed there overnight. Our 'Yatra' was successful.

On 17 June 2013, I saw the graphic images of flooding in Shri Kedarnath on DoorDarshan. Entire buildings collapsed, the encroachment made by humans on the natural laws there, and nature's furious form are something to be remembered eternally. Except for Shri Kedarnath, everything else was washed away.

On 23 June 1982, Shri Kedarnath was a delightful, scenic, and a Shivling place. It was a pious place with beautiful greenery. After 30 years, on 17 June 2013, we could see the nature's ill effects due to humans behaving improperly. Everything was washed away as-if Lord Shankar had shown His 'Rudra' Avatar and made it happen. All settlements were washed away. Thousands of people died. They lost everything. The current coming from higher elevation rushed in Shri Kedarnath Temple. Devotees were frightened. A huge boulder came rolling from the mountain and stopped behind the Temple. It split the flow of the water current into two parts and Shri Kedarnath Temple was saved from this natural calamity. The 'Yatra' resumed on 'Akshay Tritiya' in 2014. But it was not crowded as it was a fearful atmosphere everywhere. Now the 'Yatra' is stopped for some time. With Shri Datta's blessings, our Shri Kedarnath 'Yatra' was successful. Living or dying in this 'Yatra' is up to God. I have to say in this bizarre weather, unpredictable nature, and overall difficulty, our pilgrimage was now over. On Thursday 24 June 1982, at 5 AM, we started on the Shri Badrinath pilgrimage in small busses. We reached Rudraprayag in the morning. River Alaknanda originates from about 5 KM from here. This area is surrounded by mountains. The distance between Shri Kedarnath to Rudraprayag is 74 KM whereas from Rishikesh to Badrinath is 315 KM. It is a single lane road and is completely a ghat section. One can see the tall and widely spread Himalayan Mountain ranges as well as tiny looking rivers when seen from the elevations.

We had lunch at 2 PM in Pipalchatti. It is close to Rudraprayag. This route is even more dangerous than that of Shri Kedarnath. Living or dying is up to the Almighty here. We came across Joshi Mathi on the way. The road from Joshi Mathi to Shri Badrinath is a single lane. Until one batch of vehicle crosses, the other batch cannot move forward. The drivers are inspected near the Joshi Mathi and then further travel begins. We reached Badrinath at 7 PM and were tired from the day's travel. The Sun sets late in the Himalayas. Sunrays can be seen until 7 – 8 PM. It starts getting dark after 8 PM. We could see small lights from the settlements in the valleys and mountains. We slept early after having dinner. The houses here were built with stones. It was incredibly cold here. The China border is close by. Army tents are at 4 KM from here. We stayed overnight in Shri Badrinath.

On the morning of Friday, 25 June 1982, we could hear Sanai and Hindi devotional songs coming from Shri Badrinath Temple. It is considered very auspicious to bathe in 'Tapta Kund' in

this sound. Shri Badrinath is at 12,000 feet elevation from sea level. River Alaknanda flows from the valleys in this vast expanse. Hence, this area is called as Vishal Badri.

Shri Badrinath is one of the 'Char Dhaam's (A set of four pilgrimage sites namely Badrinath, Dwaraka, Puri, and Rameswaram). It is considered as Shri Vishnu's shrine. The Temple here is huge and is built with stones. A major portion of the interior is wooden, and it is painted in a variety of colors. 'Patakas' (Pennants) are always waving everywhere all the time. Even though this is a snow-clad region, there is hot water available from the 'Tapta Kund' (Hot spring). There are five pools of hot water. It is believed that one who bathes in them achieves 'Moksha'. One can choose the pool as per his or her comfort level. Guruji tied some grains of dry rice in a piece of cloth and held it in the hot water of 'Tapta Kund'. Within 10 minutes, the grains turned into cooked rice. We bathed in one such pool and took the Darshan of Shri Vishnu's idol. Even though it is small, it is very attractive. We explored Shri Badrinath Temple and had some prasad. We saw the nearby area and realized that even if this scenic Badrinath village is a small one, it is a great and pious place. There are some nice Dharmashalas with decent facilities for the pilgrims. My mind was full of joy. There are many small Temples nearby. We had their as well as Mother Shri Parvati's Darshan. After crossing the bridge on Alaknanda River on foot, we reached Geeta Bhavan in Badrinath for the overnight stay. At about 25-30 Kilometer distance from Shri Badrinath, there is a place called Swargarohan. It is believed that Dharmaraj went to heaven from here and hence the name (Swarg is Heaven). The route to it is extremely difficult.

We started our return journey in a small bus on Saturday, 26 June 1982 after morning breakfast and tea. Today, Aai was not feeling well. Due to the long, hectic travel, and cold she was under the weather.

"Shri Kedarnath Baba Ki Jay", "Badri Narayan Ki Jay" slogans were ongoing, because without blessings, this pilgrimage would not be successful. We reached Haridwar at 10 PM. All fellow pilgrims were tired from the 315 to 330 Kilometers travel in the ghat section. We had a filling dinner of warm rice, Daal Khichadi, Kadhi, and Papad at 11 PM, and went straight to bed.

On Sunday, 27 June 1982, we saw numerous tourist and religious places in Haridwar and bathed in Ganga River. There was a big crowd of all the pilgrims. Haridwar is a District place. People from all regions of India have constructed their Dharamshalas here. We had an overnight stay in Haridwar that day.

On Monday, 28 June 1982, we went for a day trip to Rishikesh and saw 'Laxman Jhula' (Bridge), 'Muni Ki Reti', and had Darshan at Shri Shivanand Swami's Ashram. We came back to Haridwar in the evening. Even though Haridwar - Rishikesh are twin cities, the latter is gifted with natural

beauty. Rishikesh is considered as the starting point for Himalaya travel. I slept in the train remembering this cute religious place.

We reached Lucknow on Tuesday, 29 June 1982 at 1 PM and saw tourist and historic places like Imambara before reaching Faizabad.

We continued our journey to Ayodhya on Wednesday, 30 June 1982 in the morning. Faizabad and Ayodhya are 10 Kilometers apart. They are twin cities. We bathed in Sharyu River in the morning. The water current here was very powerful. We took Darshan in Shri Kalaram Temple, Hanumangarhi, Kanak Bhavan, Rajgarhi, and Shri Ram Janma Bhumi, etc. At the time, Ayodhya appeared as a peaceful place and busy making travel arrangements for the pilgrims. There are many red-faced monkeys in Ayodhya. Hanumangarhi, in particular, has many and they are humanized. They were taking 'motichoor laddoos', 'phutane' (Parched gram), and fruits, etc from the people. We came back to Faizabad in the afternoon. At 2 PM, after lunch, we started to Allahabad and stayed there overnight.

On Thursday, 1 July 1982, we left for Prayagraj (Daraganj) early in the morning. Rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati (Hidden) meet here. We bathed in this 'Sangam' (union of rivers) and took some rest. We saw Emperor Ashok's fort and had Darshan of the historic fig tree called 'Akshayvat' and 'Sleeping Maruti'. We also saw Anand Bhavan belonging to Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi who gave away everything to the country. This Bhavan is excellently constructed. Allahabad city was hot this time of the year. Our overnight stay was in Allahabad.

On Friday, 2 July 1982, we left Allahabad early at 5 AM and reached Varanasi Station at 10 AM. Shri Kshetra Varanasi and Kashi are the main religious places of Hindus. River Ganga has different names like Parvati, Kali, Durga, Uma, and Amba. Parvati was Himalaya's king's daughter. Lord Shankar gave His powers, enlightened spirit, motivation, and everything else to Parvati. This women power is the mother of the world. River Ganga originates from a snow-clad cave in the Himalayas. It is believed that the source is eternal. For thousands of years, Sadhus, Sanyasis, Bairagis, and Yogis have considered the banks of River Ganga as soul liberating and have lived their lives accordingly. They lived on its banks. The peculiarity of Ganga's water is that it never contaminates, nor does it cause bad health effects. For thousands of years, people have been drinking Ganga water and bathing in it. Today, River Ganga is the Hindu Indian people's faith, life, and mother. Ganga River's Aarti is performed in the evening in Haridwar. Thousands of devotees stand on the 'Hari steps' with devotion for this Aarti.

After bathing in Ganga, we had Shri Vishweshwar's Darshan and conducted religious rituals. We were staying in the Maharashtra Bhavan. Dev Guruji and Pitre Guruji were looking after its management. The summer heat was unbearable though.

On Saturday, 3 July 1982, we bathed in Ganga again and did our religious rituals. We went to Shri Vishwanath Temple with Shri Pitre Guruji, did an 'Abhishek', and had the Darshan. After lunch, we had some rest. In the evening, we saw some historic and religious places in Kashi. We walked on the banks of the river. Old Kashi is full of narrow roads whereas new Kashi is growing as an improvised community.

On Sunday, 4 July 1982, we reached Bodh Gaya in the afternoon. Due to the extreme heat, it was hard to go out. So, we decided to take some rest after lunch. We took Darshan of the large Buddha idol and 'Bodhi' tree underneath which Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. This area is peaceful and serene. There are numerous lotus ponds. We also saw 'Boudh Vihar'. Our overnight stay that day was in Bodh Gaya.

On Tuesday, 6 July 1982, we had 'Vishnupad' Temple's Darshan in the morning. At noon, we started on our further journey from Gaya and reached Patna at 6 PM. It was not as hot as Bodh Gaya here. Our overnight stay was in Patna.

On Wednesday, 7 July 1982, we reached Patna airport in the morning. Our flight took off at 3 PM and landed in Kathmandu shortly. This was my life's first air travel. It was full of excitement, curiosity, fear, and joy. It was a memorable one. Kathmandu is Nepal's capital city. Nepali people are disciplined, calm, and busy in their work. They have a fair complexion. They are beautiful and considerate. Our stay was at the Lhotse hotel. The tall golden yellowish Himalayan peaks were visible from the hotel room's windows.

On 8 July 1982, we went for Shri Pashupathinath's Darshan in the morning. Shri Pashupathinath and Shri Kedarnath are together considered as one Dhaam pilgrimage. Shri Pashupathinath's Temple is historic, grand and built with stones. It has a very large premise. It is on the banks of Gandaki River. There are very tall Rudraksha trees on either side of this river. There are many pigeons in the Temple premise. Our Darshan of Shri Pashupathinath was very satisfying. Only Hindus were allowed in this Temple. After this Darshan, we saw religious places like Shri Bhaktapur, Patna, and Lilapur. Like Konkan, this region is blessed with greenery, waterfalls, and eye-pleasing natural beauty. Kathmandu's population is about 150,000. Even though it is a capital city, it didn't appear too big. Modern facilities were also rare. The air, however, was clean and cold. We stayed overnight in Kathmandu.

On Friday, 9 July 1982, we did an 'Abhishek' of Shri Pashupathinath in the morning and had the Darshan. We also had the Darshan of 'Budha Nilkantha' and saw Kathmandu city all day. After the earthquake in 2015, Kathmandu is now destroyed.

On Saturday, 10 July 1982, we had Shri Pashupathinath's Darshan again in the early morning and reached Kathmandu Airport at 10 AM. We reached Patna Airport at 2.30 PM. Later, we ventured into the city for sightseeing. Patna is Bihar's capital city. It is a very big city. Food and milk are very cheap here. Our overnight stay was in Patna.

On Sunday, 11 July 1982 at 3.30 AM, our passenger bogie was attached to Varanasi Express train. We reached Varanasi at 10 AM. We bathed in Ganga again and had Kashi Vishveshwar's Darshan. We purchased small containers of Ganga water, black threads and thread rolls. Until the evening, we saw all the riverbanks of Kashi. Our overnight stay was in Kashi.

On Monday, 12 July 1982, we boarded Varanasi – Dadar Express train at 10 AM and reached Allahabad at 5 PM. At midnight, we arrived at Jabalpur Station. It felt like our return journey had begun. We continued to travel on the train all night long.

On Tuesday, 13 July 1982, we crossed Khandava at 5 AM, Itarasi at 7 AM, and Bhusaval at 11 AM. Now I was feeling more comfortable. Our earlier part of the journey was in hot and sunny weather. Shri Kshetra Kashi, Allahabad, and Gaya were very hot in particular. The hot weather had bothered us a lot. After having a shower and lunch in the early afternoon, we took some rest. At 7 PM, our passenger compartment was attached to Nagpur – Kolhapur Express train. Our further journey continued throughout the night.

On Wednesday, 14 July 1982 we reached Pune at 7 AM. We were happy to have completed Char Dhaam and Kashi Yatra. All the travelers thanked Shri Ashok Kulkarni and Shri Datta Digambar from the bottom of their hearts and said goodbye to them. We were all tired from the month-long continuous travel and the heat. So, on Thursday, we rested in Pune.

On Friday, 16 July 1982, we boarded Nagpur Express train and reached Miraj in the afternoon. Our Char Dhaam pilgrimage was now completed. I completed Shri Kshetra Kashi Yatra twice. This was only possible because of Shri Ramesh Maharaj's blessings. It was a very difficult Yatra. The total expense for this pilgrimage was Rs. 5,000. Out of this, the Yatra company's cost was Rs. 3,600 and other expenses were Rs. 1,400.

Our month-long pilgrimage of religious shrines and 'Char Dhaam' was from 14 June 1982 to 14 July 1982. Even after thousands of years, Indian's faith in these religious shrines and the 'Sadhus' / 'Sanyasis' living at these shrines is intact. The attraction towards these spiritual

capabilities is overflowing in Indian's minds. Thousands of people were bathing in Ganga to wash off their sins. The Pandeys were adhering to scientific rituals while conducting Pooja and name chanting. We were also one amongst them. Sanyasis could be seen at places on the banks of Ganga River. There were naked Sadhus. 'Bairagis' were wearing only a 'Langoti'. Some were wandering and some had settled underneath the trees. Some 'Bairagis' had covered themselves with ashes and were talking to people sitting in front of the lit 'Dhunis'. Some 'Sanyasis' had their 'Ashrams'. There were large groups of 'Sanyasis' wearing saffron clothes, bearing 'Dands' (Wooden staff or wand). After Shri Kshetra Badrinath's Darshan, I had taken a local guide for company and met many 'Sadhus' and 'Sanyasis'. I had the pleasure of 'Satsang' (In good company) of many 'Sadhus' and 'Sanyasis' who had grown their beard and hair into coils. Some 'Bairagis' were 'Brahmacharis' who had given up food for years and some were deeply meditating. They mostly spoke in Hindi whereas some preferred not to speak.

The guide took me to such a cave and left me there. That Sadhu's hair and beard were bright white and were touching the ground. He had a fair complexion and was lustrous bright. Many of his students were living in the cave. A water pot and some fruits could be seen in the cave. Some tree leaves and their petioles had fallen on the ground. Sunlight was entering from one side of the cave. Maybe it was due to my former fortune that this Mahatma enquired about me. My open mind and preconceived fortune made his Darshan possible. He obliged me by guiding me for my future life. He also taught and told me some yoga routines. After two hours, when I was returning, He gave me some tree roots. By eating them, I could have stayed alive without sun, air, cold, and hunger for many days. I exited the cave. It was too late. I returned with the guide. On our way back, I was remembering this medium built, watery-eyed, passionless and Godly Sanyasi. I was suspicious if he was the same yogi whom I had met when I was 7 or 8 years old.

It reminded me of my childhood when my financial situation was extremely poor. They were summer days. My father had closed his saloon. He had taken a shower and was having lunch with my grandmother. When he was removing mango pickle from a jar, two Sadhus came at our front door for food alms. My grandmother invited them inside the house and made them sit comfortably. My parents took their Darshan. One of the Sadhus was an elderly person, and he was chanting mantras. He was extremely lustrous. The other Sadhu was young. He had a fair complexion and was also lustrous. He was probably the student of the other. My father, in his broken and Urdu mixed Hindi, asked them if they would like to have lunch. But they said, "We don't want lunch. But if you can give us dry rice, we will take it". In the meantime, I came down from upstairs and was heading out to play. My grandmother asked me to take their Darshan. Out of fear, I was not ready to do a namaskar to them. The 'Sadhus' said to me in Hindi "Aao beta. Daro mat" (Come kid. Don't be scared). They cuddled me and moved their hands on my face and body. They applied 'Angara' (Ashes) to me and said to my parents and grandmother "Yeh beta hamara hai" (This kid is our's) and they made me sit on their lap. I was scared and

started crying. My parents were telling me not to cry. After some time, the Sadhus let me go and again said: "Yeh beta hamara hai. Kai saal baad vo aayega" (This kid is our's. After some years, he will come). I don't think my parents, or my grandmother understood anything. But they thought that something good will happen to me in the future due to their blessings. Both Sadhus took the rice and the two paise that my father gave and left for their further journey.

I was speculating if I saw the same Sadhus in the cave. Were they the ones who gave me blessings for my future life?

I had been hearing Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's stories of His divine life and miracles from Lt. Maisaheb Shirke and Lt. Akka Jadhav. I used to get emotional listening to those stories. This resulted in tremendous faith, excitement, and waves of compassion in my heart towards Him. Now, I was enjoying stories of Gods and was in the company of Godly people. So, my arbitrary thoughts were subsiding. I was tired of my vagabond like life. Any temptations towards external luxuries were also over. Since I was attaining the intense longing required by a faithful devotee, Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj was giving me the experiences. I was getting some of His impossible experiences.

My parents and family members tried to get me married on three occasions. But I defeated their purpose. I was enkindled in my faith towards Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj. I was able to bypass the trivial matters in day-to-day life. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's life work was getting me excited. I used to have tears in my eyes remembering his eternal favors. His memories would make me restless. His main work was to ease the pain of mankind. This work was accomplished by blessing the people with divine experiences, guidance, and 'Karmasidhant' (Principles of karma). He was a yogi, Avatar, and manifestation of Lord Datta. He was universal, ubiquitous, and sentient. Now, I was thinking of celebrating his 'Sanjeevan (Life) Samadhi' day.

On 20 August 1900, Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj took 'Sanjeevan Samadhi' at 3.30 AM in Punyashlok Tarabai Shirke's house. 25 August 2000 would mark 100 years of His Samadhi. According to Hindu religious teachings, Sadhu and Saint's Samadhi and Jayanti should be celebrated. Their teachings, 'Upadesh' (Guiding principles), and their work gives birth to morals, culture, happiness, peace, and an ideal lifestyle. Until the year 2000, we were celebrating four festivals publicly in the Mathi and on a large scale. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Jayanti (Every year on Madya Vadya Panchami as per Hindu calendar) and Punyatithi (On Shravan Vadya Panchami), Shri Gokulashtami, Shri Swami Samartha Punyatithi (On Chaitra Krishna Trayodashi as per Hindu calendar) were celebrated by devotees from Miraj, Sangli, Jaysingpur, Udgaon, Samdoli, and Mhaisal, etc. Devotees participated with enthusiasm and took the benefits of the 'Mahaprasad'. They would return to their homes after Bhajans and Kirtans.

Now, on the occasion of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's 'Sanjeevan Samadhi Shatabdi' (Centennial) festival, Shri Dnyaneshwari Parayan (Reading) festival was also conducted in Mhaisal Station's Shri Datta Mathi. This was held from Shravan Vadya Navami – Thursday, 24 August 2000 to Bhadrapad Shudh Dweetaya – 31 August 2000. This big festival started with Shri Datta Maharaj's palanquin ceremony from Miraj's Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Mathi.

At 9 AM, Shri Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni, Govind Maharaj Kulkarni, Keshavrao Gokhale, Sakharam Maharaj Salunkhe, Ashokrao Khatavkar, Shri Pradipant Balekundri, Suresh Patil, Shri Jaganath Mhaske (Bapu), and my caretaker Shivajirao Dhulubulu did the Pooja and started the palanquin ceremony.

In this festival, Param Pujya Pattudevri Shivyogi Maharaj, H.B.P Shri Chandrashekhar Kelkar Maharaj, H.B.P Durunath Kotnis Maharaj, H.B.P Laxman Shastri Mote, H.B.P Manohar Sarda, H.B.P Vishwas Anna Gawali, Honorable industrialist Pravinsheth Lunkad, Shri Shahajirao Jagdale, Shri Subhash Lunkad, Shri Vinod Gulawani, Shri Ganesh Gadgil, Shri Dipakbaba Shinde (Mhaisalkar), Shri Manojbaba Shinde (Mhaisalkar), Shri Ratansinh Baba (Mhaisalkar), Dr. A. P. Bhupatkar, Shri Bapusaheb Kinikar, Lt. Natha Deval, Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar, and H.B.P Pandurang Bhosale Maharaj, etc. marked their attendance.

H.B.P Vitthalrao Bhosale, Rameshbuva Shivapurkar, Datta Vadgaonkar, Sitaram Kumathekar, Sopankaka Isadkar, Ramraje Pathak, Vishwesh Bodas, Mukundkaka Jatdevlekar, Shamrao Appa Karadkar, Pandurang Maharaj Ghule, Eknath Maharaj Hande, Sandeepan Shinde, and Hasegaonkar conducted Kirtan Seva.

H.B.P M. B. Joshi, Shri Gurunath Kotnis, Shri A. M Gramopadhye, Shri Lala Master, Shri D. K. Ghaware (Bhau), and Shri Vivekanand Vaskar Maharaj delivered the pravachans.

Lt. Professor Shivajirao Bhosale, Lt. P. N. Kulkarni, Lt. Nandakaka Bapat, Shri Bapu Jadhav, Shri Vaijnath Maharaj, Shri Dharmadivakar, Laxmisen Bhattarak conducted the 'Vyakhyan mala' (Lecture series). Ex-MLA Harijbhai Dhature, Shri A. Y. Meshram, Advocate Chiman Lokur, Shri Dipak Lele, Shri Bhimgondanna Patil (Gavkamagar Patil of Mhaisal), Shri R. P. Patil, Shri Mahaling Anna Patane, Bapusaheb Kinikar, Dr. V. K. Amte, Subhash Kulkarni, Advocate N. A. Kotwal, Shri Baba Patil, Dr. Anil Madke, and Dr. Ranjit Sulyan were in attendance for this program.

Miss Mangala Joshi, Shri Rishikesh Bodas, Mrs. Pradnya Topane, and Mrs. Shubdha Bhogale performed 'Gayan Seva' (Singing performances). Whereas Shri Dhondiram Magdum, Shri Vitthalrao Kushirkar, Shri Siddeshwar Koli, Shri Babasaheb Kumbhar, Shri Olekar brothers, Shri

Mohan Sapkal, Shri Manikrao Indulkar, Shri Annappa Korvi, and M. R. Savant conducted BhajanGayan Seva.

About 1500 people participated in Dyaneshwari 'Parayan' (Group reading of religious books). Refreshments like meals, tea, and breakfast were arranged nicely for everyone. On Thursday, 31 August 2000, at 8 AM, Shri Rudra Pashupati Kolekar Swamiji and Shri Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni finished the Dyaneshwari 'Parayan' program. A large Dindi yatra was carried out after this.

At 1 PM, industrialist Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad, Shri Mahesh Shirke, Shri Pradip Pant Balekundrikar, Shri Anandrao Patil, Shri Anandrao Shelar, Honorable Maruti Sale, Vitthalrao Suryavanshi, Dhavale painter, Lt. Sangappa Mama Mali, Lt. Anna Shinde, Lt. Sureshpant Balekundrikar, Lt. Chandrakant Jadhav, and Lt. Balu Tuka Ghorpade, etc. distributed the 'Mahaprasad'.

Honorable Savanta Mhetre, Bajirao Ghorpade, Doulat Ghorpade, Ajit Suryavanshi, Santosh Suryavanshi, Laxman Jagtap, Munna Bhojmalpani, Appa Zende, Ramesh Bangle, Chandrakant Kurane and brothers, Chandu Homkar, Datta Bhokare, Suresh Kamble, Mohan Kamble, Anandrao Shelar and brothers, Dr. Madhukar Mhetre, Pramod Basarge, Shivajirao Jadhav, Madhu Pawar, Shashikant Gove, Yashwant Chavan, Mangal Shinde, Tanaji Ghorpade, Anandrao Mandle, Popat Satpute, Vitthal Vijapure, Sumersingh Rajput, Manohar Kadam, Vasant Gadkari, Balaji Katkar and brothers, Sadashivrao Wadd and brothers, Ashok Tangadi, Tanaji Shinde, Anandrao Mali, Vilas Shinde, Maruti Gaikwad, Laxman Jagtap, Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi, Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar, Lt. Nivrutti Katkar, Lt. Kharade Tatya, and Dilip Kesarkhane, etc. worked tirelessly and that is why Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Sanjeevani Shatabdi (Centennial) Mohatsav (Festival) was completed with happiness and excitement. I wish to thank all of them lovingly from the bottom of my heart.

So, from 24 August 2000 to 31 August 2000, Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Sanjeevani Samadhi Centennial festival and Shri Grantharaj Dyaneshwari Parayan (group reading) were completed with grandiose. The entire credit for this goes to Shri Datta Maharaj's blessings. I had vowed that if this Sanjeevan festival is completed in the best possible way, I would walk to Pandharpur and take Lord Pandurang's Darshan for three years. Accordingly, under the guidance of Lt. Kharade Tatya and Shri Savanta Mhetre, I along with many others walked to Pandharpur in a Dindi. We had Shri Vitthal Darshan and thus fulfilled the vow. These Dindis were from 11 December 2001 to 25 December 2001, 17 December 2002 to 23 December 2002, and from 27 November 2003 to 2 December 2003. I was very happy to have completed them.

Now, I started taking some rest. During this time, I got 'Shri Sai Charitra' book given to me by Mrs. Khedekar and written by Shri Agaskar. I was very impressed after reading it. Through this book, Sai Baba's life, His work, 'Drushtaanth' explained in simple words, miracles, love towards mankind, mercy towards animals, and blessings are revealed. After witnessing Sangli's Kelkar Vahini's immense faith and devotion towards Sai Baba and through this book, I became fanatical about it.

During my high-school years, I became friends with Shri Ramling Chikode (Dada) and Shri Vitthal Vijapure. In the year 1969, we were amongst the students who passed the old format S.S.C (Secondary School Certificate - Matric) with decent scores. Even today, our friendship, affinity, and love are intact. Shri Vitthal Vijapure's father Lt. Bhimrao Vijapure was a railway ticket checking officer. He used to take all of his family members to Shri Sai Baba's Darshan once in a year. Their entire family was engrossed in Sai Bhakti (Devotion). So, whenever he went to Shirdi, he used to give Udi (Ashes from Sai Baba's Dhuni/pit fire) and prasad to me.

After this, in 1980, I went to Shirdi with the Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi (Dada) for the first time. At that time Suryavanshi Dada was a Corporator in Sangli Municipal Corporation. Lt. Raghunath Ghodake, Musabai Sheikh (Bhisti), Magdum Anna (Mudis House) Kalgutgi, Corporator Lalage Sir, Shri Rajaram Ghatage (Dada's son-in-law) were also with us.

At that time, there was no overcrowding for Shri Sai Baba's Darshan. So, we had a proper Darshan. With this Darshan, my faith in Shri Sai Baba went on increasing.

I used to stay in Dada's house in Sangli on every Tuesday. A group Aarti was conducted every Tuesday at 8 PM. Many people from Sangli used to attend this Aarti. From this group, Lt. Raghunathrao Ghodake, Shri Bhanudas Padalkar, Shri Balkrishna Gokhale Sir, Lt. Balasaheb Yadav, Lt. Nimbalkar Aaba, Lt. Dattatray Shelar (of Islampur) and we would have dinner together. Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni used to attend this Aarti. He was the most elderly and respected. Hence it was customary for everyone to take his Darshan. All Suryavanshi family members were his devotees.

I feel it is important to introduce Shri Suryavanshi Dada. His full name was Baburao Jyotiba Suryavanshi. His wife's name was Laxmibai Baburao Suryavanshi. Her maternal name was Bayjabai. This couple had four sons named Mohan, Raju, Prakash, Sudhakar, and Vijay. Their daughters were Mrs. Kamal Shinde (of Ichalkaranji), Mrs. Padma Ghatage (of Miraj), Mrs. Surutai (of Sangli), and Mrs. Alka Suryavanshi (of Miraj). But there was an unexpected storm in their life. Dada's second son died all of a sudden. People did not honor their commitments to the Bhishi (Chit fund) group he was running. So, this family came in an extreme financial crisis. Their situation was miserable. During all of this, one of their recently married sons named

Mohan was burnt severely. The bank started sending legal notices for repayment of the loan that they had taken for a truck. All sources of income were closed. They could not see any ray of light.

One of their sons-in-law, Shri Rajaram Dattoba Ghatage wanted to find a way out of this situation and hence he brought them to me. I was thus introduced to Shri Suryavanshi Dada by Shri Ghatage. I became more acquainted with them as days went by. This turned into mutual respect and love. They made me one of their sons. I started going to Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Samadhi in Shri Shirke's Mathi for Darshan on every Sunday and took them along with me. Eventually, with Shri Datta Maharaj's blessings, Suryavanshi's family's fortune started turning towards the good.

I used to call Lt. Mrs. Laxmibai Suryavanshi as Mami. She was very affectionate, dutiful, bold, and devout. She found happiness even in poverty. She used to accompany us to Kolhapur for the Darshan. Shri Mohan got married in 1979. His wife's name was Shobha, and her maternal house was in Kolhapur. Prakash married in 1980. His wife's name was Surekha. Her maternal house was in Nipani. Sudhakar got married in 1986. His wife's name was Mina. Vijay also got married in 1986. His wife's name was Manisha. She was already their relative before marriage (Mami's sister's daughter).

From 1976 onwards, Shri Datta Maharaj's Aarti started in Shri Suryavanshi Dada's house. In 1980, Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's painting was ritually installed in their house in Sangli. So, Pooja, Paath (reading), and Aarti, etc programs started routinely. More and more people started coming for the Darshan. The space was inadequate to accommodate them. It was important to construct a new Mathi. Hence, in 1993, a new Mathi was constructed. Pictures of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj, Shri Swami Samarth, Shripant Balekundrikar, Shri Shiv Chidambar Mahaswami were ritually installed by the auspicious hands of Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni and Shri Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni. I and Shri Govind Kulkarni attended the Aarti on every Tuesday evening. Many people started attending the Aarti. Now Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Jayanti and Punyatithi were celebrated publicly on a large scale. Lt. Dada and Lt. Mami (Also known as Dholi Aai – meaning fat mom) were a loving couple. Shri Datta Mathi was established due to their previous fortunes and previous merits. They spent the rest of their life in Shri Datta Mathi's management and services, public service, and devotee's service. They considered me as one of their sons. Dada gave me fatherly love and cared for me. A previous life's bond was thus discovered.

This is how Shri Datta Mathi's work started in Sangli. Mrs. Suryavanshi Mami passed away on 3 February 2009 whereas Dada passed away on 31 May 2009. The Datta Mathi's vine that they planted is now growing and spreading. Many devotees and self-willed people come to this

Temple and take Darshan. No matter how much gratitude I express towards Lt. Suryavanshi Dada and Lt. Mami (Aai), it would still fall short. Dada had made my first Shri Sai Baba Darshan possible. After that, I always had the urge to take Shri Sai Baba's Darshan in Shirdi. But because of my job and financial situation, it was not possible. In 1985, I, Lt. Shakarrao Kamble, Lt. Dattooba Shindi, Shri Shivappa Yevare Anna, Shri Ram Mahajan, and Shri Savanta Mhetre, etc. went to Shirdi for Shri Sai Baba's Darshan and to Shegaon for Shri Gajanan Maharaj's Darshan. Shri Vinod Gokhale had undertaken Shri Shirdi Sansthan's water pollution plant's work. I went with him to Shirdi in 2000 and also, with Mrs. Indu Aai, Smt. Shantai Shelar, and Shri Anandrao Shelar in 2001. My faith in Shirdi Sai Baba was increasing. Through this belief, I contemplated constructing a Sai Baba Temple. But I couldn't find appropriate land for it. However, with Sai Baba's blessings, Lt. Shankarrao Shinde made his land available. Thus, Shri Sai Samarth Vitthal Temple construction began.

Shri Sai Samarth Vitthal Temple's layout and oversight was done by Shri S. M. Sannake engineer. Shri Tanaji Shinde, Shri Anandrao Mali, Shri Shashikant Shinde, Shri Anandrao Shelar and bothers, Shri Dhavale painter, Shri Chandar Kurane, Shri Mangal Shinde, Shri Savanta Mhetre (of Vijaynagar), Shri Chandu Homkar, Shri Shashikant Kurane, Shri Hafizbhai, and Lt. Subhash Ulagadde took a lot of efforts for the construction of this Temple.

Shri Sai Samarth Vitthal Temple's opening ceremony was held from 19 February 2003 to 'Madya Vadya Dashmi' 26 February 2003. The opening ceremony began with a 'Parayan' (Group reading) of Shri Granthraj Dyaneshwari with the auspicious hands of Shri Param Pujya Gurumahant Pattdevru Shivyogi Maharaj, Shri Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni (Of Akkol), Shri Chandrashekhar Kelkar (Anna), Shri Gurunath Kotnis Maharaj, Shri Pradip Pant Balekundrikar Maharaj, Shri Bapusaheb Pujari, Honorable Rishikesh Bodas, Dr. Jaysingrao Shinde, Shri Dipakbaba Shinde, Shri Manojbaba Shinde, Lt. Kedarrao Shinde, Shri Hanmantrao Shinde, Shri Shankarrao Satpute, Shri Shri Manohar Sarda, H.B.P Dr. Sharad Gadre, Shri Vishwas Anna Gavali, Shri Vijayrao Dhulubulu, Shri Balasaheb Kurane, Shri Arun Ramtirthkar, Shri Pavankumar Kocheta, Advocate Deepshikha Apte, Lt. Bapusaheb Jamdar, and Lt. Chandrakant Jadhav, etc.

In this inauguration, Kirtans were performed by H. B. P. Balshastri Haridas, Shri Laxman Shastri Mote, Shri Prasad Maharaj Badave, Shri Shrikant Maharaj Bodhale, Shri Chaitanya Maharaj Deglurkar, Lt. Sitaram Buva Kumathekar, Lt. Nana Joglekar, and Lt. Dattadas Ghaagbuva. Evening Kirtan Seva was done by Dr. Abalaal Nadaf, Shri Eknath Maharaj Hande, Shri Manohar Buva Shirsat, and Shri Ramraje Pathak.

Pravachan Seva was done by H.B.P Utpaat, Shri Gurunath Kotnis, Shri D. K. Thavare, Shri Pundalik Maharaj Patil, Shri Shivrudra Basarge, Guruvarya Shri Vivekanand Vaskar, and Lt. Vitthalrao Bhosale.

Mesmerizing speeches of Dr. M. B. Joshi, Shri Vaijnath Mahajan, L. R Nasirabadkar, Shri M. G Dhadphale, Shri Ashok Kamat, Shri Bapu Jadhav, and Shri P. N. Kulkarni were held. Mrs. Manjusha Kulkarni conducted a singing performance. Whereas Shri Chandatai Tewary and Shri Mohan Kadegavkar led the 'Bharud' (narrative format) Bhajan Seva.

On the morning of 27 February 2003, 'Praan Pratishtha' (The rite of bringing life in an idol) of the idols of Shri Sai Baba, Shri Swami Samarth, and Shri Vitthal – Rukmini was done by the auspicious hands of Shri Ramesh Maharaj Akkolkar, Keshavrao Gokhale, Govind Maharaj Kulkarni, Sakharam Maharaj, Dinanand Maharaj (Kadgaokar), and Shri Subhash Belgavi. Shri D. K. Patil, Shri R. K. Patil, and M.L.A Sanjay Kaka Patil were present for this event. On 23 February 2003, 'Vaikunth nivasi' (One who has passed away to heaven) Maisaheb Shirke Auditorium was inaugurated by the auspicious hands of Padmashri Dr. D. Y. Patil Sir (Governor of Bihar), Shri Panditrao Chavan, Shri Mahesh Shirke, and Shri D. S. Bhosale, etc.

On the morning of 26 February 2003, after the Kirtans were over, 'Mahaprasad' was served by Shri Rudrapashupati Kolekar Maharaj, Honorable industrialist Pravinsheth Lunkad, Shri Annasaheb Kurane, Lt. Raghunath Ghodake, Lt. Vasantrao Ghodake, Shri Vasant Suryavanshi, Shri Banudas Patil, Shri Chandrakant Hulwan, Honorable Shivajirao Jadhav, Shri Bhau Narote, Shri Madhavrao Potdar, and Ram Ghodake, etc.

All devotees worked tirelessly during the opening ceremony of the Shri Sai Samarth Vitthal Temple. I would like to thank all of the guests for attending this occasion.

A great personality like 'Shikshan Maharshi' 'Padmashri' Dr. D. Y. Patil Sir (Governor) attended this program. No amount of gratitude towards him would be enough.

Now, Pooja and Archa were routinely carried out in the Shri Sai Samarth Vitthal Temple. I was feeling incomprehensible happiness. Soon after this, I went for Shirdi Sai Darshan along with Honorable Vinod Gokhale, Mangal Shinde, Appa Kudache, Chandar Kurane, and Chandu Homkar. Days were passing by happily. But my financial loans were making me uneasy. I had to take a loan from the bank as usual for the Shri Sai Samarth Vitthal Temple. It was impossible to repay the loan from my salary. But I was assured that my faith and confidence in Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj and my uninterrupted devotion to Shri Sai Baba will lead to a way out of this loan. At least I had the mental support that a solution will come to light, and it thus happened so.

In this Kaliyug, I don't recall of any instances where the Almighty gave any money to devotees. But indirectly, Shri Datta Maharaj and Shri Sai Baba sent money to me. It was my luck and religious merit that I got such an extreme experience. It so happened that, in the village of

Samdoli, there was a lottery arranged for the Girl's high school. The first prize was a Maruti car and other prizes were motorcycles, cupboards, sewing machines, and water pots. One of my close friends Shri C. K. Patil was from Samdoli. He sold me 5 tickets for Rs. 200 each. Out of those, I gave two to Subhash Ulagadde. I had even forgotten about it. After my salary day, I gave Rs. 1000 to Shri C. K. Patil and finished the matter. In July 2003, on Guru Pournima, I was reading a newspaper and noticed that a devotee from a village near Sangli had gifted a Tata Sumo car to his Guru on Guru Pournima. I laughed at the matter and was astonished by it. A new Maharaj was gifted Tata Sumo by his devotees. And here I was, after so many years my Guru Bandhus (Brothers) and the people around me had not even given me a bicycle. So, I thought of making fun of Advocate Appasaheb Kudache over the phone and asked him to read that news. He called me back and said, "if you would like, we will gift you a car". Obviously, I refused and said that I was just making fun. Thus, I got out of the situation.

As usual on Guru Pournima Day, I, respected Chandar Kurane, and Advocate Appa Kudache went to Shri Kshetra Narsinhwadi, Shri Datta Mathi Kolhapur, Shri Kshetra Admapur, Akkol for Shri Ramesh Maharaj's Darshan and returned to Mhaisal in the night. I was about to sleep after dinner when I got a phone call from Shri C. K. Patil of Samdoli. He gave me some good news. It was about the bumper lottery to raise funds for the Girl's high school. The winning ticket was the one that I had taken for Shri Subhash Ulagadde. This news was a good jolt for me. The morning fun incident I made with Advocate Appa Kudache was trying to become a reality with Shri Sai Baba's blessings.

I informed Lt. Subhash Ulagadde the next day. He too was very happy. My financial loans were increasing. It was not right of me to use a car in this situation. Besides, I could not have afforded its daily expenses. So, I requested Lt. Shubash Ulagadde to sell the Maruti Van and instead give me the money to repay the loan. He agreed to it and gave me Rs. 250,000 to 300,000. I will be ever grateful to him for this. In this way, Shri Datta Maharaj and Shri Sai Baba arranged to repay my loans by making me and Subash winners in the lottery. Is this even possible in Kaliyug? But with Their blessings, it had become possible. The loans sitting on top of my head were now on the shoulders.

Now, I shall narrate the second experience. A public Trust was formed in the name of Maisaheb Shirke of Kolhapur's Shri Krishna Saraswati Datt Maharaj. She passed away on 4 February 1994. The other trustees could not handle the accounts and management of the Trust because of their old age. For this reason, Maisaheb Shirke's son-in-law Shri Madhukar Naik requested that Trust be merged with our Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Mathi in Vijaynagar (a.k.a Mhaisal Station). On 31 July 2000, Matoshri Maisaheb Shirke's public Trust was officially merged with our Trust after all legal requirements were met. I got Rs. 200,000 to 300,000 from this trust. So, indirectly, Shri Datta Maharaj had sent such a big amount to repay the loan. This is a fact. This was His most gracious blessing. With this money, my loans were now over.

I have been going to Shri Narsinhwadi for Shri Datta's Darshan since 1969-70. There used to be many tamarind trees where today's parking lot is. There was a small bus stop with a tin roof. Besides Datta Jayanti and Pournima, there were hardly any people at this bus stop. One could have Shri Dattatraya's attractive Paduka's Darshan at peace. There was no rush or crowding. It was a silent peaceful and pleasing atmosphere.

My father, grandmother, etc. were Varkaris. They went to Pandharpur sometimes. My father, his friend Bhim Singh Rajput, Pundalik Singh Rajput, and Babu Singh Rajput, always went together to Shri Kshetra Pandharpur for Pandurang's Darshan. My elder brother Vasant Rao went regularly to Narsinhwadi on a bicycle via Krishna Ghat – Arjunwad – Shirol road. From 1974-75 onwards, I started going to Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Mathi in Kolhapur for Darshan. I and Shri Chandar Kurane would go together on his motorcycle (Royal Enfield M.H.M 636) to Kolhapur and Narsinhwadi without fail. Similarly, since Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's 'Gurusthan' (Guru's place) was Akkalkot, I started going there when possible on holidays. I don't remember very well, but I believe it was after I met Shri Ramesh Kulkarni (Akkolkar) Maharaj that I started going to Shri Kshetra Murgod for Shri Shiva Chidambar Maha Swami's Samadhi Darshan and Shri Kshetra Balekundri for Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri's Samadhi Darshan.

What did Shri Ramesh Maharaj teach me? What did he give me? More than this, it is important to remember that he guided me correctly at proper times. Besides, he arranged for blessings and support of these two 'Maha Purush' (Great personalities namely Shri Sai Baba and Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj). He consolidated the religious merits of many of my previous lives. He gave me my multiple lives' priceless treasure to behold. This, I consider as my utmost fortune.

Shri Kshetra Murgod is about 40 to 50 Kilometers from Belgaum. On the Belgaum – Bagalkot highway, one has to go until Katari Road intersection. Shri Kshetra Murgod is on the road from this intersection towards Bailhongal. Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami's Samadhi is in Murgod. The central part of this village where most of the houses are is called Kengari. There is an old and huge Pimpal tree in front of Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami's Temple. On the left side of the Temple is the place where Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami was given his last rites (Cremated with mantra chanting). A beautiful Audumbar tree sprung to life on the third day after cremation at that very spot. It has born from the leftover ashes of the cremation. On the right side of the Temple are Shri Ram Temple, Shri Vishnu Panchayatan Temples, Sanskrit school, and a place where meals are served. There is a small pond in the rear of the Temple. A few tall mounds are in front of the Temple.

Shri Datta's Padukas are underneath the Pimpal tree (Holy fig tree) and a canopy is nearby on the left side. The first time I went to Shri Kshetra Murgod for Darshan was with Shri Ramesh Maharaj's mother. We came to Katri intersection by a state transport bus and from there to Murgod in a small horse cart. For the next 12 years, I came here from Pournima to Panchami and took Shri Chidambar Swami's Samadhi Darshan. At that time, my financial situation was critical. I was surviving on my salary. But I had faith in Shri Swami. Eventually, I came to know more about Shri Shiva Chidambar Mahaswami from Aai (Shri Ramesh Maharaj's mother).

India is a pious land. It is also a parturient (Progenitress, Womb bearing) from which complete incarnated humans are born. It has given birth to Saints - Mahants (Monks), Rishis – Munis, and learned people. Shri Shiv Chidambar Dixit was such an incarnation of Lord Shiva. He was a divine person who lived in Shri Kshetra Murgod. He was born in Shri Kshetra Murgod (Taluka Bailhongal, District Belgaum) on Karthik Vadya Pashthi, Champashthi, Monday, 20 November 1758 (Marathi calendar Shake 1680). The original name of Murgod is Amar Kalyan. Lord Shiva took birth on this planet in the form of Shri Shiv Chidambar Maha Swami. His father's name was Shri Martand Shastri Dixit, whereas his mother's name was Shri Laxmi Mata. This virtuous couple did 'Tapascharya' (devout austerity) in Shri Somnath Temple which is 5 miles away from Shri Kshetra Murgod and also in places like Shri Kshetra Sogal, Shri Kshetra Devar Hippargi's Martand Bhairav – Malhari deity, and in Akash Chidambar. Thus, they pleased Lord Shri Shankar, who then took birth as Shiv Chidambar from the womb of Shri Laxmi Mata. The baby had Bael leaves and rice grains on His right ear. Also, Tulsi (Holy basil) leaves and Tulsi flower seeds were on His left ear at birth. Shri Chidambar Maha Swami was indeed Lord Shiva Avatar. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati Maharaj (a.k.a Tembe Swami) has composed a Shlok (Verse) on Him. The verse reads as follows in Marathi:

**Shiva, Swayam (By himself) Bhumit levatirn Chidambarar
Vyo Bhuti Dixite.**

The above means:

Lord Shiva appeared on this earth in His Immortal form.

By meditating on Shri Chidambar, our ignorance is replaced with knowledge. Lord Shiva blessed us.

Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalot once said that He served ghee in Chidambar Dixit's 'Yadnya' (An oblation, observance, or act in general for the propitiation of a deity). Shri Shiv Chidambar Maha Swami soaked the people with righteousness (Good and right conduct) and 'Sadharma' (Same religion). He imparted the importance of Bhajan, Kirtan and devotion to the Almighty. He distributed food, provided encouragement and divinity / divine wisdom, maintained the

doctrine, and the truth about devotion to God. He finished his Avatar on 3 January 1816 (Poush Shuddha Chaturthi Shake 1737).

By performing miracles sometimes to make people realize their responsibilities, righteousness, faith, and devotion, He put devotees on the path of devotion (Bhakti Marg) and thus made human lives happy and peaceful. There is a magnificent Temple of Shri Chidambar Swami in Babhulgaon Ganga (Maharashtra). It is about 25 to 30 kilometers from Shrirampur. His disciple Shri Das Rajaram has composed numerous 'Abhangs' (A particular metrical composition in praise of the Deity, and usually in the Prákrit language). He was considered as Saint Tukaram's Avatar.

For 12 years I went to Shri Kshetra Murgod for Shri Chidambar Swami's Darshan from Pournima to Panchami. Similarly, I used to go to Balekundri for Datta Darshan. Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar was a Datta Avatar. By finding a balance between family and spiritual life, he demonstrated a path of 'Parmartha' (The highest and most excellent object of a human being, viz. the attainment and enjoyment of the Divine nature), righteousness, and morality to the people. His name was Shri Dattatraya Ramchandra Kulkarni. His native place was Balekundri. The Kulkarni 'Vatan' (A hereditary estate, office, right, due;) from Balekundri is now named as Pant Balekundri. Shri Pant Maharaj was born on Monday, 3 September 1855 (Shravan Vadya Ashtami, Rohini Nakshatra, third Prahar). His mother's name was Goddakka / Sitamai. Shri Pant Maharaj's birth was at his maternal grandfather's house in a village called Daddi (Karnataka). His primary education was taken care by his mother's brother Shripad Pant Kulkarni (a.k.a Daddikar). His mother's sister's son Ganu Marihalkar and Hanmu Daddikar were along with him in Daddi for their education.

His maternal ancestors in Daddi and His paternal ancestors (Shri Pant Balekundrikar Kulkarni) were devotees of Lord Datta for many generations. Both families were 'Satvik' (Pure, honest) and charitable. Of significance was the fact that a 'Dattavadhut' (Messenger of Lord Datta) by the name of Shri Balaji Anant Kulkarni (a.k.a Ballappa), used to visit both families quite often. Shri Ballappa was a 'Vatandar' Kulkarni of Parishawad (A village in Khanapur Tehsil, Belgaum District) and was a very rich person. He had a family as well. His sons were Gopalappa and Rangappa, whereas his daughter's name was Tungavva. Due to his predestination, he grew tired of family life. He gave up his Kulkarni title and quit following rituals ('Karmakaand'). He started roaming around farms and jungles in search of Sadhus' and Saints' Darshan. He did extreme asceticism ('Tapascharya') and tough 'Yog Sadhana', resulting in earning blessings and propitiousness of Shri Ramavadhut. Shri Ramavadhut was blessed by Lord Dattatraya. He (Shri Balappa) did Sadhana under the guidance of Madwalappa, Naglingappa, and many other Yogis in the Kabri-ban garden near Parishawad (Dist. Belgaum, Karnataka). He reached the highest level and completeness in Yog Sadhana. He transformed into a complete Avadhut state and became a Siddha Purush.

Due to his external appearance, people started calling him 'Huch' (Mad in Kannada language) Balappa. He grew very long hair, beard, and a mustache. He wore torn clothes and wandered around in his ecstasy away from the world of merits and demerits. 'Huch' Balappa roamed around numerous villages. He lived on a hill in Karadiguddi near Balekundri. The 'Berads' (A class of professional robbers) and 'Dhangars' (Shepherds/herdsmen and weavers in wool) became his disciples. He used to go to Shri Pant Maharaj's 'Wada' (House) occasionally to seek food alms. He would take rest in their front-yard or in Shri Rameshwar Temple in front of the house. He mainly traveled to Belgaum, Daddi, and nearby villages. Even though he had given up on all relationships, he always got engrossed with the devotees. Now, he had sown the seeds of Avadhut Sampradaya. He had become famous for this. He carried a single-string musical instrument, carried himself in an ungroomed manner, held a cloth bag (Zholi) on his sides, spread ashes ('Bhasma') all over his body, but remained always happy, free-willed and wayward. Both families in Balekundri and Daddi had faith in 'Huch' Balappa. But Shri Pant Maharaj did not respect or believe in Him because of His external appearance and veil of madness. On the contrary, Shri Pant Maharaj used to ridicule 'Huch' Balappa. However, 'Huch' Balappa was very forgiving and loving. Hence, because of His affection and indebtedness from many previous lives, He blessed the ridiculing Dattu (Nickname of Shri Pant Maharaj), showed Avadhut Panth's spiritual path, gave experiences, and hence passed His powers on Ashwin Vadya Dwadashi (GuruDwadashi) to Shri Pant Maharaj. Shri Pant Maharaj was 20 years old at this time in 1875. Saint Balappa thus named Dattu as His successor through a religious ritual by instructing the mystical verses and incantations of the Vedas. Shri Pant Maharaj continued with his family life with the blessings of Balappa.

In the year 1877, Shri Pant Maharaj passed the Public Service exam and took a teacher's job in the London Mission School in Belgaum. Through hard work and extreme warmth, He looked after the Balekundri family and Avadhut Sampradaya with motherly love. He endured sorrow, hardship for his Guru Bandhus (Fellow devotees of the same Guru), devotees, and all siblings while staying stable and serving His Guru. He did all of this while living a family life.

Shri Pant Maharaj composed 2,757 verses. Out of these, 2,730 are in Marathi and 27 are in Kannada. He has depicted Guru Bhakti (Devotion to Guru), experiences, knowledge of the spirit (Self-knowledge), and Darshan of the Avadhut (A Brahman-Avatar of Dattatraya) form through these verses. He gave a new name to His Guru Huch Balappa as Sadguru Balmukund Balavadhut. In these poems, He praised His Guru and His blessings, Avadhut Sampradaya, selfknowledge, epithets of God, Datta Bhakti (Devotion to Lord Datta), Yog Sadhana, and 'Namasmaraan' (Remembering a God's name) in Shri Datta Premlahari (This is a collection of verses written by Shri Pant Maharaj. The literal meaning of the title is Waves of love towards Shri Datta. It is considered to be his most seminal work).

Shri Pant Maharaj's impartations to his devotees and students are written in 'Bhaktalaap' (A long essay that was written by Shri Pant Maharaj) number 7 – 8, 'Shrinche Patre' (Shri's letters), 'Premtarang' (An essay), 'Bodhanand Gutika' (Describes the eight limbs of yoga), 'Atmajyoti' (Pant Maharaj describes the euphoria experienced when he attained self-realization under the guidance of Balmukund), 'Anubhavalli' (In this second essay, Shri Pant Maharaj narrates his experiences in a self-realized state in a question-and-answer form), 'Bramhopadesh' (In this third essay, Shri Pant Maharaj explains the concepts of 'Brahman' and 'Atman' in accordance with the Vedas and Upanishads), 'Bhaktodgar' (A story also referred to as 'Preambhet' where a devotee approaches Balmukund with the desire to attain 'Moksha' through self-realization), 'Bhagvadgeetasaar', 'Padmanubhav', 'Paramanubhavaprakash' (Also known as Prakash), and other small pieces of literature. Shri Pant Maharaj's Bhajan Sampradaya, Datta sampradaya, Avadhut Sampradaya have spread all over Maharashtra, Karnataka, and many countries. Through poetry, He simplified teachings of devotion to Sadguru, love towards brothers, inner peace, world life, and oneness with the Parmeshvar in simple words. Such a loving incarnation Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri finished his Avatar Leela on 16 October 1905.

In the year 1980, Shri Pant Maharaj's devotees, Shri Datta Sansthan, and Shri Kshetra Pant Balekundri celebrated Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar's 'Amrut Mohatsav' (75 years) by working tirelessly. The guidance, discipline, and oversight of Honorable Annasaheb Balekundrikar, Appasaheb Pant Balekundrikar, Dadasaheb Pant Balekundrikar, and Suresh Pant Balekundrikar was particularly important in making the palanquin ceremony and 'Mahaprasad' an unforgettable experience.

I was fortunate to participate in this 'Amrut Mohatsav' celebration in 1980. Preparations for the 2005 centennial (100 years) Punyatithi celebration began in March 2004. A gathering of Shri Pant Maharaj's devotees was held in Kolhapur. This gathering drew tremendous response from people. Topics like Shri 'Rajatmudra' (Silver coins), Shri Pant 'Paduka – Parikrama' (Padukas are wooden footwear / Khadau or an impression of a foot on a stone, worshiped as the trace of some god or Guru), (Parikrama is circumambulation, circuit, circle), 2004 festival, and 2005 Shri Pant centennial celebrations were discussed. Shri Pant's poetry, 'Avadhut Marg' (Avadhut spiritual way), public enlightenment, lectures on Bhajan 'Parampara' (Tradition), Kirtans, development of Shri Kshetra, women and youth development, meditation, and public gatherings were excellently addressed in the meet. The centennial celebrations were held from 18 October 2005 to 21 October 2005 in Shri Kshetra Pant Maharaj Balekundri on a large scale. On the last day of the celebrations, about 200,000 devotees took the 'Mahaprasad'. Everybody got the Darshan and 'Mahaprasad' in a disciplined way. It was my fortune that after being born, I was able to have the Darshan of Shri Pant Samadhi centennial festival's palanquin ceremony and perform some services. I did not realize how quickly the next year passed in memories of

this festival. Shri Vasantrao Jadhav and other devotees from our region worked a lot for Shri Pant 'Paduka Parikrama'.

In 2005, I was transferred to the Tasgaon Subdivision. I had spent quite a few years in Sangli's Divisional office and Board office. My senior officers were Shri G. R. Kulkarni, Shri A. Y. Meshram, and Shri S. A. Deshmane. Many years of my job flew quickly in close association with my brotherly friends and colleagues like Shri C. K. Patil, Shri Maruti Aldar, Shri Tamma Shishte, Shri Rajabhau Dongare, Shri Madan Bongale, Shri Vinayak Metkari, Shri Baban Padolkar, Shri Vivek Khedekar, Shri Deepak Lele, Shri Babu Mangaonkar, Shri Mahadev Devrukhkar, Shri Pandurang Gondhale, and Shri Limkar, etc.

My days in the Tasgaon Subdivision office were happily passing-by amongst officers like Shri M. V Metkari, Shri R. V. Patil and, Shri R. R. Gadkar and other colleagues like Shri Hanmant Kamble, Shri R. S. Patil, Shri Anil Ghail, Shri Rambhai Sapate, Shri Ashok Amrutsagar, Shri Kumbhar, Shri Mujawar, Shri A. B. Karanji, Shri Sushant Kulkarni, Shri R. G. Patil, and Shri Marathe, etc.

The July 2005 Krishna River floods destroyed the lives of common people. Sangli was isolated because of the water levels. Areas like Vakharbhaag, Gaavbhaag, Karnal Road, Bypass Road, and Ambrai were underwater. The water level in Shri Datta Temple in Shri Suryavanshi Dada's house was at 5 feet. So, I immediately moved many people from that area to the Datta Mathi in Mhaisal Station and made arrangements for their food and accommodation. Similarly, water had entered Swami Samarth Temple in Krishna Ghat and the road was submerged in 10 to 15 feet of water. So, I moved some people from there too to Shri Datta Mathi in Mhaisal Station. The water had reached up to the railway bridge on Miraj – Mhaisal road. Thus, the road leading to Karnataka was blocked. Even Miraj – Kolhapur – Sangli road was blocked. This flood caused mayhem everywhere.

It took 15 days for the flood to subside. It was the biggest flood after 1994. The 2006 and 2007 floods were not as severe as 2005. Now the memories of the flood are fading.

I used to go to Akkalkot mostly every year for Shri Swami Samarth's Samadhi Darshan. In my 2007 Darshan trip, I had Shri Balkrishna Mahadev Gokhale Sir for company. We stayed in H. B. P Shri Damodar Kashinath Thavare's house. Shri Thavare is Shri Dyaneshwar Maharaj's disciple - Shri Saint Sachchidanand Baba's 23rd descendant. Shri Dyaneshwar Maharaj had verbally narrated Dyaneshwari in Shri Kshetra Nevasa. Shri Sachchidanand Baba had penned it down. Shri Thavare Bhau is born in a Saint's family and is a mugwump (Great and commanding person) Satpurush (Perfect soul). He worked as a sub-registrar (class 2) in Maharashtra Government's Co-operative Department. It was because of Shri Gokhale saheb, that I was introduced to Shri Thavare Bhau. He lives with his son in State Bank of India's - bank colony in Solapur. He delivers

'Pravachans' (Lectures/preaching / discourse) and travels all over Maharashtra daily. Many Saints, especially from Marathwada (A region in Maharashtra), often visit Bhau's house. So, his house has become a maternal home for the Saints. His wife, and Shri Mali, etc. always welcome everyone visiting their house. The entire Varkari clan of Maharashtra respects and loves him with a sense of belongingness. With the help of 'Shri Saint Mandal' (Group) of Solapur, he has published biographies of many unpublished Saints. He can recite the entire Dyaneshwari without reading it. Supreme Saint and world Guru Tukaram Maharaj was born in 1608 (On Madya Shudh 5 Shake 1530) in Dehu Maharashtra. 12 February 2008 would mark 399 years since his birth. Shri Thavare Bhau inspired me to conduct the 400th-year Jayanti celebration of Saint Tukaram Maharaj. I started working towards it.

It was hence decided to celebrate the 400th Jayanti of Supreme Saint and world Guru Tukaram Maharaj from Monday, 25 February 2008 to Tuesday, 4 March 2008 in Vijaynagar (Mhaisal Station) and it was completed in a grandiose way under the guidance of H. B. P Shri D. Thavare Bhau of Solapur.

This program began on Monday, 25 February 2008 from Shri Datta Mathi Miraj in the auspicious presence of Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni, H. B. P Shri Vishvesh Bodas, Shri Pradip Pant Balekundrikar, H. B. P Shri Ramakant Bongale, Param Puja GuruMahant Shri Pattdevaru Shivyogi Maharaj, Param Puja Chandrashekhar Kelkar Maharaj, Param Puja Shri Gurunath Kotnis Maharaj, H. B. P Subhash Maharaj Kumbhar, Shri Ganesh Gadgil, Shri Bhupatkar, Shri Kishor Jamdar, H. B. P Shri Bapusaheb Pujari, H. B. P Shri Jagannath Mhaske (Bapu), Dr. Shri Jaysinghrao Shinde (Mhaisalkar), Hanmantrao Shinde (Mhaisalkar), Shri Vishwas Anna Gawali, H. B. P Shri Chandrakant Kumbhar, H. B. P Bhosalebuva, and H. B. P Dr. Sharad Gadre.

A procession of Supreme Saint World Guru Shri Tukaram Maharaj's palanquin and His picture was carried out on the main road in Miraj. Thousands of devotees participated in this tableau. The procession reached Datta Mathi in Mhaisal Station. About 1,000 to 1,200 people participated as readers in Shri Saint Tukaram Maharaj's Abhang Gatha (Abhang is a particular metrical composition in praise of the Deity, and usually in the Prakrit language. Gatha is portraying). A large canopy was erected for this purpose. H. B. P. Shri Dyaneshwar Khade of Bedag, H. B. P. Shri Hiralal Pardeshi of Soni (District Sangli, Maharashtra), H. B. P Shri Vitthalrao Suryavanshi, Shri Maruti Sale and Bhosale Buva served as the main readers.

Dr. Shri ShriKrishna Deshmukh of Murgud, Dr. Shri M. B. Joshi of Karad, Dr. Shri Shivajirao Bhukele of Gadhinglaj, Dr. Shri M. A. Kulkarni of Kolhapur, H. B. P Shri Chandrakant Kumbhar of Yadrav, Shri Vinayand Maharaj of Hupri, Shri Tukaram Maharaj of Yelur, and H. B. P Bhau

Thavare conducted Pravachan Seva. Whereas H. B. P Shri Vitthalrao Kore (Vaskar) of Pandharpur, Shri Bhausahab Patil of Hasur, Shri Vishvesh Bodas of Miraj, Shri Pandurang Maharaj Ghule of Alandi, Shri Bapusaheb Dehukar of Dehu, Shri Sandipan Shinde – Hasegavkar, and Dada Maharaj Manmadkar performed Kirtan Seva.

Similarly, Dr. Ashok Kamat of Pune, Dr. Tara Bhavalkar of Sangli, Dr. Shri R. G. Prabhune of Karad, Dr. and Professor Shri Dada Awati of Jaysingpur, and H. B. P. Shri Indrajit Deshmukh of Karad delivered their speeches and mesmerized the audience.

Miss Mangala Joshi of Sangli and Mrs. Manjusha Kulkarni of Pune performed singing services whereas Shri Dharmanand Baba Valivade, Shri Shamrao Sutar, and Shri Pandit Chile of Kolhapur performed Bhajan Seva and Chandatai Tewari performed Bharud Seva (Bharud means long, intricate storytelling).

After the Dindi and palanquin ceremony on 4 March 2008, about 30,000 to 40,000 devotees took 'Mahaprasad' from the auspicious hands of Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj Kulkarni, Shri Rudrapashupati Kolekar Maharaj, Shri Mahesh Shirke, Shri Sanjaypant Balekundrikar, Shri Anandrao Shelar, Shri Yuvaraj Jadhav, Lt. Raghunath Ghodake, Lt. Chandrakant Jadhav, and Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi. The then current Governor of Uttar Pradesh Shri Ram Naik of Mumbai was the special guest for this program. Our trusted people and devotees worked tirelessly to make this Supreme Saint World Guru Shri Tukaram Maharaj's 400th birth anniversary program, an unprecedented experience.

It is very hard to fulfill multiple roles in one's life. It is similar to an intricate exercise. I was very happy with my job, although I did not progress much in it. I had to do this job for my stomach. Some of my people used to say, that I should quit my job and that they will deposit enough money in my bank account so that the interest matches my salary. But this fantasy and thought was something that I would have never accepted. It was because of my job that I was able to run my house and sustain it. It was only because of my job that I was introduced to Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's divine way. And it was through this job that my spiritual life was enlightened. I was able to withdraw money from the provident fund (Retirement income). And it was through this job that I could take loans and able to erect Shri Gurudev's Temples in Mhaisal, Krishna Ghat, and Miraj. Officers like M. N. Shevade Sir, Shri G. R. Kulkarni, Shri Arvind Meshram, Shri Subhash Deshmane Sir, Shri Madhukar Metkari, and Shri R. V. Patil took care of me in my career. The magnitude of my work was pretty large. I was working punctually. Truly speaking, Lt. M. N. Shevade Sir was my food-giver.

He was the one who hired me in Government service. My first position was that of a peon, followed by a clerk and then a junior clerk. I too worked very sincerely in my job.

The years 2004 to 2010 were troublesome, hectic, and sorrowful for me. In 2004, my mother Smt. Laxmibai Zende underwent her first surgery for her thigh bone. It was successfully done by Dr. Kiran Prani. After that, she was walking with the help of a walker in our Miraj house-Mathi. She used to enquire about the devotees coming to the Mathi for Aarti. She always cared for and enquired about the studies, families, and food of the children studying in the Mathi. In the early days, my sister Smt. Janabai Jadhav used to cook food and serve these very same children. My mother used to visit the farm until she was 85 years of age. She did farming by herself.

I remember very well, our financial situation in my childhood was very poor. We were 5 siblings, mother, father, grandfather, and grandmother in our family. We had a hair cutting saloon. My father was not feeling well. But my mother never lost hope. She worked in other people's farms to harvest groundnuts (Peanuts), and Jowar (A type of pulse), etc. She woke up very early morning and often went up to Vaddi (A village near Miraj), Karal (A part of farmland near Mhaisal) to Mhaisal boundary for this work. She would carry her share of Jowar bulbs and return home late at night. She then placed these Jowar bulbs in the yard for drying and hammer them to separate the grains from the bulbs. She would then grind the same Jowar grains early in the morning, make 'Bhakari' (Jowar roti) out of it and prepare daily meals before heading out early morning for work again. We used to enjoy her singing when she was grinding the grains. (In old days grinding was done using two heavy round slabs of stones. The bottom slab was fixed to the ground whereas the top one had a handle for grip and a hole to put the grains).

She knew many songs typically sung during Panchami festival. She was not educated. But she was pragmatic and compassionate. She used to make Bhakaris (Flatbread made from Jowar flour) on her hands and in a wooden 'Katvati' (A deep circular wooden pan with two handles on the edge used to make Bhakari dough in old days). On festival days, she used to make large 'Puran Polis'. During the Diwali festival, she would always first send homemade snacks to our Muslim neighbors like Desai, Baandaar, Kurane, and only then we were allowed to eat. She fasted during the entire month of Roja (Ramadan Festival). Even during this Roja festival, she would wake up very early morning for cooking and head to the farms for work. On returning, she would take the Darshan in Mira Saheb's Dargah in the evening. She used to leave her fasting for the day only after eating a leaf from the tamarind tree in the Dargah premises. She worked a lot until she was worn out for our family and the people living in our Gully. Everybody called her 'Vahini' (Brother's wife). She was a big shadow of support for the young and elderly women in our Gully.

The changes in my job and the growing workload from the Temple were always existent. But I was trying my best to keep my mother at ease. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Temple was built in 1995. I discussed with Shri Anandrao Shelar and arranged for my mother to stay

close to the Temple. My mother and sister started living there. In 2004, my mother's thigh bone was broken. So, she had to undergo major surgery. Thus, her independence was now limited. She started walking with the help of a walker in the house – Mathi. I appointed two ladies for cooking, laundry, and dishwashing. These two ladies took good care of my mother. My elder sister Janabai took care of her nursing whereas my younger sister Bhimabai rendered her services as much as possible when she visited. But now my mother was mostly sitting. I was devotedly enquiring about her health every day. I don't know what happened, but once after her meal, she lost her balance while standing up and fell. She fractured the same bone that was operated before. Something that should not have happened ultimately happened. I and my people concentrated our efforts on her. Dr. Kiran Prani successfully operated on her again. I thought my mother will be able to walk again using the help of a walker. I imagined she would lovingly ask again about me, all of us, and that she will stay happy with a smile on her face. But nothing like that happened. She stopped walking and remained bed-ridden all the time. She couldn't even sit up. We were all trying our best. But she could not bear the pain anymore. She did enquire about us siblings and others. But I had a feeling that there wasn't much depth in her talks anymore. Every night, when I was free, she used to recall her and my father's memories and would get teary-eyed. I would also burst in tears seeing her cry. After my father passed away, my mother had made sure that I would not miss him. She played the role of both, my father and mother, with all her heart. Recently, she had neither scolded me nor made me sad. I couldn't control my tears thinking of the pain she suffered in her hard life. I had firmly decided to make her current life bearable and was trying to take steps towards it. My only prayer to Shri Gurudev was that she should not suffer.

It was the Shravan month. The sky was filled with clouds and a cold breeze could be felt. On the night of 11 August 2006 (Shravan Vadya Dashmi), my mother was admitted to Dr. Mhetre's hospital. At 4 AM, she was inquiring about everyone happily and finished her life's journey as she was talking. I could not understand what to do. Everything was standstill for me. Dr. Mhetre, Suryavanshi Dada, Devmane Sir, Wadd brothers, Honorable Anandrao Mandle, Shivajirao Jadhav, Appa Zende, Rambhau Zende, Chandar Kurane, Appa Kudache, Chandu Salunkhe, Mangal Shinde, Chandu Homkar, Savanta Mhetre, Chandrakant Jadhav, and others were consoling me.

There were about 10 thousand to 15 thousand people for my mother's funeral. At that time Krishna River had a flood. Hence, the funeral procession was routed from Nadives, Miraj market, Saraf Katta, and Shivaji statue towards the crematory on Pandharpur road. Her last rites were performed there. Even in heavy rain and a flood situation, so many people from all layers of the economic strata attended her last journey. If she earned anything in life, it was the people.

She was the eldest of all her siblings. Her brother, sisters, and all her relatives were from Karnal. All neighbors from her maternal house were also present for the funeral. On the third day, my elder brother Vasantrao Zende came from Mumbai. Everybody performed the rituals for the last rites and consoled me. Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj's Punyatithi on Shravan Vadya Dashmi was properly completed in my absence. I am grateful to everyone for this.

I was feeling lonely after my mother passed away and I was not interested in anything. My father Shri Bhimrao Zende had passed away on 2 July 1983. Shri Ramesh Maharaj and Sangli's Suryavanshi Dada had taken care of me like a child. I was not interested to stay in Miraj as my mother was not in the city anymore. Earlier, I was staying in Sangli on every Tuesday. Now I chose to stay in Sangli. Shri Suryavanshi Dada and Mami (Lovingly called as Dholi Aai / Fat mother) gave me the parental love and kindness. They considered me one of their own. Slowly, I started coming out of my mother's shocking demise. I started commuting daily to Tasgaon from Sangli for my work. I used to visit my house and Mathi in Miraj to keep an oversight. I was enquiring about my sister Janabai and taking care of her. After my mother's death, I gave away all the belongings in the house. After arranging for the food and medicines of Janabai, I was relaxed. Slowly, days were passing by. I was visiting Kolhapur every week for the Darshan.

After my mother's death, I moved my stay from Miraj as I was mentally not attached to it anymore. I started visiting Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Samadhi Temple in Kolhapur ever week, Akkol every fortnight, Shri Kshetra Pandharpur, and Shri Kshetra Tirupati. I would meet Param Puja Shri Ramesh Maharaj and Param Puja Aaisaheb and the children before returning. I used to derive guidance from Aaisaheb's talks. It was evident that her maternal Deshpande family from Belgaum and Akkolkar – Kulkarni family were sanative since many generations. Karnatak Kesari and freedom fighter Hanmantrao Deshpande was Aaisaheb's second cousin. All members of her maternal family had sacrificed everything during India's freedom struggle. Both Aai and Kaka had participated in it and had spent time in the prison. Her maternal family had blessings from Shri Shiv Chidambar Mahaswamiji and Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati Maharaj (Shri Tembe Swami).

Aai's in-laws were blessed by Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar. Her husband's brother's wife was Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar's brother's daughter. Shri Pant Maharaj frequently visited them, stayed over, and danced using 'Tipris' (Dandiya / wooden batons). He considered Akkol has his maternal place. In 1982, upon insistence from Aai, I went along with Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj to Shri Kedarnath and Badrinath pilgrimage. She always read Shegaon's Saint Gajanan Maharaj's biography and always had a rosary (A string of 108 beads used for meditation) in her hand. She never sent anybody visiting Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj on an empty stomach. If maid Laxman was not at home, she would prepare some food by herself and serve. She always helped the poor. It was under her guidance that I carried out tasks like taking Kaka to the hospital, getting him admitted, and bringing him back to Akkol, etc. She was very

kind-hearted and loving by nature. In 1979, she had undergone major knee surgery. Since then, she was walking in the house with the help of a walker. She participated in Guru Pournima and Shri Datta Jayanti. By taking me to the Samadhis of great Avatars like Shri Shiv Chidambar Swami and Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar, she firmed and prospered my spiritual foundation. Now, she was getting old. From 1974, I experienced her life's practices, generousness, and her motherly love. I have eaten food prepared by her. I considered her and Kaka as Godly. Such a great 'Sadhavi' Aai went to God's house on 25 July 2007 at the age of 97. Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj and Param Puja Girija Vahini performed a lot of services to her. Aai's talks revealed Param Puja Girija Vahini's dutiful nature. Aai's passing was a second big shock for me. I was dejected. Now, slowly my trips to Akkol reduced. Shri Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj frequently sent messages to me. But my mind was not ready to go there as frequently. Now, I was moving forward with the happy and comforting memories of the days when Aai and Kaka were alive.

In 2007, our area got hit with floods again. 2008 was somehow through. Now, another ax of sadness came on me. I was staying in Suryavanshi Dada's house in Sangli. He and his wife 'Dholi Aai' had taken care of me like their child. I unnecessarily started worrying about Dholi Aai's health. She had diabetes and blood pressure issues. But she was stanch and brave. She was running the house properly even with these health issues. The year 2009's Shri Datta festival was over and Aai fell ill. She was having kidney related issues. She was taking medicines prescribed by Dr. Palange. She started feeling better and I thought there wasn't much to worry about. She was admitted to Dr. Palange's hospital for only two days for observation. Her body was responding to the treatment. Our hopes were increasing.

But unfortunately, on Tuesday, 3 February 2009 on 'Durga Ashtami', time took her in its influence. She passed away and left all of us. All of the family members, relatives and I personally got a huge shock. She never accepted any services from anyone. Sorrow had attacked both Dada and me. Who should console whom? The consoler, our Godly Aunt had left our home. She passed away as a 'Soubhagyavati' (A woman whose husband is still married). As a gift to everyone, she left her love and kindness with us before leaving. About seven thousand to eight thousand people attended her funeral procession. Amidst Bhajans, this procession ended in Sangli's Vaikunth Math at 4 PM. I returned home around 5 PM with heavy feet and a sorrowful mind.

I used to see Dada and Aai sitting on the bed whenever I came home from outside. But today, Aai was not to be seen. Her shadows were invisible. I was not feeling happy anymore in Sangli's Mathi. When Aai was alive, the house and Mathi felt complete. Dada too stopped sitting on the bed. The visiting people used to recollect Dada – Aai sitting on the bed. Dada now mostly spent his time at home. His face did not reflect happiness anymore. He was sunken in spirit since Aai left. We were trying to cheer him up. He stopped attending the Aarti every Tuesday. He was not

interested in any matters. Somehow, Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Jayanti (Celebrated on Shravan Vadya Panchami as per Marathi calendar) was completed. Similarly, Shri Samarth Maharaj's Punyatithi was completed, and Dada passed away at 11 AM on Sunday 31 May 2009 without taking any services from anyone while he was still able to walk and talk. He had a heart attack. As soon as I heard this, I rushed from Mhaisal to Sangli. There was chaos in the house. Dada passed away before he was taken to the hospital.

My father Mr. Bhimrao Zende had passed away early. But Dada Suryavanshi never let me feel his absence after that. He would always pick me up on his scooter to go to Sangli and drop me off, no matter if it was rain, sunshine, or wind. He took all the care for me. Besides, he made sure that I never felt sad about anything. He was pained by my whimsical and stubborn nature. But he never directly or indirectly expressed it. Dada and Aai sacrificed a lot for my happiness. After Aai and Dada's deaths, I was dejected and feeling depressed. Every night, I cried recollecting their memories. Because of this, I started feeling uneasy, and hence I started moved my stay from Sangli to Mhaisal Mathi.

I was still reminiscent of Dholi Aai and Dada's memories and it will continue in the future. In my free time, I used to recall the past. The month of May was over, and June had started. This marked the end of summer and beginning of monsoon. The sky was obscured by clouds and sunshine was intermittent. Rainbows could be seen in the skies. Red velvets started appearing. Slowly, the cold 'Mrig' winds started blowing. The trees were shaking by the strong winds. Then 'Mrig' rains began.

When I first came to Mhaisal, I could see crops like onions, eggplants, Jowar, and Bajari (a pulse). Now, these crops cannot be seen. The fluorescent green grass growing on mud roofs, Gracula birds, and sparrows are missing. The clustered huts and mud houses are all gone and are mostly replaced by cement and slab houses. The hardworking people from here have settled down on their profession. Grape vineyards are now erected here with physical labor, skills, hard work, and in conjunction with modern science. Sugarcane and vegetables are today's common crops. Prosperity is now marking itself.

During my stay in Mhaisal Temple, petty complaints of quarreling married couples, small thefts, and physical fighting used to come to me. When I used to leave for Miraj / Sangli on Mondays, people used to ask me to convey a message to someone, handover somebody's items, medicines, and lunch boxes etc. I did all of these tasks without complaining as I liked to serve the people.

As time passed, these days have fallen behind. The memories though remain wet. Now, I was working in the Tasgaon office. I was happily spending time with my colleagues making jokes and

having fun. Our office was on Tasgaon – Manerajuri road on 'Datta Mala' (Mala is a Marathi word meaning farm or open land). I used to go to Shri Datta Temple there every day. My retirement date was also approaching. It was 28 February 2010. My loving companionship with my colleagues like Honorable R. V. Patil Sir, R. G. Patil, Shri A. B. Karanji, Shri G. S. Kulkarni, Shri Belvalkar, Shri R. R. Gadkar, Shri A. B. Ghail, Shri S. R. Marathe, Shri R. S. Patil, Shri A. E. Amrutsagar, Shri Mujawar, Shri S. C. Kumbhar, Shri Rambhau Sapate, Shri Bhupal Kamble, etc. was about to get over. I had joined my job on 25 May 1973. At the age of 58, after 36 years, 9 months, and 3 days, I was retiring from work. Time flew so quickly that I did not realize that my job was about to end. After working in Kolhapur, Chandoli, Islampur, Miraj, and Sangli, I retired from the 'Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran' (Water Supply and Sanitation) Department in Tasgaon. The quality of my work was good, and I had worked sincerely throughout. Because of my excellent track record, I was given two advance increments in pay. I had selflessly helped many people get jobs in our department without seeking anything in return. I was instrumental in forming the 'Patsanstha' (Credit union) within our department. The labor union had my backing. On 28 February 2010, the above-mentioned officers and colleagues gave me a loving sendoff. They had helped me during difficult times. For this, I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Before retiring, I felt like I wanted to retire as soon as possible. I was tired of my work since 2005. But because of the mountain of financial loan and my mother's illness, I did not have any option. I used to think that after retiring, I will be able to travel, and I will have happy days. But the opposite happened. I had a piles issue. In 2010, I was admitted to Dr. Sanjay Kulkarni's hospital in Vishrambag (A part of Sangli). I underwent major surgery. It was only because of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj and GuruDev's blessings that I was cured of this. Due to the words of support and services performed by Dr. Shri Sanjay Kulkarni, Dr. Bindusar Palange, Dr. M. G. Mhetre, Dr. Kedariprasad Kulkarni, Dr. Bhalchandra Joshi, and Dr. Vinod Joshi, I was back to normal. There is no amount of gratitude to express towards the people who personally came to visit me, support me, and gave me the waft to live.

I stayed put in the Sangli Mathi from October 2010 to 31 January 2011. Dr. Vinod Shinde did the dressing of the wound every day, whereas Vinod Gokhale and Suhas Jadhav took me to Dr. Sanjay Kulkarni's clinic once a week. The dressing was very painful. Mrs. Shobha Vahini, Mrs. Rekha Vahini, Mrs. Meena Vahini, Miss Keru, Konda, Popat, Sitaram, Ramu, Guddu, Santosh, Ajit, Bajirao, and Ghorpade Mami stood by me like a shadow. These days too passed. They made some enchanting memories that will remain like a rock in my mind.

I went to Shri Narsinhwadi, Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Samadhi Temple in Kolhapur on every Pournima (Full moon day) for 36 years. But for the first time in these 36 years, I had missed attending Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar's festival and Shri Datta Jayanti festival. I was not feeling well and had weakness in my body. I was tired of laying on the bed all day. In these 6

months, I continued listening to music and reading. That was all the entertainment that I had. Laying on the bed, I was thinking of the work to be done in the next 20 years, planning social work, Temple management, and community undertakings, etc. Whereas sometimes I was analyzing my past life, people's nature, and their minds. During this illness, I was getting restless when I reflected on the mistakes made in my life so far. I always had thoughts of Shri GuruDev , His favors, memories of my parents, memories of Akkol's Aai – Kaka, and memories of Dholi Aai and Dada. Many waves of thoughts were splashing on me. I was sincerely and properly carrying out Shri Gurudev's work. The waft of social work was not letting me sit idle.

Like mentioned earlier, my maternal family was from Karnal. I would recollect memories from my childhood. Karnal is a small village. It is 5 to 6 miles from Sangli. As a kid, I used to visit there along with my mother during my summer vacation. The people sitting on a stone platform in the front yard of my maternal grandparents' house used to discuss stories about how our country got its freedom on 15 August 1947. We used to hear many stories of Lt. Vasantdada Patil, like how in 1942 he broke open from Sangli's prison, took a bullet on his body, and swam in the Krishna River. Also, stories of his patriotism, daring, and social work post the country's independence made me respect him a lot. He was from a family of farmers. But he led the poor people and became their true representative. Such was my admiration towards him.

I don't recall exactly, but in 1966 – 1967, Lt. Advocate Shri Appasaheb Deshpande had started a study group for the prisoners. He used to live in the fort area of Miraj. Some of its members were Advocate Shri Chiman Lokur, Ashok Patil, Annappa Bhende, Kokate Sir, etc. This study group used to assemble in Shrimant Balasaheb Jubilee Library in the Miraj Market area. Appasaheb Deshpande was the president of this library. People like us were shaped by this initiative. We learned the basics of social work, and community education, etc. from the senior members of this group. Around 1966, Lt. advocate Appasaheb Deshpande and Advocate Chiman Lokur had invited and felicitated the great social worker Shri Baba Amte and Mrs. Sadhanatai Amte. At the time, Shri Baba Amte was the mayor of Chandrapur. His Anandwan was not formed at that time. But even then, his 'Tyagi' (Renounced) life gave me indications of peace and happiness.

Later, I went to Param Puja Shri Vinoba Bhave's Darshan. Staying in his Ashram, gave me immense tranquil, and motivated me for the economic and social development of a community as a whole. One should do some work for the society. I learned this notion and motivation mantra from this great social worker and Godly man.

Maharashtra saw a major drought in the years 1971, 1972, and 1973. There were no rains, hence no water or daily wages for the people. At the time, Shri Vasantdada Patil was the minister of the irrigation Department, whereas Shri Shankarao Chavan was the Chief Minister.

Vasantdada made attempts to overcome the drought situation with his intelligence and dutiful nature. Through his efforts, 25 Lift Irrigation Schemes (Commonly known as 'Dhadak Yojana') were approved for the Sangli District. Through these 25 schemes, 50,000 Hectors of land in Sangli District was going to be supplied with water. This was Asia's biggest project. Eventually, because of Vasantdada Patil and Shivajirao Dhulubulu, I got my job in this Irrigation Department. Under the guidance and able administration of M. N. Shevade Sir, all 'Dhadak' schemes were successful.

Lt. Shri Kamlakar Keshav Kale was the Chief administrative Officer in Miraj Municipality in those days. He was a very clean person (Did not indulge in non-ethical matters) and had a mindset of serving the people. Hence, our acquaintance turned into a bond. Many of today's landmarks in Miraj like Ganesh Market, Ganesh Talav (Lake), Mirasaheb Market, Shri Bramha Chaitanya Gondavalekar Maharaj Shopping Center, Miraj High school, etc. were built during his administrative tenure. At the same time, the main roads were widened. He undertook many projects that benefitted people. I too was involved in them. He renovated some Temples. He was extremely spiritual and religious. He was a big devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba and Shegaon's Saint Shri Gajanan Maharaj. During his tenure, I got jobs for many youngsters in Miraj municipality. Even today, they are working on good posts. They meet me and remember me. This covers everything.

When I was working in Warananagar Mechanical Engineering Department Number Two in Chandoli, I resolved many people's issues under the scope of the projects and rehabilitated them at work. So, even through my job, I was doing social work. I was transferred back to Miraj in 1979-80. Now, my bond with M.L.A Vitthalaji Patil was growing strong. His native place was Salgare. He was a loyal and strong follower of Vasantdada Patil. He had faith in my work. When one of his followers Mr. Ram Hari Kharade was the President of District Cooperative Bank, he hired many youngsters based on my recommendation, and according to their education without seeking anything in return. M.L.A Daaji Patil too helped some youngsters get jobs in the government.

When Barrister Abdul Rahman Antulay stepped down as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Vasantdada Patil became his successor. The latter sent a message to M.L.A Vitthal Patil (Commonly known as Daaji) to become a minister in his cabinet. On receiving this message, Daaji Patil said to me "When one goes to look for a bride for his son and on liking her, gets himself married to her, I do not appreciate this. I had suggested Shri Shivajirao Bhosale's name for the post of a minister to Barrister Antule and Barrister Babasaheb Bhosale when they were Chief Ministers. Now, when this minister post has come to me, Maharaj, I do not feel right that I should accept it, and neither can I comprehend doing so. Instead of accepting this position, I am going to insist on water schemes for the villages on the east of Miraj and a major portion of the

Kavathemahankal area from Vasantdada Patil. Please bless me for this". This is a fact. Until the end, such a true royal Maratha M.L.A sacrificed a minister's post and dedicated his life to get water to the Kavathemahankal area. He arranged for a water conference in Kavathemahankal and in the attendance of Vasantdada Patil demanded water from the Krishna River for the drought struck areas. Vasantdada Patil later approved it.

Now, that it was decided to supply water from Krishna River to the eastern villages and Kavathemahankal, discussions around where and how this will be done started taking place. Since I had worked on the Chandoli dam, I was able to understand some of it. I had done some studies on it. The original plan of the 'Takari Yojana' (Takari project) was to bring Krishna River's water from Khanapur Taluka's Shaalgav gorge (valley) to the villages on the east of Miraj. I found it to be impractical. I was personally convincing Daaji Patil about it. As an alternative, I suggested that if water was instead lifted from Krishna River in Mhaisal, it would cost less and the project would complete sooner. Soon enough, Daaji Patil was convinced by this idea and he kept appreciating me. He worked tirelessly day and night and got a new survey done from officers like Lt. Darekar and others. He got approval for this project as a sub-project of the 'Takari Yojana' from Vasantdada Patil. This new project is now famously called 'Mhaisal Kalava Yojana' (Or Takari Mhaisal project).

One day, Daaji Patil came early at 6 AM in Miraj's Mathi and said to me, "Come, and let us break the coconut for Mhaisal Yojana with your auspicious hands". I politely declined. But his immense faith in me and his insistence prevailed. So, I, two officers from the irrigation Department, and Daaji Patil went to Mhaisal Dam at 7 AM. I did the honors of breaking the coconut for the Mhaisal Yojana. We were only four of us for this program. No photographer, no crowd, no supporting politicians, and no pomp-displaying digital boards. Daaji Patil was a down-to-earth person and hence all of this was kept low-profile. He was an M.L.A away from publicity. I further suggested him to move the closed offices from Manmad to here. Daaji Patil agreed to it. At the same time, I recommended him to allocate 2 crore rupees from his M.L.A fund for the main water intake portion. He agreed to it as well. The government machinery started working. Daaji Patil personally put in a lot of work and kept an oversight on the work. The first stage of the project was completed successfully. The second stage was completed when Shivajirao (Bapu) Shendge was the minister. Daaji Patil was now convinced that the entire project would be successful. But, on 17 April 1993, he passed away all of a sudden. A dutiful, apathetic, stern, and principled M.L.A left us. At the time of his passing, he had a substantial loan of 10 to 11 lakh rupees (1 million to 1.1 million). I had once suggested him to give a 40 lakh rupees project to his son Ramdas so that he could earn a livelihood by working on the project. But he replied to me, "Ask me anything for yourself. Ask for my life. But don't ask anything for my family. Until I am alive, I do not want to bring any of my family members in politics". Such was the resolute, generous, open-hearted, and clean Daaji. By taking me with him in this Mhaisal Yojana public project, he showed the way for the drought-stricken people. Now, the

water from this project has reached the villages on the east side of Miraj, and to the villages in Talukas of Kavathemahankal, Jat, and Tasgaon. The lives of the farmers are prospered. I feel happy about it. It is my nature to thank Lt. M.L.A Daaji Patil and Shivajirao Shendge (Bapu) over and over again.

Today, some organizations do social work. But the old concepts and depth of public work are different. There aren't many people in today's communities with a mindset of helping others. It is hard to find people who do social work with an unbiased mindset.

I was feeling that I should do something for Mhaisal Station and for the people there. I had a feeling that I owe them something. I am of the firm opinion that to shape a new generation, there should be a culture of reading in them. I am very fond of reading. My thoughts and social work were shaped by the reading culture. Since my student days, I have purchased and read books written by great authors. I have a huge collection of such excellent books. (A note from the translator of this book: Zende Maharaj has read more than 150,000 books). I have been lucky enough to have listened to speeches and lectures of great authors like Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar, Narayan Sitaram Phadke, Shankar Khandu Patil, Anna Bhau Sathe, Gopal Nilkanth Dandekar, Vasant Shankar Kanetkar, Purushottam Laxman Deshpande, and D. M Mirasdar. I have read their books and I continue to do so.

There was no clinic or children's playground in a rural place like Mhaisal Station. I decided to build them. But there were extreme financial difficulties. The Temple construction loan was still not repaid, and the loan was increasing. My total pay was Rs. 5,635 and after all the cuts the take-home amount was only Rs. 2,475.

Consequently, for this social work, I decided to seek the help of some good and generous people. There are many rich people in the society. But they don't necessarily have the mindset to financially support a good cause. And even if they support, it is not guaranteed that they would do so profusely, unbiasedly, and without seeking anything in return. I met such 2 to 4 people. However, I was not much successful. I had to hear sermons like "Why do you do such work?" and "What is its necessity for you?" I had to return with disappointment. Subsequently, I did not pursue this path.

I met Shri Sambhajirao Kumbhar Sir in a hap at a function in Sangli. I and he used to travel together to Kolhapur for our jobs from 1977 to 1980. He was an officer in the Telephone Department. We bonded together. He said to me, "I will introduce you to Shri Pravin Sheth Lunkad. He is a good man and will help you". On this, I said "Okay" to him and said bye. In that meet with Kumbhar Sir, I had talked about a library and a clinic. Until that day, I had not even heard of Shri Pravin Sheth Lunkad.

But Shri Kumbhar Sir made the meet possible quite soon. One day, he took me to the Chakan Oil Mill in Kupwad and introduced the big-hearted person Shri Pravin Sheth. I was overwhelmed by meeting him. He had built large institutions like the Krishna Valley Chambers Club and Krishna Valley School and was successfully running them. Thousands of employees worked in his oil mill and animal-food factories. He was their foster and sustainer. I felt that he was a stern and compassionate person. Shri Kumbhar Sir informed him about me and my plans. Further, he requested him to help me in starting a clinic and library.

At that time, I did not expect much from Shri Pravin Sheth Lunkad for the construction. I would have been happy even if I had gotten 25,000 to 30,000 rupees. I could have arranged the rest of the money through my providence fund etc. and begun the work. Pravin Sheth immediately called a person and asked him to prepare 4 checks of 25,000 rupees each. He put those checks in an envelope and handed over to me and said, "Maharaj, please start the work. If you need more, I will look into it". I was shocked. Neither did he know me, nor had heard of me, nor was he acquainted with me. But he showed immense trust in me. When I was considered too expensive for 1,000 rupees, he gave me 100,000 rupees that were worth a lot. What a big favor? This happened because of Shri Kumbhar Sir. He introduced me to a great industrialist and him to me. He gave me the trust. I will ever be grateful for it.

My first community work now truly began. Buildings for a free-of-cost Clinic, Library, and Reading-Center started taking shape. Around the same time, I was introduced to the famous Hindi film music director Shri Omprakash Nayyar. His songs from multiple films had become famous. His usage of western music was successful for Hindi songs. In my childhood, I used to run behind a 'Tanga' (Horse cart) used for advertising films, in order to listen to his songs. And I used to watch those movies. He had made his songs famous without using the singing queen Lata Mangeshkar for any of his songs. Such a great Hindi film music director O. P. Nayyar was going to attend Shri Shridar Khot's son Raju Khot's marriage in Sangli. It was decided to inaugurate the Lt. Surajmalji Ratanchandji Lunkad Clinic, Library, and Reading-Center by the auspicious hands of industrialist Pravinsheth Lunkad and O. P. Nayyar. I requested Shri Mohan Kumbhojkar Sir to mediate in this inauguration ceremony. It was held on 1 December 1997, and it was a big function. A very large crowd had gathered to see O. P. Nayyar Sir. On the occasion of this function, a few dignitaries were felicitated for their good work. Slowly, Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad and I were getting to know each other more.

Days were passing by. When I was busy at work during the day, time was flying quickly. But at night, I was getting distressed with the memories of my parents, Akkol's Aai – Kaka, and Sangli's Dada – Aai. At the same time, I was remembering Lt. Shankarao Kamble, Maruti Mane, and Anna Ghewari. I used to long for the company of the people who had helped me and had faith

in me. I wanted to spend time talking to them, thank them and feed them a meal. Thus, I wanted to feel happy in their presence.

I retired on 28 February 2010. However, I was not keeping in good health. On 11 October 2010, I underwent major surgery and rested for the next six months. My life was getting extended with Gurudev's blessings. I had identified the shadow of death at the time. So, with an intention to thank my supporters, well-wishers, and the people who loved me and to discharge myself from the obligation, I decided to bring them all together on account of my 61st birthday.

Before this, I had gone to Narsinhwadi on an evening. I was about to return after taking Shri Darshan and met Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj, Shri Aniket, and Shri B. S. Suryavanshi. They too had come for the Darshan. It was Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj's 61st birthday. I bowed to him and wished a long life for him. Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj did not tell me anything about his 61st birthday. But I felt that such a great person's 61st birthday should have been celebrated with a big ceremony. I felt disquietude about it. At that moment I decided to celebrate his 71st birthday bigger than my 61st birthday. Thus, I wished to use that occasion to express my gratitude and show my respect towards him.

So, I started working towards this goal. I decided to build a training center for the rural people in order to upskill them on industrial education, government service exam preparation, and women's small-savings schemes. This initiative would help sculpt the new generation. On the occasion of Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj Jayanti in 2011 (Marathi calendar - Madya Vadya Panchami), the foundation stone for this building was laid by Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj. This building was intended to be used as a free-of-cost lodge for the devotees. Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad's Suraj Foundation mostly paid for this project. Construction work began soon enough, and the building started taking shape. This was a good dream. We all were working hard towards it. The expanse of my activities was increasing, and I was staying busy. So, visiting Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj regularly wasn't happening. When he came to Miraj for his health checkups, I used to meet him.

Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj's Punyatithi ceremony and 'Mahaprasad' were done through his auspicious hands in April 2011. After that, I met him 2 to 3 times in Sangli and informed him about my work. He always uttered words of pride in my work. He had tremendous love, affection, and respect towards me. Sometimes, he would say to a friend of mine, "If I am one rupee, then Zende Baba is 1.25 rupees. He is a hardworking apt person". I had decided to inaugurate the new training center with his auspicious hands. But destiny had something else in mind. On 15 July 2011, Guru Pournima, I could not visit him for his Darshan. So, I went a day early and took his Darshan. This turned out to be my last Darshan of him. Sometimes, he used to say, "Now I have nothing left. I will go" and he would burst in tears. "Now, you have to

handle all of this". On this, I said, "Don't say that Maharaj. Once this Guru Pournima is over, come for rest. We will spend a few days happily". He said, "Baju, why rest now? Now, I cannot come for rest". For a moment, Maharaj sometimes used to speak like a scared child. I could sense his trembling hands on those occasions. I did not feel like leaving him. That day, I kept talking about the next projects and construction work. When seeing me off, he as usual with a calm mind, blessed me. I was not able to sense the change in his talk, behavior, or anything going on in his mind. For many years, I had bathed in his affectionate sunrays. He never expressed his love through words. I had engraved his love and advance notifications in my conscious mind. He hugged me and said, "Baju, you came. I felt very nice". After so many years, I had the Darshan of his emotions. I was even scared a bit. I started recollecting some of his sanctified memories. His soothing promise-like sweet words, mesmerizing affection, spiritual life, and detached life glanced in front of my eyes. Since my return journey to Miraj was long, I bowed down to his pious feet and left with tears in my eyes.

On my way back to Miraj, many memories of his worldly life were flowing in front of my eyes. His demeanor was simple. But his thinking was very sublimated. He always showered graces on others. He supported the distressed and the people who were scared in life. He would plant a ray of hope in their hearts. He had instilled faith and affection amongst people. Hence, people considered him an angel of God and a high-ranking spirit. People felt happy with his Darshan of truth and morals.

My next few days passed in the construction work and meeting old friends. They were very busy days. I was remembering the previous week's emotional meet with Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj. On the early morning of Friday, 22 July 2011, at 3 AM, Akkol's Aai came in my dream and said, "Come soon to Akkol". I was frightened. Why did Aai tell me to come to Akkol quickly? Many gloomy thoughts rushing through my mind scared me to the core. At 6 AM, I got a phone call from Akkol stating that Shri Ramesh Maharaj had said good-bye to this world between 4 AM to 5 AM. This was a big jolt to my mind. My eyes were full of tears. But I could not sob. Such was the shock that I couldn't understand what to do. Somehow, I left for Akkol. Many people were calling me on my cell phone. I went to Maharaj's Wada (House). There was a big crowd outside. It was hard to make a way in the Wada. The entire house was engulfed in chaos with people crying everywhere. Girija Vahini, Guru, Aniket, Aparna, and Hema's eyes were swollen from crying. The entire atmosphere was wailing. His body was looking as if he was alive. His face reflected love. For the past two days, he was not feeling well. He had not gone out of town much since Guru Pournima. He had passed away in his sleep between 4 AM to 5 AM. There was a glee on his face, and it was emitting anonymous peace. I was overwhelmed with sorrow from his pious memories, and I collapsed.

There was a mournful atmosphere everywhere. A tremendous crowd had gathered outside the house. People were crying, grieving and everybody had become emotional. At around 1 PM,

Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj's last journey started. There were 8,000 to 10,000 people in the procession. Amidst Bhajans and God's name chanting, the procession came to his Nipani road farm on 'Balobacha mala' (A place near Akkol). The last rites were performed as per their traditional rituals on his body on their farm. Everybody was sitting with sadness in their minds. After offering their tributes, everybody started returning to their homes in the evening. Shri Gurunath and Shri Aniket started seeing off people. The day was Friday, 22 July 2011 (Ashad Vadya Saptami).

I was grieving with sorrow. Maharaj was never going to be seen in Akkol's Wada. He became eternal in the realm of immortality. My 40 years and many previous lives journey with him had stopped. I was unable to forget the news of his death. His passing away evaporated my peace. His company had sailed me through the good and bad karmas of my life. I will always remain thankful to him.

His untimely death had created a vacuum in my mind. Before he left this world, he had narrated biographies and life stories of many great incarnate (Avatars) personalities to me. Like the solitude in our Himalayan pilgrimage and the splashing water of the pious Ganga River in Haridwar, Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj's journey was unforgettable for me.

His company in Haridwar, Laxman Zhula (Bridge), and Rishikesh reminded me of his mysterious calm. He had given me many things generously. He taught me to remember something using spiritual powers and gave the happiness of spiritual powers. He also told me to pass the happiness of spiritual powers to others. He taught me to consider the society as a God's form and to serve it. He convinced me of the power of devotion and said that one can achieve God through ardent devotion and 'Sadhana' (meditation).

I was already educating myself on spiritual knowledge and doing community service. I had previously expressed my plan to use the occasion of my sixtieth birthday to express my gratitude towards Param Puja Ramesh Maharaj, other Gurus, and my trustworthy friends for supporting and encouraging me in every thought and endeavor. Everybody liked this idea. On Hanuman Jayanti, 6 April 2012, I completed 60 years of my life. On 19 April 2012, it was decided to celebrate my 'Eksashti' (Entering the 61st year of life). Coincidentally, that day was also Shri Swami Samarth Maharaj's Punyatithi, which we were celebrating every year on a large scale. So, it was decided to combine my 'Eksashti' with Swami Samarth Maharaj's Punyatithi program.

This program was held from Wednesday, 11 April 2012 through Thursday, 19 April 2012. Shri Bapu Jadhav, Mrs. Renu Dandekar, H.B.P Dr. Shri Ramchandra Dekhane, Shri Vijaydada Awati, Advocate Shri Shrikant Malkar, Shri Vaman Kale delivered their lectures. Whereas H.B.P Shri Chandrakant Kumbhar, Shri Babalal Nadaf, Shri Pandurang Maharaj Kasar, Shri Namdev Vaskar

Maharaj, Dr. Bhalchandra Joshi, Shri Bandopant Kore Maharaj did the Kirtans. Shri Dilip Sutar, Lt. Shivaji Mali, and Shri Sanjivani Bhajan group performed the Bhajans. Felicitations of dignitaries to honor their good deeds were held during this time. Volunteers put in a lot of hard work. A blood donation camp and health checkup camp were organized on the morning of 19 April 2012. With the auspicious hands of Param Pujya Shri D. K. Thavare Bhau, Shri Chandrashekhar Kelkar Maharaj (Anna), Shri Gurunath Kotnis Maharaj, Shri Pradip Pant Balekundrikar, Shri Vijayanand Maharaj, Dinanand Maharaj, Shri Gurunath Kulkarni, Shri Mahesh Shirke, Shri S. M Belgavi, Shri Apte Baba, Shri Rudrapashupati Vijayanand Kolkekar Swami, Shri Gurumahant Pattedevary Shiviyogi, Sakharam Maharaj and chief guests namely, M.L.A Sanjay (Kaka) Patil, Shivajirao Dhulubulu, Shri Bapusaheb Pujari, Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad, Shri Dipakbaba Shinde – Mhaisalkar, Shri Manojbaba Shinde – Mhaisalkar, Shri Jagganath Mhaske (Bapu), Shri D. K. Patil (Kaka), Shri Ramrao Dada Patil, Kedarrao Shinde – Mhaisalkar, Laxmanrao Jadhav, and Lt. Shri Chandrakant Jadhav, etc., the 'Eksashti' program was celebrated on a large scale.

Many people who respected me were happily and enthusiastically present. These loving people were from all levels of society, and I am indebted towards them. A 'Prasad' and co-meal in the warm presence of these people marked the completion of the program.

While recollecting the old memories, I remember these experiences. Call it a coincidence or my predestination, but I had the Darshan of many noble men. Amongst them were, Vinobaji Bhawe (Bharat Ratna, Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership), Baba Amte (Padma Shri, Ramon Magsaysay Award, Padma Vibhushan, United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights, Dr. Ambedkar International Award, Gandhi Peace Prize, Templeton Prize), V. S. Khandekar (Jnanpith Award), N. S Phadke (Padmabhushan Award), Annabhau Sathe, G. T Madkholkar, and Ranjit Desai (Famous author of novels like Shriman Yogi and Swami. Sahitya Akademi Award and Padma Shri Award). Their books have influenced me. I cannot tell how many times I have read "Shyamchi Aai" (Shyam's mother book). Guruji's blessings have always filled my life. I started the Sane Guruji lecture series in Vijaynagar (Mhaisal Station). The intention of this lecture series was to spread information about the society, agriculture, and spirituality. We cultivated a coconut tree garden as a permanent memorial of Shri Sane Guruji. I watered the plants myself. This garden gives peace and happiness. Now the garden has taken a nice form. We have also constructed a 'Mangal Karyalay' (Wedding Hall) with a lawn in the same garden. This garden is 2 Acres and 2 Guntas and it has about 200 coconut trees, 100 to 125 palm trees, 300 betel nut trees, teak-wood trees, 'Kevada' (Pandanus odoratissimus) trees, and 'Sonchafa' trees. With plenty of water available for this garden, it has become a serene premise. This garden is named as 'Sane Guruji Garden'. Since the 'Zila Parishad' elementary school is next to it, it was decided to call this area as 'Sane Guruji Nagar'.

As mentioned earlier, Param Pujya Ramesh Maharaj had laid the foundation stone of the "Lt. Babibai Lunkad Training Center" on 'Madya Vadya Panchami'. Industrialist and President of Suraj Foundation, Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad had wholeheartedly and generously paid for this building which is used for rural educational development and helping people to get jobs. I decided to hold an inauguration ceremony of this building. So, I met Padmashri Dr. D. Y. Patil Sir (Governor of Tripura). We call him Dadasaheb. He had also inaugurated the Sai Temple in 2003. His life is very spiritual and accomplished. He is compassionate towards common people and is blessed by many noble and pious men (Satpurush). He has made many Satpurushs his own through devotion. So, it was decided to inaugurate both, Sane Guruji Garden and Lt. Babitai Lunkad Training Center through such a 'Satpurush'. He agreed to come. I was a simple person and filling my stomach through a job. But even then, he accepted my invitation. For this, I will be ever indebted and grateful to him.

11 AM on 27 May 2012 was chosen as the time of inauguration. We all started working hard to ensure that the program would be held on a large scale and shall be beautiful. Since a Governor was coming, the Government machinery started moving. Honorable M.L.A Shri Sanjay Patil (Now Member of Parliament) also joined us in the hard work. Finally, the auspicious day rose. On Sunday, 27 May 2012, Honorable Padmashri Dr. D. Y. Patil Sir (Now Governor of Bihar) inaugurated both locations in the chief presence of Lt. R. R. Patil (Home Minister of Maharashtra), Lt. S. R. Patil Sir, M.L.A Kakasaheb Patil, M.L.A Sanjaykaka Patil, Shri Pravinsheth Lunkad, Shri Mohansheth Kadam, and Shri Chiman Lokur. Dr. D. Y. Patil Sir (Dadasaheb) felicitated many dignitaries and delivered a small but beautiful speech. Thousands of people were present for the function. Shri Panditrao Chavan, Shri D. S. Bhosale, Lt. Avadhut Jadhav, and we all had worked a lot for the success of this program. We were successful in it.

As per Param Pujya Sane Guruji, "Act as per your thoughts and have the courage to act as per your thoughts. Don't be numb. Don't spread religious hatred. Consider a poor and harassed person as your own and distance yourself from the harasser. The distinction between Hindu and Muslim, Black, and White are false. There are only two true quarrels and distinctions that are ongoing for ages. They are between the ones destroying other's families and the ones stopping it. You stand on the side of correctness. Based on what you learn, participate in this quarrel wholeheartedly". My work of trying to implant these thoughts in this land is in progress.

I believe that a Temple is a place to start contact with the Almighty. By visiting a Temple regularly, a family person can continue with his or her karma, stabilize the mind, and create good thoughts. That person can reach high levels of spirituality, attain a continuous direction, gain knowledge of the inner and outer world, understand the difference between physical and transcendental speeds of life, prepare the body for ardent practices and meditation, attach pious karmas, gain yogic powers and body, transform the mind, and subdue or eliminate the

fear, lust, and anger. One can also do some contemplation ('Chintan') by controlling the mind and senses, slowly make a way towards spiritual upliftment and godliness, remove the ill thoughts from attractions and renounce the ego. Mainly, a person starts developing love towards the Almighty and is devoid of the ego after he or she benefits from godliness. I believe that to form a better human being, a Temple is an elementary medium.

I have mentioned about my pilgrimage to the Himalayas earlier in this book. From 19 November 1992 to 30 November 1992, on my Gujrat trip to the Himalayas earlier in this book. From 19 November 1992 to 30 November 1992, on my Gujrat trip, I had the Darshan of Sorti Somnath, Dwarka, Ranchoddas, Bhagwan Swami Narayan, Garudeshwar, Nareshwar, and Jalaram Bappa. I saw many shrines, religious places, and Shri Kshetras. I tried to visit almost all shrines to take the blessings and happiness. I was already visiting shrines in Shegaon and Pawas once in a while. A new thought came to my mind. It was to build a temple of Shegaon's Saint Shri Gajanan Maharaj and the great Saint and freedom fighter of Pawas Shri Swami Swarupanand. Soon enough, Gurudev fulfilled my wishes.

The committee that arranged my 60th birthday celebration had given me a big amount. I added my pension fund and provident fund to it and started work on my resolution of constructing Shegaon's Saint Shri Gajanan Maharaj's Temple. About 1.5-to-1.75-acre land of Lt. Bapu Nana Shinde, Shri Vishnu Nana Shinde, and Shri Tukaram Nana Shinde was purchased for this purpose. The only intention in building this temple was to be eligible to seek the Almighty's blessings, create a large family of God-loving people, uphold ethical spirituality and its values, make it as a goal of life, and create an atmosphere suitable for spirituality by cultivating a beautiful garden in the free-flowing fresh air.

Slowly, the construction was up to speed. It was completed under the oversight of Shri Pralhad Dhumal, Vilas Laad, Bhau Gavandi, Anandrao Shelar, Naik brothers, S. M. Sannake (Civil engineer), Sadashiv Wadd, Sandip Patil, and Shrikant Mangavate. Most respected Anandrao Mali, Tanajirao Shinde, Shashikant Shinde, and others worked a lot for this Temple. The inauguration ceremony was held from 27 August 2013 to 2 September 2013 (Shravan Saptami).

The flag hoisting ceremony was done by Shri Pradip Pant Balekundrikar, Dr. Bapusaheb Pujari, Dr. Jaysinghrao Shinde – Mhaisalkar, Dattatray Gosaki, Sunil Patil, Balasaheb Pawar (Of Kundal), and Shivajirao Ingavale. Whereas, Shri Manohar Sarda, Vishwas Anna Gavali, Vijaybhai Shah, Apte Baba, Vishnu Gopal Kulkarni, Ramesh Gholap, and H.B.P Rohit Dandekar were present for the Veena (A musical instrument) Pooja. Shri Chandrakant Kumbhar, Dattdaas Ghag Buva, Pandurang Kasar, Mrs. Kamaltai Joshi performed the Kirtans. Mangla Joshi conducted a singing performance. The Bhajans were performed by Shri Anil Fadanvis, Dilip Sutar, Jay Bhavani Bhajni Mandal (Bhajan group from Ichalkaranji), and Shri Bhajani Mandal (From Soni).

Shri Gajanan Maharaj's idol's 'Praan Pratishtha' (A ritual of bringing life in the idol) was done by the auspicious hands of Shri Yadneshwar Shastri Joshi (Of Satara), Shri Palmakar (Of Nanded), Shri Chandrashekhar Kelkar Maharaj, Shri Kotnis Maharaj, Dr. Avinash Patil, Shri Mahesh Shirke, Shripad Rajaram Nerlekar, and Gurunath Kulkarni. Whereas Shri's Aarti was done by the auspicious hands of Mr. and Mrs. Sudhakar Regodkar, Mr. and Mrs. D. K. Patil Sir, Mr. and Mrs. Sanjiv Patil (Laxmi Group industrialist from Solapur), M.L.A Sanjay Kaka Patil, Rajaram Magdum (Of Admapur).

The 'Mahaprasad' and publishing of Shri Hanumandas Maharaj's biography was done by Shri Chandrashekhar Kelkar Maharaj, Dr. Kedariprasad Kulkarni, Dr. Bindusar Palange, Panditrao Chavan (Of Kolhapur), N. G. Kamat Sir, Dhouka Sir, and Shrishailya Motagi. Thousands of people took the 'Mahaprasad'. I was happy that Shri Gurudev completed the last work of my life.

Every year in the month of Ashad, 'Hatti Laxmi' (A deity near Mhaisai) is offered 'Ambil' (Ragi / a type of cereal) as a ritual. There is a small hill about 1 to 2 kilometers towards the east of Mhaisai Station. The Hatti Laxmi's Temple is on this hill. Earlier, there was merely an idol inside a shade. Its nearby land is empty and rocky. A railway line passes close to it. The road leading to this Temple is full of Cassia Auriculata flowers (A type of wildflower) and tall grass. The local villagers believe this deity has fulfilled their wishes and has blessed them with good crops. So, the villagers have constructed a Temple for the deity after she stayed in a shed for many years. A small carnival is held every year for the deity, and she is offered 'Kheer' (A dessert made with milk), rice and 'Ambil'. With the goddess's blessings, people around here are living happily. It has rained consistently for years and thus this outskirts area is well cultivated. Old sheds and huts are now replaced with concrete houses. Now birds like sparrows, crows, 'Salunkhi' (Indian myna), waterfowls (Ducks), rosy starlings, and peacocks can be seen in the lush green fields. Herds of sheep started sitting in the fields in the rainy season. Bullocks working in the fields are a common sight. Earlier this village did not have enough water, hence the crops were negatively affected. So, the villagers were suffering. Working in nearby farms was not an option. Pardhis (A caste. The ones who do 'paradh'/keep a watch) and Kunbis (A caste of farmers) lived on the open lands around here. The huts and houses here were simple. They had mud shingles as roofs, and the walls were built in mud and clay. Overall, it was impossible to live in this village without hardships. The past was bad. Even though things were inexpensive in those days, poor people did not have enough to eat. The schools were not up to the standards. Even in such poverty, people were bearing hardships and educating their children. One good thing from those days was that people had control over their wandering wind-like minds. These people were passing through sadness and happiness. But the hardworking hands were never loose.

Now vehicles speed through in both directions on the road. People's torn lives are now over.

The villagers now think about living peacefully, educating their kids, and getting them a job. Their children have started going to new schools and colleges. Dark clouds, rain, and rainbows are rare now. Crops like sugarcane and grapes are now cultivated on the water from irrigation schemes and canals. Farmhouses are getting erected on the open lands. Times are changing. Farmers' children are becoming doctors, engineers, and advocates. New inventions are coming out every day. The village is developing as the farmers are getting decent money and education. The past was such that, even though there was no money, it was still an endowed and quietude time. In those days, people used to give goats, cows, and buffalos to each other for free. People were healthy drinking animal milk and yogurt. Now cows and buffalos have become very expensive. Bullocks, cows, and buffalos are becoming rare. However, it is fair to say that cow milk and cow waste have helped the families financially to some extent. There was a time when radio was the only means of entertainment. People were content listening to radio news and were going about their work. Now, the radio is replaced by television. TV serials are rapidly changing their form. The channels are changing as well. They start from early morning from 5 AM to midnight. The young generation does not move away from TV. Transformation and changes are happening in all villages. Many traditional professionals like 'Vasudev' (A coneshaped hat-wearing person who narrates religious stories of either Vitthal - Rakhumai or Lord Krishna from Temple to Temple), 'Jogate' (Typically female devotees carrying an idol of the goddess Yogeshwari. They sometimes tell the future of the person and are also astrologists), 'Darveshi' (Mendicants mainly amongst Muslims. They exhibit wild beasts like tigers, bears and monkeys and exact toll from house to house), 'Gondhali' (Musicians and singers who do a tumultuous festivity in propitiation of a goddess), 'Potraj' (A fast vanishing tribe of priests who worship Lord Pothuraju/Avatar of Lord Vishnu), 'Pingala' (A wandering tribe representing the Sun's charioteer Arun. Arun was considered crippled in his legs. Marathi word for somebody crippled in legs is Pangala. Hence, they go to houses to seek alms before Sunrise), 'Nandivale' (A wandering tribe known as Tirmal - meaning devotees of Lord Venkatesh of Tirupati. They are native devotees of Lord Shiva and carry a cow / Nandi which is considered Lord Shiva's vehicle), 'Kadak Laxmi' (Worshippers of goddess Kadak Laxmi. They carry a whip and punish themselves while another member plays a musical instrument), and 'Bahurupi' (Polymorphic. A person dresses up as some professional like a Police officer, etc. and gives a message to earn some money) that not only brought food to their table but also enlightened our society through their messages cannot be seen anymore. Now letters and telegraphs are gone, and cell phones are the medium to speak the language of affection. There were 'Jaatas' (A flour grinding device made of two heavy circular slabs. The bottom slab is fixed to the ground whereas the top one had a handle for grip and a hole to put the grains) in every house. It was fun to grind the Jowar flour in it and eat the 'Kaar' (A type of Jowar) 'Bhakaris' (Rotis made from Jowar flour). Now they are replaced by flour grinding machines. The bullocks from the 'Bendur' festival cannot be seen. (Bendur is a festival held in June to worship the bullocks working in the farms). Panchami songs, Gouri's circles, 'Zimma' (A play usually done by females where they clap their hands and go in circles), 'Fugadi' (A play where two people hold each other's hands and rotate), dancing

with the 'Supps' (A rectangular lightweight utensil made from tree leaves to separate beans and pulses from their outer skin). Days are changing under the guise of modernization. Families are becoming small. In my childhood, we couldn't get 'chutney' for 'Amti' (Curry). So, we used to make 'Kharada' by crushing wet chili peppers and mix it with the 'Amti'. Our meals used to be of 'Bhakari' made from 'Nachni' (Raagi / brown finger millet seeds) grains, 'kaar' Jowar Bhakaris, wet green chili pepper 'kharada', mango pickle, 'dangar', 'patri' sabzi (A vegetable dish made from the leaves of wild weed and considered to be high in iron content), 'ambada' sabzi (A vegetable dish made from gongoora leaves), 'kurdu' sabzi (A vegetable dish made from wild leaves of Celosia argentea), chapatis and sweet polis with rice during festivals. There were 'mots' (A rotating wheel with buckets attached to the spokes and driven by bullocks. It is used to fetch water from open wells) running in the farms. With doting affection, people used to request for some sugarcane from the farmers to eat. The only Diwali snacks were laddoos, chakalis, and kanula. Diwali was celebrated in poverty. In the old days, people didn't have enough money, but they were straightforward and were living happily. Now, days have changed. People have money and every day is like Diwali. They don't realize it coming or going. All of the above memories are from my childhood at my mother's maternal village and other villages. The old villages have changed. They have acquired a new form. Mhaisal Station also has attained a new form. Old mud houses are replaced with Bangalore-shingle houses. Kerosene and glass lamps are replaced by electric lights, the 'muroom' (Decayed rock), and crushed stone roads in villages are replaced by asphalt roads, and bullock carts are replaced with trucks. Radios have bowed down. Groups of people have started sitting in front of TVs day and night. Stacks of mud pots have disappeared. Tractors have taken over from bullock carts. Like the villages, education too has progressed.

I go for a walk every evening towards Miraj, Bedag, and railway station. My legs automatically start falling towards the railway station in the evening when it is time for the passenger train to arrive and the bell on the station rings. I sit on a bench at the end of the railway platform. The passenger train from Belgaum to Miraj slowly arrives on the platform and it starts taking off slowly. Many villagers, young children get down on the station. As the youth who are engrossed in their loud fun leave the station an anonymous silence spreads through the premises. I calmly sit on the platform. Mind waits for someone to arrive. Years ago, I and Lt. Shivajirao Mali used to come by this passenger train and would walk to the Temple in darkness. After a stayover, we would return to Miraj by the passenger train. We used to feel happy. Now, as it gets dark, the mind becomes restless and awaits the 7 PM passenger train thinking that somebody from Miraj may come. But most of my old supporting friends have gone to God's home. They are never going to come to meet me by the passenger train. But my mind tells me that somebody may come and that gives a ray of hope. I too must leave. Travelers exit the last passenger train and walk away. I too leave the station after waiting for someone and walk towards the Temple. The bell rings indicating the passenger train is about to leave and then it leaves. Looking dejectedly towards the platform, I go on my way. Now it is night. Stars have spread far away in the sky.

Temple bells are echoing in my ears. The slow-moving passenger train cars are visible from the Temple premises. The passenger train's horn disturbs the silence of the darkness. Slowly, the passenger has started disappearing in the darkness. The mountain is getting old.

* * *

Beneficial Discussion with the Seekers through Questions and Answers.

1) Should humans do 'Sadhana'?

Ans: Yes, humans should do 'Sadhana' to seek pleasure, peace, and the joy of the Almighty.

2) What is 'Sadhana'?

Ans: Mantra chanting ('Mantra Samhita'), name chanting, and meditating integrally with a specific goal in mind.

3) Is it necessary to do 'Sadhana'? What is the benefit of 'Sadhana'?

Ans: The mind is wandering, unstable, and excursive. It never stays steady. According to scientists, there can be anywhere between 27,000 to 28,000 thoughts per minute. The mind is unquenchable. To stabilize such a mind, it is necessary to do 'Sadhanas' through means like 'Jap' (Name chanting), 'Tap' (Religious austerity), Mantras, Yogas, 'Naamsmaran' (Recalling God's name).

4) Can the mind be stabilized through 'Jap', 'Tap', Mantra, 'Tantra', Yoga, and 'Naamsmaran'?

Ans: 'Jap', 'Tap', 'Mantra', 'Tantra', 'Yoga' and 'Naamsmaran' have to be done with the help of mind. The mind is the basis of 'Sadhana'. Until 'Gyaan Marg' (Path of knowledge), 'Karm Marg' (Path of actions), and 'Bhakti Marg' (Path of devotion) is perfected, the march towards 'Mukti' (Liberation of the soul) will be with the help of the mind. As the speed of 'Jap', 'Tap', 'Mantra', 'Tantra', 'Yoga' and 'Naamsmaran' increases, the mind stabilizes. The way a frantic elephant is stabilized by hitting its 'Gandasthal' (A sensitive part between the eyes and ears) with a pointed object, our wandering, restless, fickle, unstable, and unsatisfied mind can be slowed down, stabilized, and concentrated by hitting it with 'Jap', 'Tap', 'Mantra', 'Yoga', and 'Naamsmaran' etc.

5) Is a Guru necessary to do 'Sadhana'?

Ans: Yes, a Guru is necessary to do 'Sadhana'.

6) How many types of Gurus are there?

Ans: Scriptures have mentioned 12 types of Gurus. They are, 'Dhaturvadi' (Metallurgist), 'Chandan' (Sandal), 'Vichar' (Thoughts), 'Anugrah' (Grace), 'Parees' (A stone of which the touch turns iron into gold, the philosopher's stone), 'Kachhap', 'Chandra', 'Darpan', 'Chayanidhi', 'Nadnidhi', 'Krouchpakshi', and 'Suryakant'.

7) Out of the above, which Gurus are superior in today's prevailing time? Who to make a Guru?

Ans: In today's time, 'Anugrah' and 'Parees' types of Gurus can be seen. 'Anugrah' Gurus show the path of self-well-being to their disciples through names, mantras, and meditation. Whereas 'Parees' Gurus turn their disciples lives into gold through their cohabitation. The latter does not overload the disciples. They transform the lives of the disciples while staying detached. Hence 'Parees' Gurus are superior. They are also called 'Siddha Gurus'. The laws of nature do not apply to such 'Siddha Gurus'.

8) What do 'Siddha' Gurus teach?

Ans: 'Siddha' Guru and 'Parees' Guru terminate a disciple's 'Kartutuva' (Deeds) and benefit him/her with the Almighty's blessings. There are instances of Siddha Gurus uplifting humans, animals, and birds. Hence Siddha Gurus are superior.

9) What qualities are granted to a disciple by a 'Siddha Purush' and Guru?

Ans: Achieving the Almighty's blessings through knowledge and 'Vivek' is made possible by Siddha Gurus. (Vivek means Prudence; It is the power of separating Brahma the invisible spirit from the visible or objective system, truth from untruth, reality from illusion).

10) Does a Guru have a religion, time-difference, or place-difference?

Ans: Gurus do not have a religion. They do not belong to a religion, country, time, or place. Human life is very rare. Gurus negate the lust and desire in a disciple and make them disinterested and free from desires. Thus Gurus benefit the disciples with 'Shivatva' (Shiva like qualities) and make their human life pleasant and comforting.

11) In practicality, what is the difference between a Guru and a Saint?

Ans: Sometimes, in reality, a Guru's conduct can create a dilemma. So, a disciple may not necessarily be impressed. But staying in the company of a Saint and Saint's thoughts can transform the life of a disciple.

12) What can be achieved in the company of a Saint?

Ans: Staying in the company of a Saint makes the disciple utter the name of the Almighty often. Thus through name chanting and mantra chanting, one can enter a meditative state. The number of thoughts in the mind is reduced.

13) What is the difference between 'Jap', 'Tap', 'Mantra Diksha', 'Anugrah', 'Sadhana', and devotion?

Ans: It is easier to find the path of knowledge through the path of devotion. The origin of the path of knowledge is in the path of devotion. 'Jap', 'Tap', 'Mantra Diksha', 'Anugrah', and 'Sadhana' revolve around the path of knowledge. They are the rings that circulate around. There are two types of devotion. One is devotion with a purpose while the other is devotion without any purpose. The latter benefits a devotee with blessings from God.

14) Who has the biggest influence on humans? A Guru or life?

Ans: Happenings in life have a bigger effect on human life. The concepts of pleasure in life are similar to the disappearing fog. Hence, humans should make use of the things provided by the Guru and strive to live egoless, compassionate, charitable, and with a quest for the Almighty.

15) How does a Guru transform a disciple who is under the influence of life?

Ans: A Guru turns a disciple who is engrossed in life into a fearless person. He takes the disciple's lifeline in his own hands and makes him free of worries.

16) What do Bhajan, Kirtan, Pravachan and Satsang give to a human being?

Ans: Bhajan, Kirtan, Pravachan and Satsang create devotion and thus make the person stable. They create a longing for the Almighty.

17) How can one concentrate?

Ans: This is rather a difficult question to answer. It is extremely difficult to concentrate. But the main means to achieve it is through Karma (Actions/thoughts). One's Karma has to be clean. There should be persistence in the Karma. Through 'Jap', 'Tap', 'Mantra', 'name chanting', and devotion, the concentration of mind can be achieved. Similarly, by activating the helix, impartation of powers by a Guru ('Shaktipaata Diksha') and action initiation (Kriya Yog Diksha), the concentration of the mind can be achieved. Complete calmness can be achieved.

18) Does a Sadguru make a disciple great or is it the other way around?

Ans: Sadhguru eliminates the difference and curtains between Himself and the disciple. They both become one. Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundri made his Guru Bal Mukund available to the entire world. Whereas, Swami Swarupanand did the same with Param (Supreme) Guru Ram Bhau Tikotikar, Vishwanath Buva Rukadikar, and Baba Maharaj Vaidya and gave the Guru Parampara (Tradition) to the world.

19) What are the main problems in front of a disciple? How can a Guru solve them?

Ans: The main problems facing a disciple are the visible outer world and the dealings in this visible outer world along with family, household, relatives, money, etc. Neither the disciple nor anyone else can stay aloof from this outer world. The things in this outer world either make someone happy or sad. Happiness or sadness is in the belief. It is imaginary. Sadhguru cleanses a disciple's inner mind through sacraments and blessings and frees the devotee from lust, greed, and infatuation.

20) Why does a human being get engrossed in the world?

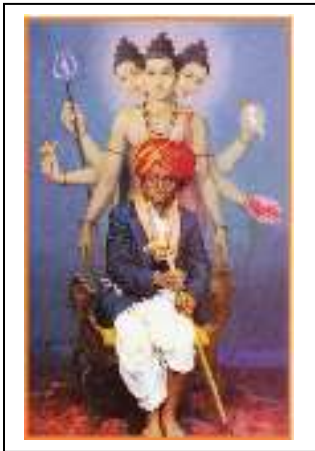
Ans: A human being gets engrossed in the world because of ego. The ego doesn't let him or her know understand the truth. Ego gives birth to all kinds of disorders and thoughts. The infatuation born from ego is capable of destroying a person.

21) What should a human do to stay wakeful in this world?

Ans: To stay vigilant, a person should do 'Jap', 'Tap', 'Bhajan', 'Sadhan' regularly. This slows down the speed of the senses and mind and allows one to be indrawn and satisfied. * * *

Underneath the shade of 'Kalpa Vriksha' (The wishing-tree of Indra's heaven) Shri Mhadba Patil Maharaj (Dhulgaonkar)

The twentieth century has witnessed many saints. One of them was Shri Mhadba Patil (Dhulgaonkar). He was born on Monday, 9 October 1916 (Ashwin Shudh Trayodishi. Shake 1838) in Dhulgaon (Dubal Dhulgaon, Taluka Tasgaon, District Sangli). His father's name was Shri Babgonda Patil and his mother's name was Bayakka. Shri Babgonda Patil was a Patil (A leadership position) of the village. Since he was a devotee of Shri Datta, he used to visit Narsinhwadi for Shri Datta's Darshan on every full moon day. It would not be wrong to consider that Shri Narsinh Saraswati took birth as his son.



Shri Mhadba Patil always remained disembodied. He mainly traveled between Miraj, Sangli, Ichalkaranji, Kurundwad, Narsinhwadi, and other places. His Guru's name was Shri Ramanand Maharaj Khatavkar (Of Nandre – Khatav village). Shri Mhadba Maharaj traveled by foot, bicycle, motorcycle, horse-cart, bullock-cart, and any vehicle he could find. He always wished that his devotees should not bear the slightest of hassle. Until his end, he did not touch a single rupee. He did not keep a single rupee near him. He was such a desire-less person.

His usual costume was made of a Dhotar (Dhoti), coat, turban, handkerchief, and cloth shoes. He carried a stick in his hand. Many of his relatives lived in our Patil Gully in Miraj. So, since childhood, I used to have his Darshan. He visited Maha Sadhu Anna Buva's Temple in Miraj's Sitarmaker Gully 4 days in a month from the full moon day to Sankashti (The fourth lunar day of every dark fortnight. It continues until moonrise). A large crowd used to gather for his Darshan. He was a Datta Avatar. I was lucky enough to spend some time with him.

Shri Mhadba Patil Maharaj informed his devotees and showed inauspicious signs before taking Samadhi in Narsinhwadi on Sunday, 6 June 1982 (Jeshth Pournima / Vatsavitri Pournima, Shake 1904) at 6.05 AM. His Samadhi, Temple, and Mathi was built by his true disciple Padmashri Dr. D. Y. Patil Sir and other devotees in Narsinhwadi.

*

Shri DasRam Maharaj, Sangli

'Chimad Sampraday' believes in human religion. One of the great 'Satpurushs' from this 'Chimad Sampraday' was Shri DasRam Maharaj. His full name was ShriRam Govind Kelkar. His mother's name was Indirabai. Shri Dada was born on Thursday, 6 August 1920 (Shake 1842, Shravan Vadya Pashti) in his maternal uncle's place in Kurundwad (District Kolhapur, Maharashtra).



Shri Dada was the blessed student of Shri Tatyasaheb Kotnis Maharaj. He started singing Kirtans from the tender age of 5 and he continued them until his last breath. Shri Dada remained a family man but became a Siddha saint. Staying in his family life, he taught 'Parmaarth' (The attainment and enjoyment of the Divine nature) to people of all strata within the society. It was his nature to consider everyone as a good person. On any occasion, his 'Ashtha Bhaav' (eight affections within the body) would awaken and he would get overwhelmed with teary eyes. He was a great saint of extremely loving and gentle conscience. He had memorized entire books like Dyaneshwari, Shri Das Bodh, Shri Tukaram Gatha, and the Abhangs from Shri Guruling Geeta.

It was my good fortune to have received his blessings and spent time in his company around 1980.

Shri Dada finished his Avatar on 25 July 2001 at 7.40 PM on the auspicious day of 'Naag Panchami' (Shravan Shudh Pashti). His further work is carried-on lovingly and capably by Shri Chandrashekhhar Anna.

*

Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni, Sangli

Shri Govind Maharaj Kulkarni was born on 2 July 1921 in Bramhanal (Near Sangli). His father's name was Balkrishna and his mother's name was Saraswati. He had 3 brothers and 3 sisters.



One of his brothers, Shri Gopalrao was a student of Shri Pandurang Maharaj Tamhankar. The latter was from the disciple-tradition of Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar. In the year 1957 (Marg Shirsh Vadya 14), Shri Pandurang Maharaj Tamhankar gave Diksha to Govind Maharaj through a ritual and ordered him to carry forward the tradition of Avadhut Sampraday. He owned and managed a famous hotel in Patel Chowk (Sangli), by the name of 'Kulkarni Bandhu Tea Club'. Traveling on foot and bicycle, he reached out to the people from the slums to the affluent ones and spread the 'Avadhut Sampraday'. I was introduced to him through Lt. Baburao Suryavanshi. He was an extremely simple, loving, caring, and compassionate saint.

Every Tuesday, both of us were present for the Aarti in Suryavanshi's house. He sang beautiful Bhajans and poems. His company has remained significant for me. He finished his Avatar on the night of 24 March 2003 at 11.30 PM. His Samadhi is on the banks of Krishna River in Sangli in Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar Temple's premises.

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Shri Hanumandasji Maharaj, Yashwantnagar, Sangli

I was introduced to Shri Hanumandasji Maharaj through Dr. Bindusar Palange and Dr. Kedariprasad Kulkarni of Sangli around the year 2001. He was approximately 65 to 70 years of age at the time. He was a Bal Bramhachari and was a Siddha Purush of a special kind. He had witnessed the Almighty. His life was very marvelous. His native place was Yelavi (Tasgaon Taluka, District Sangli). His father's name was Param Pujya Anant Govind Joshi and his mother's



name was Rukmini Anant Joshi. Shri Hanumandasji Maharaj was born to such Punya Shlok parents in Angol Belgaum on Sunday, 23 February 1936 at 10.10 AM (Falgun Shudh Pratipada).

At the age of 12, he was blessed by the intelligent Saint Shri Charanand Saraswati. The latter gave him the mantra of Shri Ram Jay Ram Jay Jay Ram. He traveled throughout India. And circumnavigated ('Pradakshina') the Narmada River and Himalayas many times.

He spent his life in solitude and doing intense Sadhana. Due to my pre merits, I spent some time in his company and was blessed by him. In today's world, it can be said that he sold his 'Janavi'

(Literal meaning is Yadnyopavit – Sacred thread. Meaning in context is by selling his knowledge/services) to pay for his livelihood. He finished his time on earth as an Avatar on 10 August 2012 (Shravan Vadya Asthamiyukt Navmi) at 1.17 PM. *

A note of gratitude from co-translator:

A guru is your GPS in your spiritual journey. He will never allow you to get lost and he will help you reach the destination safely and smoothly with wise instructions to follow the path and its guaranteed success. But for that, you will first have to surrender before him and believe in him leaving aside all your ego and myths. And I can't agree any more to this sacred pathway of spiritual journey!

Since the age of 7-8 years, I have been fortunate and blessed to avail the precious guidance of Pa. Pu. Shri. Zende Maharaj. It wasn't an age to understand the depth of spirituality. However, I was pretty sure that he is someone who has the capability to guide people and help them cope up with worries and challenges. He is like a God's messenger who could rescue you through unbearable and tricky situations. This assurance and belief makes you feel confident and resilient to deal with the situation. I have experienced this divine and supernatural power of support since childhood. Throughout this journey of life, I owe so much to Shri Zende Maharaj for whatever guidance he has provided me with or blessings bestowed upon me. I can't thank him enough and that's why I was always thinking of paying my gratitude towards him in some or the other way.

Fortunately, I got the opportunity to translate some part of this wonderful book called 'Gratitude' from Marathi to English. I wish to offer my services in his revered feet and I am delighted to see his noble work being spread in all parts of world. I firmly believe that mere language should not be the barrier to understand someone's personality and his work. I hope this translation would help non-Marathi speaking readers to have an insight into his life. If the intrinsic emotion and motive behind this activity helps to build your devotion and help you understand him better; my purpose of translating this book would be deemed served. God bless...

Thank you,

In his service, always I remain,
Arvind Ashok Tangadi, Pune

A note of gratitude from the translator:

Greetings! to all you pious readers. It is no coincidence that this book has gotten to you. Destiny has a reason for everything. Whatever faith or circumstances have led to this, mark my words, your spiritual journey will gain even more pace.

Although everybody from my native place Mhaisal (Sangli District in Maharashtra) knows Shri Zende Maharaj, it wasn't until the age of 29 that I first met him. I was born and brought up in a Jain family. Our house in Mhaisal is right next to the Jain Temple. Coincidentally, Shri Krishna Saraswati Datta Maharaj had stayed at this house when it was owned by Shrimant Kedarrao Shinde (Mhaisalkar). It was rare for our family to pray to any Gods or Saints other than Jains. This wasn't a discrimination per say but with the sheer volume of 24 Tirthankaras and their protector Gods called as Yakshas and Yakshinis, there was no shortage of idols to pray to. Growing up, I had not read any spiritual literature, nor did I know much about any Saints or Incarnations like Shirdi Sai Baba, Shri Gajanan Maharaj etc. Like most people of my generation, I needed proofs or scientific explanation of any miracles. Otherwise, I considered them as superstitions.

There was an untoward life-changing event in our family. You see, when calamity strikes, we humans intensify our prayers to higher powers or seek a new idol to pray to. We run towards fortune tellers, dig-out our horoscopes, and read spiritual literature. Similarly, my family was directed to read Shirdi Sai Charitra by two of our relatives. As we read it over a few months, some miracles started happening in our lives. Long story short, this led us to Shri Zende Maharaj.

I can easily narrate over fifty incidences where Shri Zende Maharaj's words have come true for me and my family. I will narrate some anecdotes here.

I was ready with my smart phone and was about to open Google Maps to show him my proposed house in Chicago. He said he doesn't need internet and he drew a map of my proposed house in Chicago without knowing its address or seeing any pictures.

My parents and his friend witnessed his power in controlling rain when the concrete slab of our house was being poured.

I have heard a story from a person where Shri Zende Maharaj gave the timing of that person's cousin's death and rebirth.

In another example, my parents had informed Shri Zende Maharaj of one of our relatives Covid situation where multiple members had contracted the Delta variant. Maharaj told my parents how many people amongst that group will survive. My parents obviously could not pass this information back to our relatives until the words came true.

There is a story where he had informed the parents of an intelligent young boy that he will not graduate from a medical college. As years passed by, the parents were happy to see their son getting good scores and getting admission in a medical college. Unfortunately, the boy passed away while in college.

In another incident, Maharaj had warned someone to always take his permission when leaving the town. These instructions were religiously followed by that person for many years. However, once he went on a trip with his friends and had not taken Maharaj's permission. Unfortunately, he died in a road accident.

Shri Zende Maharaj used to write horoscopes. In one example, many years after writing someone's horoscope, that person fell sick. His relatives brought the horoscope to Shri Zende Maharaj to seek his guidance. It was then that Maharaj remembered that he had not finished completing that horoscope due to an urgent work that had come up. That person did not make it through. After this incident, Maharaj stopped writing horoscopes.

One young person whom I know very well had a divorce and lost his mother. He developed insomnia and was hardly sleeping for two hours a day. None of the medical treatments helped. From the moment his father met Maharaj, the person started sleeping a lot and then in a few days became completely normal.

Out of respect to the families, I am refraining from quoting the names in above mentioned stories. To keep the length of this book short, I will abstain from other such stories. Also, anyone that knows Maharaj is aware that Maharaj does not like his own publicity. I waited 15 years to get his permission to create a website. He ultimately gave the permission and has strictly warned me against having any feature on the website related to seeking donations. He had suggested a long name like Shri Datta Mathi Mhaisal Station etc. Since these names were too long for a website, I took the liberty and named it as zendemaharaj.com. I would encourage you blessed readers to check it out. There are free PDF copies of his books on it. I am not sure if Maharaj would have allowed me to quote the above-mentioned stories. If I had asked for his permission and if he were to say no, then after a few decades these stories will forever be forgotten. Hence, I apologize to Maharaj from the bottom of my heart for quoting them.

I keep guessing how is it scientifically possible for him to know someone's future or see things without physically seeing them that too from seven seas across? My quest or so-called research has led to one finding. It is that nobody really knows who Shri Zende Maharaj really is.

Even if we were to forget about his Ashta Siddhi powers, as a person, he is an able administrator, incredibly intelligent, utmost humble, and the purest soul that I have ever come across. Getting to know him with whatever little time I have spent with him is the single biggest accomplishment of my life.



Lastly, I thank you all readers whom I would consider my Guru brothers and sisters, for reading this book and indirectly forgiving my translation mistakes.

Maharaj's disciple,
Ameet Bapusaheb Patil
(Mhaisai, India; Chicago, USA)



...A wayfarer was searching for something. What was he looking for? This cannot be described....I kept walking...bare feet...making a relationship with the soil...the journey continued on the treacherous path of devotion. While I thought I would get lost in the crowd, I met Gurus who showed me the way to eternity...mind became peaceful...the path to a state of stability was always with gratitude as a companion. Sometimes when reflecting on the past, one hears the cascading encompassing notes of the temple music. The Tulsi in the yard blossoms completely and carries a fragrance of gratitude. Wavelets of life sing in union...Gratitude! and Gratitude!

- Bajrang Zende