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**DATTATREYA TRADITION --(DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

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**SHRI  DATTATREYA**

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**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

**DATTATREYA TRADITION (DATTA-PARAMPARA):  Shri Dattatreya is a popular deity in Western India, especially Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra and Gujarat.  Dattatreya according to Purana myths was the son of Rishi Atri and Anasuya.  Analysis of ancient literature presented here indicates that he was born in about 2450 BC in Atri lineage but his mother’s name is not known. He was a householder with a son but must have renounced the world later. Though Puranas depict him as an avatar of Vishnu, the Nath sect considers him an avatar of Shiva.  These revelations need not disturb the pious who believe in the Purana myths for basically worship of Dattatreya implies worship of the Supreme entity Brahman which is not different from the Dattatreya Principle.**

**Four saints: Shripad Shrivallabha, Narsimha Saraswati, Swami Samarth and Manik Prabhu  are recognized as avatars of Dattatreya and have a large following even decades and centuries after their Samadhi.  In addition to these there are many famous Dattatreya devotees who lived during the past few centuries until the present times who have kept and are still keeping the Tradition of Dattatreya worship alive.  These webpages give the historical aspects of Dattatreya′s birth and biographies of the Avatars and many famous devotees.  Many spiritual aspects like Shaktipat, Mantras, places of pilgrimage etc are also discussed.**

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# DATTATREYA TRADITION --(DATTA-PARAMPARA)

# V. V. Shirvaikar

**PART I**

# SHRI DATTATREYA’S BIRTH-

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# PART I-A

**HISTORICAL DATING OF DATTATREYA’S BIRTHDAY**

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**Shri   Dattatreya**

**SUMMARY**

**In this article the legend of Dattatreya’s birth from the Puranas is critically examined for its plausibility using the information from Rigveda, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Puranas and the excellent published analytical studies of these ancient works by scholars.  Puranas are silent on chronology however the above analytical studies especially the corrected lists of the Solar and Lunar dynasty kings enabled construction of a Chronological frame which when used with various other information from the above sources leads to approximately 2450 BC as the most plausible birth time of Dattatreya and conclusively proves the Puranic birth legend to be a myth composed by the wise probably to cement the traditional conflicts between Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites. Contrary to the belief that Dattatreya was a celibate yogi the above sources show him to be a householder born not to Atri rishi but to unknown parents of Atri lineage. It is in later life that Dattatreya renounced and took to yoga and spiritual path. As would be expected of such a great master he had some eminent disciples whose names actually lead us to dating his birth. Puranas depict Dattatreya as an avatar of Vishnu which is disputable since the Nath sect considers him to be an avatar of Shiva which is not implausible considering that the nature of worship rituals in Dattatreya tradition are closer to Shaivaite traditions.  In fact it has been shown that the entire story of Dattatreya’s birth to Atri and Anasuya is a myth. Atri is a *gotra* or lineage to which different persons belonged in different times and ages but the Puranas call all of them by the generic name “Atri Rishi” with wife’s name as Anasuya. It has also been shown that Soma was son of an early Atri but his mother’s name is not known while Durvasa was Shiva’s avatar born though a yajna not at all involving Atri’s name anywhere.**

**This part of the article deals mainly with history and not spirituality. The spiritual aspects of Dattatreya worship are discussed in the next part. When Datta-devotees worship Dattatreya through his *sagun* i.e. material image what they worship in effect is the Dattatreya Principle, hence they should not be distressed by the findings about Shri Dattatreya’s birth presented here even though these are contrary to the image of Dattatreya in his mind that has been created by the Puranas. As has been shown here, though they have been the main medium of moral and religious education for Hindus for centuries, the Puranas, for historical reasons, have distorted the real ancient history and religious thinking to such a deep level that chances of improvement are virtually non-existent. Fortunately, Puranas have not been able to distort the spiritual thinking because while Puranas speak of attainment of heaven and hell after death depending on the *karmas* that involve the body, by contrast, stress in spiritual thinking and practices is on control of mind to attain detachment (*vairagya*), suppression of ego and desirelessness which lead to Self-realization and attainment of bliss even while you live.  Thus, Hindu religion can survive only though Spiritual pursuit.  Bibliography has been provided.**

# 1.0   TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

**Shri Dattatreya’s birthday is traditionally celebrated on Purnima (Full moon day) of the ninth lunar month *Margashirsha* which falls in December.  Dattatreya is considered to be an avatar of Vishnu born to Rishi Atri and Anasuya. Though an avatar of Vishnu he also possesses the attributes of Brahma and Shiva who also were incarnated as Soma and Durvasa respectively along with Dattatreya.  Hence Dattatreya is also known as Trimurti.**

**Rather than a deity, Dattatreya is regarded more as a wandering Guru and a king among yogis, who travels on earth showering his grace on worthy devotees.  These attributes of Dattatreya are deeply imprinted in the minds of Datta-devotees.**

**This imprint on devotees’ minds is based on the legends of the birth of Dattatreya in the Puranas.  Lay people have an intrinsic belief in Purana stories. This is not surprising because Puranas have been over the ages, in the pre-British era and even for a considerable time later in the absence of printed books, the source of their religious, spiritual and moral education. Even the illiterate people were exposed to the stories in the Puranas as a part of the religious discourses by learned persons and sages held in temples usually during festive occasions. Puranic education pervaded all aspects of Indian life since childhood. Even in normal talk Puranic legends were quoted which were heard by children and grownups throughout their lifetime guiding them to lead a life according to Dharma i.e. the code of righteous conduct.**

**A peculiar character of Purana tales is that to a large extent they are metaphorical and allegorical myths with an element of supernatural, considerable exaggeration and devoid of any sense of chronology. When examined critically the basis of these mythical stories can be sometimes be discerned and one cannot but admire the brilliant literary ability of the composers of these stories which constitute a Purana.**

**At the outset it must be clarified that this is an article dealing with history and not spirituality as the main theme.  In this article we shall examine critically the legend of Dattatreya’s birth as an avatar of Vishnu born to rishi Atri and his wife Anasuya.**

# 2.0 BIRTH LEGENDS OF DATTATREYA

**Different Puranas give different versions of the story of the birth of these avatars. We shall quote here only two.**

***Legend 1*    According to Bhagwat Purana (Canto 4, Ch 1) Brahma the god of creation, asked one of his mind sons Rishi Atri to procreate. Atri went to Riksha Mountain with his wife Anasuya where he performed a severe penance standing on one leg for hundred years living only on air, with a firm thought that “I surrender myself unto Him who is the master of the universe to give me a son like Himself.” The gods were pleased. Brahmadeo, Vishnu and Shiva came to him riding their vehicles, the swan, Garuda and Nandi the bull respectively. Bowing before them Atri said, “I bow before you Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, who have assumed your different bodies through the millenniums for the three modes of Prakriti (nature) viz. the creation, destruction and maintenance of the universe. He asked them to clarify his doubt as to how the three had appeared before him when, for getting a child, he was praying to and had concentrated his mind on One Great Lord of the Primary Principle.  The gods explained that they are all part of the same Great Principle and gave to him their benediction that they will be born to them as partial incarnations.  Accordingly, three sons were born; the child born as an avatar of Shiva was named Durvasa, one born as an avatar of Vishnu was named as Datta and the third child born as an avatar of Brahma was named Soma (or Chandra).**

**This story seems to have been contrived to explain the Trimurti concept in the Hindu philosophy in which the formless, attributeless Brahman, in order to perform the tasks of creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe manifests itself as the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva having the attributes Raja, Sattva and Tama respectively.  Brahma is assigned the task of creation, Vishnu that of sustenance and Shiva that of destruction.**

**Brahma Purana gives a similar story but adds that the couple was blessed also with a daughter named Shubhatreyi.**

***Legend 2*   The following is the most popular version of the birth story and seem to have dominated devotees’ minds:   The wandering *Devarishi* (divine sage) Narada once visited Atri *ashram* where Atri’s wife Anasuya welcomed him with great respect and fed him sumptuously. Narada, highly impressed by this hospitality went to the abodes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and sang praises of Anasuya to their wives Saraswati (or Savitri), Laxmi and Uma commending her hospitality and devotion to her husband but passed a remark that there was no other *pativrata* (chaste and devoted wife) in the universe as good as Anasuya. This made the wives very jealous. They nagged their husbands who conferred and decided to test what kind of *pativrata* Anasuya was and punish her if she was not. They came to Atri's house in the disguise of three mendicants Brahmins choosing the time when the Rishi had gone out to the river for his daily worship. They assured Anasuya that they were Brahmins and have come having heard that guests were offered food of their choice in their *Ashram.* They said they were extremely hungry and demanded to be served food immediately otherwise they would go elsewhere.**

**Anasuya immediately made obeisance to them, offered them seats, washed their feet and worshipped them with sandal paste and flowers. She seated them, set leaf-plates before them and began serving food. But the guests stopped her and insisted that she should serve by becoming naked or else they would leave.  Deciding that it would not be good for her husband's reputation if the guests left dissatisfied, she asked them to wait and went in the kitchen to remove her clothes. Concentrating her mind on the feet of her husband, she removed her dress and said, "The guests are like my babies and therefore I need not feel ashamed." She came out of the kitchen and saw the three of them really turned into babies who were crying from hunger. Frightened, she went back to the kitchen to get dressed and returned. Anasuya lifted the babies one by one and held them to her breast to feed them.**

**Now, in the three abodes the wives were waiting for their husbands to return after disgracing Anasuya. But since the gods were stuck in Atri’s home they could not return home. This caused the wives a great deal of anxiety. Finally, they came to Anasuya, praised her and got their husbands back after giving a boon to Anasuya that their husbands would be born as her sons.**

**(The *Gurucharitra* gives a slightly different version in which it is Indra who fears the power of Anasuya from her being a *pativrata* and induces Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to test her.)**

**The Trinity stayed with Anasuya who named Brahma as Soma or Chandra (Moon), Vishnu as Datta and Shiva as Durvasa. Durvasa told Anasuya that he was a Rishi and was going away for penance and pilgrimage. Chandra said that he wants to go immediately but he will remain in the sky so that she can always see him. They said that Datta who was Vishnu's form would remain with her and he would be endowed with their attributes also and make both of them happy. So saying, Soma and Durvasa went away leaving Dattatreya as the combined form of the Trinity with Anasuya.**

**These birth stories from the Puranas are very dear to Dattatreya devotees who not only have allotted a birth-date but composed even lullabies for the child Dattatreya.  There is no doubt however that these stories are myths as will be discussed in later parts. Before that we shall digress and discuss two important topics that will greatly assist in the discussions. These are:**

**3.0 *Sources of information and its reliability* and**

**4.0 *A chronological framework*,**

## 3.0 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

**Vedas (and especially Rigveda Samhita), Upanishads, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas are obviously the main sources of information about Dattatreya.**

**Even more important than these basic texts are:**

**·       *The annotated translations of the above texts in modern European and Indian languages; and***

**·       *The commentaries and critical reviews on the above texts by learned scholars and historians of modern times in the British and post-British* era.**

**Hindu readers are conditioned to consider ancient texts to be holy and their contents sacrosanct. Very few are bold enough to express doubts about even obviously absurd or conflicting parts of the texts for the fear they may be committing a sin or sometimes because these texts explicitly contain threats of dire consequences of different kinds of hell if any doubt is expressed about them.  However, a careful reading of these texts, especially the epics and the Puranas will show glaring absurdities and contradictions within the texts, with other works and with reality.**

**Now, conclusions drawn from any kind of information can be reliable only if the input information itself is reliable.  It will be seen from the forthcoming discussions that except for Rigveda, the other sources have been subject to many spurious changes and additions at different stages in time. It is an established fact that every aspect of life be it social, political, religious or that of technological advance, changes over time. The texts added later reflect the contemporary state of socio-political situation and technological progress. For example texts written when iron was in widespread use are added to an original text pertaining to stone age or copper age then it is bound to create an incorrect impression that iron was being used during the era original events took place. Or say text referring to Shiva worship has been written during a period when Shiva worship was popular and added to a text pertaining to a period when Shiva was not heard of then also an incorrect impression of the society would be created.  Information must therefore be properly weighed before drawing conclusions from its use.  Commentaries and critical reviews on the above texts by learned scholars and historians become extremely important, even more than the original texts themselves.**

**Western scholars who were first introduced to the ancient Hindu literature in early British days in India were greatly attracted to its deep philosophy contents. In his preface to the English edition of the Gita, by Sir Charles Wilkins, Warren Hastings, the first British Governor General of India, declared towards the end of the eighteenth century. “*The writers of the Indian philosophies will survive, when the British dominion in India shall long have ceased to exist, and when the sources which it yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrances.*” (See Blog1 in Bibliography). For studying the literature they first acquired a sound knowledge of Sanskrit, other ancient languages like Pali and some main Indian languages, something a non-Hindu and a non-Brahmin in India would have found impossible to achieve.  They translated these texts into English and other European languages, subjected the texts to critical research using various techniques in etymology, philology, linguistic analysis, various branches of science like physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology, mathematics, statistics, archaeological data, cross-referencing it to other texts and so on to learn whatever they could about the texts. This had never happened in India before, mainly because Indian psyche lacks the sense of enquiry and courage to question the statements of the ancients. These western scholars and later, Indian scholars trained by them, using the techniques mentioned above, dated the texts, tested their genuineness, whether any additions and alterations have been made to the original, identities of the redactors making these alterations and identified the alterations wherever possible.  It is now known from their analyses that over the years many books have been victims of redactions with spurious texts leading to conflicting and doubtful information. But though obvious, nobody had ever doubted or questioned any texts, most people taking them to be holy and sacrosanct.**

**Several years of research has led to a wealth of information on ancient Indian history and culture. These scholars newly introduced to the Indian texts initially thought that Krishna and Rama and events like the Mahabharata  war were imaginary once considered as imaginary but as evidence grew they not only admitted the persons and events to be real and historical but even fixed dates for them.**

**As a result of this historical research a fairly reliable list of the Aryan kings of the Solar and the Lunar lineages who ruled India from Vaivaswat Manu onwards have now been prepared and are useful for making a Time-line of the ancient events (See later).  With the help of these analyses it is now possible to identify which piece of information in the ancient texts is real or a myth.**

**These analyses have established that only Rigveda Samhita has remained largely uncorrupted while in the case of both epics redactors have made alterations in the original texts and added a very large volume of new text. Unfortunately not many people know or bother about these redactions and take the texts at face value with great piousness. Regarding Puranas, all the 18 Puranas of today have evolved from an original single Purana Samhita by Maharshi Vyasa each with its own variations from the original.  (See section 3.2 later).**

**3.1 Referred Prominent Scholars:  In this study the work of the following researchers has been used to examine the legends about birth and early life of Dattatreya and how he came to be a deity. These are: (i) Mr. M.R. Yardi who has used statistical analysis on the distribution of syllables in the verses (*shlokas*), which are in the *Anushtubha* metre, to identify the styles of the original authors (Valmiki and Vyasa) of the two epics and those of individual redactors thus separating the contribution from each.  This work was done at and published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune.  (ii) Dr P. L. Bhargava a research scholar of international repute who has critically studied the above literature, has identified many ridiculously false stories from the Puranas, studied the redactions to the Ramayana, commented on many misconceptions about Vedic deities etc. In the present context his greatest contribution may be considered as the preparation of the lists of rulers of the Solar and Lunar dynasties and rishis associated with them. This required removal of many non-conformities within the lists given in various Puranas using extensive cross-referencing of the synchronic events (marriage, wars, yajnas etc.) in the ancient literature. His analysis gives a far better realistic picture of ancient Indian history. (iii) S. G. Talageri whose analysis of Rigveda brings our relative chronological scale of the compositions of hymns in various mandalas and the geographical background of the times.  Publications used in this work are including those of these authors are listed in the Bibliography. They should be read in the original.**

**References to the above authors who are more frequently referred to, are given in the text by abbreviated letters as follows;**

***Reference scheme:***

**P.L.Bhargava: B-VA: *India in the Vedic Age*; B-VRC: *Vedic Religion and Culture*; B-RH: R*etrieval of History from Puranic Myths*;**

**M.R.Yardi: Y-MB: *Mahabharata, Its Genesis and Growth*; Y-R: *Ramayana, Its Origin and growth*; Y-BG: *The Bhagvadgita as a Synthesis*.**

**We now give a short account of the redactions made to the epics and how so many Puranas evolved from a single Purana Samhita by Vyasa.**

**Though Puranas are later than the epics we shall first start with the Puranas because they are the key to the chronology of ancient events, an important factor usually ignored in our religious literature but needed here for appreciation of Dattatreya history.**

**3.2 About Puranas    In the pre-British era and even later printed books were not easily available. People in India, most of them illiterate, received their religious, spiritual and moral education through stories in the Puranas told in the religious discourses by learned persons and sages held during festive occasions in temples.  Puranic legends were quoted and heard by children and grownups guiding them to lead a life as prescribed by Dharma or the code of righteous conduct. Puranic education pervaded all aspects of Indian life since childhood.**

**The information regarding the evolution of Puranas summarized from B-VA pp 20-40 is given in the following:**

**Traditionally it is believed that all the 18 Puranas are authored by Maharshi Vyasa. This is a misinformation. According to historians, based on statements in the early Puranas (Vayu and Matsya) themselves, there was only one Purana Samhita in the beginning written by Maharshi Vyasa. This Samhita contained the record of kings and rishis from ancient times and legends of their activities. It was the duty of certain court officials called *Sutas* to maintain the dynasty lists.  (This S*uta* is different from the caste name Suta who used to be a person born of mixed caste parents and assigned the job of a charioteer). Existence of a work called Purana or Itihasa-Purana in the Vedic period is mentioned in the Samhita and Brahmana literature. In Atharvaveda V (XI 7, 24) also it is mentioned that there did exist a Purana. Maharshi Vyasa must have composed the original Purana Samhita based on this Vedic Purana. There were continued additions to this Purana Samhita during the subsequent generations after Vyasa and reached the final version of the Samhita five generations later, in the reign of king Adhiseemakrishna (about 1225 BC) of the Bharata lineage. (B-RH Ch 9 p 85, Roy Chron, row 196).**

**According to Vayu and Matsya Puranas this Purana Samhita was the basis of the 18 Puranas of today.  These new Puranas are of sectarian nature but they have a common feature that all give the list of kings of the Aryan ruling dynasties. The first three Puranas: Brahma (also known as Adi Purana or the First Purana), Vayu and Matsya were written by Vyasa’s disciples based on this original Purana Samhita during the reign of king Adhiseemakrishna.**

**Puranas are presented as dialogues between rishis and Suta Romaharshana (or Lomaharshana) and later his son Ugrashravas Sauti in which the rishis ask questions or request to be informed about some person or event and the Sutas reply through accounts of ancient episodes which do have some historical base but more often are mythical. Natural phenomena like phases of the moon which had no scientific explanations in those days are explained through myths. Often, origin of names of persons is also explained through myths. These dialogues were not religious discourses which were the prerogative of the Brahmin priests; the *Sutas* were only narrated the stories of glories of kings from the Purana Samhita.**

**Vayu Purana was narrated to a group of rishis performing a twelve year sacrifice in Naimishya forest on the bank of the sacred river *Drishadvati* by Suta Lomaharshna or his son Ugrashravas and must have been narrated elsewhere also.  The legends delighted the listeners who liked the deeds of their ancient heroes and became popular.  The ever increasing popularity was exploited by priests of different sects who began to appropriate the Puranas for expounding their own religious doctrines. Puranas began to multiply and even the old tales were revised to suit the purpose of different conflicting sects (B-VA: Ch 2 p 24). The priests who did all this were of inferior calibre temple priests and not learned Veda knowers.  (But they seem to have been talented enough to have added material much of it myths to increase the importance of the deities of their own temple.- Auth).**

**In the new Puranas the older accounts became corrupted in various ways, e.g. giving wrong origin to dynasty lists and omission of some members; unrealistic exaggeration e.g. about long lifetimes (thousands of years) and reigns to the kings; number of children (thousands); addition of absurd stories like Parashurama killing his mother on his father’s instruction and her revival; use of family name of a Vedic rishi throughout the era without giving the personal name for glorifying the rishi’s names like Atri and Vasishta, thus giving the false appearance that the same person lived throughout the ages; identifying different persons by the same name and explaining the incongruities in absurd ways (like Vedic Rishi Kashyapa with Prajapati Kashyapa and Brihaspati, father of Bhardawaja with divine priest Brihaspati); introducing divine beings in the accounts of famous persons e.g. claiming their marriage with the daughters of gods, *gandharvas* and *pitris* and vice versa. All this was done by the writer priests to enhance the glory of the ancient heroes, to explain facts which authors did not understand (e.g. the myth of Ikshwaku born out of Manu’s sneeze and Jarasandha born in two halves being joined together by an old woman). According to Winternitz the theory of reincarnation (avatar) also seems to have arisen out of this sectarian corruption, in this case from the Krishna cult. One also notes absurd stories of gatherings of rishis separated by centuries and who are no longer alive only to get credence from blindly pious people.**

**The 18 Puranas are: Brahma, Vayu, Matsya, Brahmanda, Vishnu, Bhagvata, Garuda, Agni, Padma, Linga, Kurma, Markandeya, Bhavishya, Narada, Brahmavaivarvata, Varaha, Vaman and Skanda. They were written at different times with increasing number of myths in the later Puranas, the process of additions lasting until the end of the first millennium of the Christian era. Older the Puranas better do they agree with the Vedic evidence. The order in which these Puranas were written is as follows: (Brahma, Vayu, Matsya); (Brahmanda); (Kurma, Linga, Garuda, Vishnu); (Agni, Bhagwata, Padma); (Markandeya, Bhavishya, both giving little genealogy); (Narada, Brahmavaivarvata, Varaha, Vaman, Skanda which are sectarian). Later Puranas follow one of the three earliest Puranas. Texts of the Puranas other than the first three have been frequently edited and contain conflicting information. (B-VA: p 21).**

**To qualify as a Purana it must include description of the following:  (1) The creation of the universe, (2) Its destruction and recreation, (3) The genealogy of gods and *prajapatis*, (4) The reigns of the Manus (Manvantaras), (5) The history of the Solar and Lunar dynasty kings. But not all Puranas fulfill these requirements in entirety.**

**3.3  Mahabharata : Shortly after the Mahabharata war (*ca.* 1100 BC) Maharshi Vyasa wrote a short account of the conflict between the cousins Pandavas and Kauravas called *Bharata* consisting of about 24,000 shlokas. There is a traditional belief that Vyasa originally wrote an account called *Jaya* of 8800 verses (shlokas) but it is disputed. About a century later, during the serpent sacrifice performed by King Janamejaya rishi Vaishyampayana recited this story (called Bharata) in about 21,262 *Shlokas and called it Bharata*. Five centuries later, Suta Romaharshana and his son Ugrashravas Sauti (who lived in about 450 BC) added 17,284 and 26,728 shlokas respectively. This new text presented various topics like dynasty lists, philosophy, art of governance, ethics, religion and numerous stories extraneous to the main theme of the family feud. Yardi also concludes from his statistical analysis of Shlokas that it was Suta who changed the bias of the story from a neutral account to one biased towards Krishna cult presenting Krishna as an avatar of Vishnu and implying he knew he was an avatar. He further shows that Gita was composed and added by Sauti who synthesized the various spiritual philosophies current in his time and presented four different spiritual paths all leading to *Moksha* (liberation), stressing the importance of devotion and surrender to God personified by him as Krishna in consonance with the *Pancharatra* philosophy of the Vaishnavaites. Bhargava however points out that Krishna has been presented as *Bhagwan* or god only in the middle six chapters of Gita (B-VRC: Ch 14). To be fair Krishna is described as a staunch devotee of Shiva. Yardi also concludes that in the 2nd century BC the author of Harivansha whose name is not known added 9,053 verses.  Another redactor, mentioned as Parvasangrahakara, also added further 1369 verses in the first century BC.  Later, Harivansha was also considered as part of the Mahabharata making a total size of about 100,000 verses and became an encyclopedia of religious information. (Y-MB)**

**Mahabharata (and Ramayana too) have many absurd stories in which rishis and characters from widely separated generation meet just as in the Puranas. This is not surprising since the redactors Suta, Sauti and Harivanshakara had also their hand in writing the Puranas and Puranas also must have lifted a lot of material from the epics.**

**3.4   Ramayana   Ramayana and its composer Rishi Valmiki have both been the victims of a lot of misinformation. In my childhood I remember having been told and read that Rishi Valmiki who wrote Ramayana was a contemporary of Rama and had written the events in advance even before they occurred. Valmiki has also been portrayed as a robber transformed to a Rishi. Responsibility of these aberrations lies mainly with Skandapurana, Adhyatma-Ramayana and one of the redactors of Mahabharata with the intention of somehow explaining the Rishi’s name “Valmiki” by relating it to *Valmika* meaning an anthill.  In reality Valmiki belonged to the lineage of Bhrigu and Chyavana. According to Vishnu Purana his personal name was Riksha. (B-VA, B-RH)**

**Same redactors viz. Suta, Sauti, Harivanshakara, Parvasangrahakara and another unknown redactor who added to the original Valmiki text of 8121 verses another 9733 verses  (Y-R: Annxs A & B). They added a new chapter at the end called Uttarakanda with totally imaginary stories that describe exile of a pregnant Sita and her being sheltered by Valmiki.  They also considerably expanded the first chapter Balakanda which was very small in the original text adding again many imaginary stories. It is unfortunate that spinning stories like Rama’s sending Sita into exile while she was pregnant and death penalty to the Shudra Shambuka actually malign the character of the great hero revered who is actually considered as ethics personified.  (B-RH, Ch 2)**

**The redactors added many imaginary stories e.g. the story of Vishwamitra’s visit to Ayodhya and Rama’s conflict with Parashurama added by Suta (Y-R Ch 2). As seen from the dynasty lists, both Vishwamitra and Parashurama lived more than 30 generations earlier.**

**In the modified text Rama is shown as a Shiva worshipper and later, when Rama was considered an avatar of Vishnu, a tale was also made up to show that just as Rama worshipped Shiva, Shiva also worshipped Rama.  Actually, as Yardi has pointed out there was *no mention* of Shiva in the original Valmiki Ramayana. During Rama’s time Vedic deities were worshipped with Indra as the greatest god and Vishnu as subordinate, hence known as Upendra.**

**By the time of the Mahabharata war Indra’s importance waned and Shiva began to be worshipped. As seen from the Bharata text, in Vaishampayana’s time five to six centuries later, Shiva was considered as the greatest god and was named Mahadeva (Y-R: Ch VIA p. 69, 70). However after Krishna’s death Vishnu also began to gain importance. The concept of Vishnu’s incarnations took shape and by Suta’s time Krishna and Rama began to be considered as avatars of Vishnu. Thus it is natural that the redactors gave importance to Shiva-Rama mutual worship to appease both Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites.**

**According to Yardi (Y-R; Ch V p60) Valmiki and Vasishta were separated by one generation. He mentions the list of rishis compiled by Pargiter in which Vasishta (Dasharatha contemporary) stands at No 64 and Valmiki at No 66.  This shows that Valmiki was not a contemporary of Rama but lived only a generation later and composed Ramayana soon after Rama’s time.**

**Bhargava however gives a date which is far removed from Rama’s time. He opines that Valmiki must have composed the epic in the seventh century BC. He arrived at this conclusion after carefully studying the comments of the two western scholars Jacobi and Winternitz and taking into account the fact that the language spoken in Rama’s time was Vedic Sanskrit while the verses in the Valmiki Ramayana are in classical Sanskrit which came into use only around 800 BC.  This implies Valmiki was not Rama’s contemporary. This is couple of centuries before Suta and Sauti who must have included Rama’s story in Mahabharata (B-RH: Ch 10).  However we must also note that almost 55% of the new Ramayana text belongs to the redactors who used the classical Sanskrit and not the Vedic Sanskrit.**

**Bhargava concludes elsewhere (B-RH: p 36) that Valmiki based this epic poem on the tales current among the contemporary *sutas* narrating Rama’s activities. This work was recited in public by professional rhapsodists who were called Kusilavas because of their patronage by kings who were descendents of Rama’s sons Kusha and Lava. This custom must have lasted for several centuries.**

**3.5 Rigveda Samhita   It is the earliest Hindu text passed down to us without any significant changes. It contains 1028 hymns divided into 10 *mandalas* but not arranged chronologically. The hymns composed by rishis praise the Vedic gods and pray for material benefits like wealth, success in wars, children, cattle and protection in general. The yajnas were peformed by rishis for themselves and for kings.  The hymns exhibit an amazing poetic inspiration in describing the deities and events and are an invaluable source of information to the historians. The most famous hymn on Hindu tongues is undoubtedly the famous Gayatri Mantra (RV III; 62.10) composed by Rishi Vishwamitra:**

**Om Bhur Bhuvah Svah, Tat Savitur Varenyam,**

**Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi, Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat**

**(We meditate upon the auspicious godly light of the Lord Sun.**

**May that heavenly light illuminate our thought flow in our intellect.)**

**The Vedic gods are basically nature gods. However, from the description of their personalities it seems possible that Indra was a human being who was deified later and so was Vishnu who assisted Indra in his activities and was known as Upendra but later superseded Indra; Vivaswan, father of Vaivaswat Manu also appears to be a person, all three being progressively included later in the list of Adityas and described as sons of Aditi (daughter of Daksha Prajapati) and rishi Kashyapa. Seed of the concept of one Supreme Entity may be seen in the hymns but it is in Atharvaveda for the first time that an omnipresent god (Varuna) is mentioned (B-VRC Ch 7). The concept matured only in the Upanishads.**

**It is believed that Maharshi Vyasa collected these hymns which were passed on from generation to generation and arranged them into 10 mandalas. This is remarkable since in the absence of the art of writing which did not exist even up to the Ramayana times (Y-R: Ch VIB p 90) the hymns were preserved without any change.  The events mentioned in Rigveda Samhita were those observed by the composer Rishis and may be considered contemporary and reliable.**

**4.0 CHRONOLOGY FRAMEWORK**

**Most Hindu texts ignore or are vague about chronology and history. We cannot ignore the fact that in the early Vedic times writing was not invented and texts had to be composed and transmitted orally and committed to memory.  Even after writing was invented the books had to be copied by hand in the absence of printing technology and errors in copying could propagate in time.  Unfortunately the corruption of the texts has gone much farther than just copying errors. We have already reviewed how various authors have added their own texts to the epics and rewrote the Puranas thereby striking at the reliability of information. Analyses of the type made by scholars mentioned earlier put these texts in proper historical and chronological perspective.**

**The dynasty lists in the Puranas give us a means for developing a chronological framework as well as vetting the historical anecdotes in the Puranas by comparing them with events mentioned elsewhere.  The dynasty lists cannot be relied upon without careful vetting.  In order to arrive at the dates of personalities in the Dattatreya legends the author himself once tabulated the Solar and Lunar dynasty lists from Bhagwata Purana starting from Vaivaswat Manu. It was a shock to find that this list showed a ridiculous scenario in which Yudhishtira lived *earlier* to Krishna by nearly two centuries and Rama one and half centuries *later* than Krishna. Even though this was glaringly apparent it is surprising that no historian seems to have investigated this incongruity.**

**First such attempt was made by Bhargava (B-VH ch 8-10) who looked into the reasons for the incongruities some of which have been mentioned earlier. Bhargava used information from Vedas and Brahmanas on mutually contemporary events (e.g. marriage of Bindumati, daughter of Shashabindu of the Lunar dynasty with Mandhata of the Solar dynasty). He also noted that many descendents identified themselves by their ancestor’s name thus creating confusion. Using these criteria he removed the chronological inconsistencies and corrected the dynasty lists.  Though this corrected dynasty leaves many blanks for the names of kings in some lunar dynasty lineages it is still the most consistent list available today.**

**Bhargava’s dynasty lists may be used to create a reference chronological scale taking a time reference of some well-known event and an average period of reign for the kings.**

**4.1   Mahabharata War   The reference chronological event generally used is the time of the Mahabharata war. People have tried to date this war through an analysis of astronomical events mentioned in the texts but have arrived at widely separated dates, e.g. 5561 BC (P. V. Vartak) - 1424 BC (S. B. Roy); 2449 BC (Prof. Subhash Kak), twelve dates between 2744 BC and 505 BC out which 1478 BC is claimed to fit almost perfectly (Dr. R. N. Iyengar).  We must reject these dates outright because the input data has been obtained from the corrupted part of the Epic.**

**Historians have also attempted to date Mahabharata war through dynasty data. Mazumdar (See Bibliography) uses the length of reigns of various dynasties given in Vishnu and other Puranas and using an average period of reign as 25 years gets 1389 BC as the date (rounded to 1400 BC). Altekar gives the date as 1400 BC after several genealogical and historical considerations (Sharma, See Bibliography). Pargiter gives 950 BC as the date using an average length of reign of 18 years while Yardi gives 1011  50 BC using an average length as 20  2 years. (Y-MB Ch X).  Bhargava deduces an average reign of 20 years and concludes that the war could not have occurred much earlier than 1100 BC (B-RH: Ch 8).  He considers that this date agrees well with the data from archaeological excavations at Dwarka (Rao) which as the legend goes was submerged at the time of Krishna’s death.  We shall accept this 1100 BC as the reference date. (Using any other dates listed above merely shifts the dates in time e.g. by 300 years with MB War date of 1400 BC, not a very serious concern when we consider the span of several millenniums involved.)**

**Reader should note that the period of reign is not the same as the king’s age or lifetime. A king may ascend the throne at any age, from childhood to an old age e.g. Yudhishtira must have been about 80 years old since, according to Vaidya , Krishna was 83 years old at the time of the war and Yudhishtira’s age cannot be very different from him. Taking the period of reign as 25 years will shift Manu’s time earlier by five centuries and intermediate times proportionately.**

**4.2 Dynasty Lists     We are now in a position to build the chronology taking the year 1100 BC as the MB War date which is the same as that of Yudhishtira’s ascension to the throne and 20 years as average period of reign.**

**Bhargava’s corrected dynasty table starts with Vaivaswat Manu as No 1, Ikshwaku and Sudyumna as No 2 etc. (NB: Pururava was Ila’s son but was adopted by Sudyumna as permitted by the then prevailing custom.  Hence Ila’s or Budha’s name has not been given)**

**He has given a similar listing for the rishis belonging to well-known lineages enumerated also with reference to the royal generations.**

**Following are the generation numbers of some famous kings with respect to Manu and the year of beginning of his reign. Note that these are based on an average figure and actual year may lie even a few decades on either side.**

***SOLAR*: 1- Vaivaswat Manu (3100 BC); 21- Mandhata (2700); 38 – Harishchandra (2360); 46 – Sagara (2200); 50 – Bhagiratha (2120); 54 – Ambarisha (2040); 72 – Rama (1680).**

***LUNAR*:  1- Vaivaswat Manu (3100 BC); 3 – Pururava (3060); 4 – Ayu (3040); 6 – Yayati (3000); 7 – Puru, Yadu (2980); 16 – Haihaya (2800); 17 - Raudrashwa (2780) 20 – Shashabindu (2720); 23 – Bharata (2660); 28 – Jahnu (2560); 36 – Alarka (2400); 37 -  Kartavirya Arjuna (2360);  38 – Vishwamitra, Jamdagni (2380);  39 - Sudasa, Parashurama (2340);  98 – Shantanu (1160); 100 - Dhritarashtra/Pandu (1110);  101 - Yudhishtira/Krishna (1100).**

***RISHIS*: 1-Atri (A), Soma (A), Marichi (K), Bhrigu-Atharvan;  2- Budha (A), Gavishtira (A), Kashyapa (K), Dadhichi (B); 3- Chyavana (B), Kavi (B), Ushanas-Shukra (B); 18- Prabhakara (A); 19 – Brihaspati (An), Samvarta  (An); 21 – Dirghtamas  (An), Bharadwaja (An), Kanva (An); 24- Samvarana; 25- Shobhari Kanva  (An); 26- Harita (An); 27- Nara (An), Garga (An); 28- Sankriti (An); 37- Bhauma (A), Vasishta (V), Agastya (Ag); 36-Gopavana (A); 37- Richika (B), 38- Jamadagni (B), Gritsamada (B), Vishwamitra (K), Parvata (An), Narada (An), Shakti (V); 39- Parashurama (B), Parashara (V), Galava (K); 40- Vamadeva (An), Upamayu (V); 49- Rahugana  (An); 40 - Gotama-Rahugana  (An).  (Note: letters in brackets show the Gotra” A – Atri, An – Angirasa, Ag- Agastya, B – Bhrigu, K – Kasyapa,  V – Vasishta).**

**This chronology framework will put many ancient events in proper chronological perspective and be useful when we discuss Dattatreya’s life.**

## 4.3  About Rama’s Date   We note that according to the above listing Rama stands at No 73 and Krishna at No 101.  This means that there is a time difference of five and half centuries between the two.  According to the dynasty lists compiled from Bhagwat Purana the numbers are No 60 and No 54 respectively corresponding to a difference of only a little more than a century between them. As Bhargava has pointed out this is because of omission of some names in the Solar lineage and in addition mixing up of lineages in the Lunar lists. Thus there was an omission of twelve kings in the Solar list which did not branch out much. Because of the extra confusion in Lunar lists adjustment ranges over forty-six intermediate generations. As seen from his table names of all missing kings are not known and have been left blank.

**There are however two pointers on which comments are required. These are as follows:**

***Pointer 1:* Maharshi Vyasa is related to Vasishtha, the royal priest of Dasharatha through the following lineage: Vasishtha > Shakti > Parashara > Vyasa. Vyasa’a mother Satyavati  was Shantanu’s wife. But since Shantanu married Satyavati in a very late age when Bhishma was already an adult, Shatananda Shantanu seems to be contemporary of Shakti, indicating that Shantanu belonged to Rama’s and also Parashara’s generation. Since Yuidhishtira belongs to the third generation from Shantanu there is a difference of 50 years between Yudhishtira and Rama.**

***Pointer* 2:, son of Gautama was the priest during the marriage of Shri Rama and Sita. His son was Sharbhanga who had twins: Kripa and Kripi. They were fostered by King Shantanu. Kripi married Dronacharya. He and Kripacharya participated in the Mahabharata war on Kaurava side. Thus Shatananda belongs to Dasharatha generation Shanatnu therefore belongs to a generation after Dasharatha i.e. Rama’s generation. (Mazumdar p 60).**

**Regarding pointer 1, according to Bhargava Vyasa was a distant descendent of Parasharal; either Vyasa’s father‘s name was also Parashara or Mahabharata uses the *gotra*  name for Vyasa’s father (B-VH: Ch 9 p 223).  Regarding pointer two also Bhargava states that Shatananda’s descendent was Satyadhriti wahose descendent was Kripa of Mahabharata fame. Thus the confusion is seen to have been caused by the habit of referring to a rishi by his gotra rather than his personal name (B-VH: Ch 9 p 211). Thus there is no abnormality in the difference of about five and half centuries between Rama and Krishna.**

## 5.0  A COMMENTARY ON THE BIRTH LEGEND

**These comments are based on the works of the authors already enumerated in section 3.1.  Without their publications especially of Mr. Yardi and Dr. Bhargava this work would not have been possible at all and the author is very grateful to them.**

**The following points may be noted in the Purana birth legend:**

**1.     Atri is an ancient and famous rishi;**

***2.* His wife’s name is Anasuya and she is a *pativrata;***

**3.    Narada instigates wives of the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.**

**4.    Wives who are goddesses in their own right get jealous and angry and instigate their husbands to punish Anasuya;**

**5.    The three gods visit Atri’s hermitage just before midday meal time when the rishi would be away and demand food;**

**6.    Anasuya offers traditional welcome to the guests;**

**7.    The guests insist Anasuya serves them food while naked;**

**8.    Anasuya agrees but when she says that “guests are like her babies”, legendary power of a *pativrata* is manifested and the guests really turn into babies;**

**9.    The wives of the gods are punished; gods are pleased at Anusuya’s bevaviour and offer boons;**

**10.   Atri couple asks for the babies to remain with them which is granted;**

**11.   Babies are named Soma, Datta and Durvasa respectively;**

**12.   The gods and goddesses leave;**

**13.   Soma and Durvasa leave charging Datta with their attributes;**

**14.   Dattatreya becomes Trimurti.**

**When we consider these points we observe examples of greatness of characters like Atri and Anasuya and the curious personalization of gods and goddesses**

**5.1   Personalization of gods   The Vedic gods are mostly powers of nature but ancient Vedic people personified them assigning them a human or near human form and many human attributes. Rigvedic deities Indra, Varuna, Vishnu, and Ashwins etc., who are Adityas (see Section 3.5 above), are mentioned as *asuras* which in the early Vedic age meant powerful and wise but in later Vedic age the term *asura* attained the meaning of a demon. These gods are noted for their good qualities like valour, wisdom and compassion but Puranas assigned to some of them and particularly Indra the undesirable qualities of jealousy, anger, arrogance etc.  In some Puranas this system of personification has been extended even to the inanimate Vedas and Yugas.  By the time of the epics some older gods lost their importance, some new gods were added to the Hindu pantheon and they married and had children. Thus we see Adityas increasing from the original three to twelve (B-VRC: Ch 3), Indra superseded by his junior Vishnu, Shiva added to the pantheon and married to Uma (Parvati) and having Ganapati and Kartikeya (Skanda) as sons. We see that Brahma and Vishnu both having wives.**

**Puranas describe gods at war with Daityas, Danavas and Asuras who are depicted as evil having magical powers. Mazumdar (p 117, See Bibliography) considers Devas, Daityas and Danavas to be names of Aryan tribes living in neighbouring regions now in the Afghanistan and north Himalayan region.  The wars seem to have continued off and on Devas sometimes winning and sometimes losing. But there were social relationships also among them e.g. Indra married Shachi who was Daitya Puloma’s daughter and in a post-Manu age Yayati married Sharmishta daughter of the Danava king Vrishaparva. These frequent wars could be due to expansionist ambitions or due to differences on religious matters. At least Daitya Hiranyakshipu’s enmity with his son Prahlada seems to be of this nature. In the long run Devas prevailed and assimilated the other Aryan tribes into the Vedic system.**

**Whenever Daitya-Danavas (called *asuras*, *rakshasas* or demons in the Puranas) had upper hand and ruled over the Devas the latter rushed, according to the Puranas, to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the mother goddess Durga who then helped them to defeat the demons. This is chronologically incorrect for during the era of these wars Shiva and Durga were not part of the Hindu pantheon, however that is another matter. In Puranas we read stories in which these main gods meet and confer, like politicians and diplomats of today, and plan strategies for defeating the demons sometimes by taking an avatar.**

**In the Puranas we see conjugal disputes between Shiva and Durga, Vishnu and Laxmi, Brahma and Saraswati.   Pious readers no doubt tend to forget that these gods are spiritual powers and the stories of conjugal disputes, meetings between the gods are merely myths written to make some point related to Dharma (code of righteous conduct). There is an understanding when using an analogy that its use should be limited to explain or prove a certain point but cannot be extrapolated beyond it or be generalized.  But a pious reader unfortunately takes these stories literally. The audio-visual presentation of these stories by movies has further deepened this impression.**

**5.2 Atri and Anasuya     Atri is a famous rishi of ancient times. The following passage in Mahabharata, Sambhava Parva Section 66: “O king, it is said that the sons of Atri are numerous. And, being great Rishis, they are all conversant with the Vedas, crowned with ascetic success, and of souls in perfect peace.” recognizes the prominence of Atri lineage.**

**5.2.1 Atri in Rigveda     In Rigveda a number of hymns, majority of them included in the fifth *mandala*, are ascribed to the rishis of this lineage. Talageri (Ch 5) lists 37 rishis who have composed the hymns including a female rishi Vishwavara Atreyi.**

**Bhargava gives the following lineage of Atri family: Atri, Soma, Budha, Gavishtira and Archananas, Syavashva, Andhigu, Manu Savarni, Nabhanedishtha, Bhalandana, Vatsapri, Prabhakara, Samvarana, Gopavana, Bhauma and Isha (B-VA). Of these Budha and Gavishtira are contemporary.**

**But unfortunately Dattatreya is not one of them, but neither are Soma and Durvasa. Though Soma is frequently mentioned in Rigveda the reference is to Soma the plant and not Soma the person)**

**In ancient times many rishis were attached to a particular dynasty of kings. A large number of Rigveda hymns concern the activities of the kings of Puru-Bharata lineage in the Lunar line.  However Atris and Kanvas seem to be rather mercenary in their policy and have officiated as priests for and composed the hymns in praise of whichever king (irrespective of his tribal identity) showered them with gifts.  These two families were not affiliated to the Bharatas or the Purus in general as were Vasishtas and Vishwamitras, but they were more often associated with non-Purus (Iksvakus, Yadus, Turvasas, Anus), hence Atri is characterized as *Panchajanya* (belonging to all the five tribes). Talageri concludes that *both these priestly families were themselves of Puru* origin and originated in the Late Period of the Rigveda, when the predominance of the Bharatas had ended, and the Purus in general had become more cosmopolitan in their attitudes.  The most important Atri and Kanva Rishis in the Rigveda are however closely associated with the Purus.**

**The name Atri in early days, according to Talageri (See Bibliography) was used to mean the Sun. It is used for Rishi Atri only later. Many references to Atri in the older Mandalas (VI, VII, II) of Rigveda, also refer to the Sun and not to the Rishi; e.g. verse VII.68.05 praises Ashwins the gods of twilight as follows: “Wonderful, verily, is the wealth that is yours; you have liberated from the cave Atri, who is dear to you, and enjoys your protection.”, which implies the sun being rescued from darkness of the night at dawn. Elsewhere (II.8.5) the word Atri is also used as an epithet for Agni (who is literally the earthly representative of the Sun). There are attempts in some hymns in the Mandala V (e.g. hymn 40) where Atri the Sun is deliberately transformed into Atri the Rishi (V.40).  In later Mandalas (I, X) the Rishi Atri is fully identified with the mythical Atri.  Atris in Mandala V considered themselves to be special priests of the Sun. In Mandala I, hymn 45 the third verse says: “Agni, accomplisher of solemn acts, cognizant of all who are born, hear the invocation of Prashkanva, as you have heard those of Priyamedha, of Atri, of Virupa, of Angiras.”  All these are rishis; Atri and Angiras are among the Prajapatis and Priyamedha is *Priyavrata* the elder son of Swayambhuva Manu; Virupa is an early descendant of Vaivasvata Manu who is just mentioned as Manu in the Vedas. We thus see that Atri and Angiras were two of the oldest rishis.**

**5.2.2 Atri in Ramayana    The only Atri who had a wife named Anasuya is mentioned in Ramayana. This Atri is a historical person and was Rama’s contemporary. On Rishi Bharadwaj’s advice Rama, accompanied by Sita and Laxman, had visited the ashram and obtained his blessings from Rishi Atri and Anasuya. Sita had met Anasuya who listened to the details of her marriage, praised her for her devotion to Shri Rama and blessed her presenting her with her own clothes.  Anasuya at this time was very old with wrinkled face.  This story is part of the original Valmiki Ramayana (YR: Ch I) and hence this Atri and Anasuya are historical persons and not mythical as the Kardama’s daughter married to Atri of the *saptarshis*.**

**At the same time we also note from this story how Puranas have taught rules of good character and righteous behaviour commendably through the characters of Atri and Anasuya.**

**When we examine the birth legend in this context it is obvious that the story of the goddesses getting jealous or the Trinity visiting Anasuya to test her claim of being a *pativrata* can only be a myth.**

**Ramayana does not mention any children born to this Atri.  In any case neither Dattatreya nor Soma and Durvasa could have been born to this Atri who lived centuries after Alarka, Sahasrarjuna and Parashurama who are known to be Dattatreya’s disciples (see later).**

**5.2.3 Atri in Mahabharata    Atri is highly praised in Mahabharata. The following passage in Sambhava parva Section 66: “O king, it is said that the sons of Atri are numerous. And, being great Rishis, they are all conversant with the Vedas, crowned with ascetic success, and of souls in perfect peace.” recognizes the prominence of Atri lineage.  Members of Atri lineage have been mentioned in many places including the one who was contemporary to King Prithu.  According to Bhishma, Barhi is named as sons of an Atri but which Atri is not specified. (Shanti Parva Sec 208). This Barhi must be Prachinabarhi a descendent of Prithu and father of the ten Prachetas whose son was the famous Daksha Prachetas (in Pre-Vaivaswat Manu time).  In Shanti Parva Section 234 Vyasa mentions while commenting on the duties of a Brahmin a royal son Indradamana of Atri and another son Sankriti both of whom are praised for their generosity. Section 210 also mentions “the dark-complexioned son of Atri” as an expert in medicine. However none of these references help in reaching at the Atri who was Dattatreya’s father.**

**Atri is mentioned as a contemporary of king Prithu from Swayambhuva Manu lineage (Mahabharata, Vana Parva Section 184). But it does not have any relevance to the present context.**

**5.2.4 Atri in Puranas   Atri’s name occurs as one of the seven mind sons of Brahma the creator at the time of creation. These are the Saptarshis or seven rishis, the other six being Marichi, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulahak, Kratu and Vasishta. Brahma also created three more mind sons, Bhrigu and Narada and Daksha Prajapati. These Rishis were instructed to procreate but refused to do so. Brahmadeo then had to create a couple who were called Swayambhuva Manu and Shatarupa who are said to be the first couple to procreate by conjugal process.  This couple had two sons Priyavrata and Uttanpada and three daughters Prasuti, Akuti and Devahuti. (Some Puranas mention only two daughters.).  Of these Devahuti married Rishi Kardama. Among their daughters was Anasuya who married Rishi Atri. In another Purana Anasuya is the daughter of Daksha Prajapati and Prasuti.**

**This of course is one of the Puranic myths. These rishis lived in differing times some of them centuries later than the earlier rishis like those of Atri and Angiras lineages. As can be seen from the dynasty list given later, while the first Atri lived a little before Vaivaswat Manu the first Vasishta belongs to 37th generation after him and Narada belongs to the next generation.  Secondly, if there was no procreation then question arises as to where Rishi Kardama came from.  The creation story is therefore largely a myth with some metaphoric element.**

**The *Saptarshi* group can therefore be considered merely a group of the most learned thinkers of the ancient era presented together as mind sons of Brahma the creator.  According Bhargava (B-VH: Ch 9) Bhrigu, Angiras, Atri and Kashyapa are the oldest lineages, Kashyapa being a descendant of Marichi.**

**Bhagwata Purana mentions that Swayambhuva Manu lineage lasted for seven centuries before Vaivaswat Manu but historicity of this dynasty is in question because perpetuation of higher species has always been through conjugal process and Swayambhuva Manu - Shatarupa cannot be the first couple who started this process. They can however be belonging to early Aryan tribes living in regions which later suffered floods compelling Vaivaswat Manu to immigrate to Indus-Saraswati region. The story of first Atri as the mind son marrying Anasuya must also be a myth.**

**Atri is mentioned in many Puranic stories. He is said to have discovered the technique of controlling fire and knew about eclipses and about medicines. It has been mentioned that he was imprisoned because he fought for democracy (Dattatreya Dnyanakosha, See bibliography). Vayu Purana mentions that Atri had five sons instead of the three and a daughter.  The names of the sons are given as: Satyanetra, Havya, Apomurtti, Shani, and Soma; the daughter’s name is Shruti, who became the wife of Kardama. (*Ref* Vishnu Purana Ch X, footnote No 83.4, Translation by H. H. Wilson [1840]).**

**Out of the members of Atri lineage from Vaivaswat Manu’s time, only his son Soma, Soma’s son Budha who married Manu’s daughter Ila and a rishi named Prabhakara mentioned in the Puranas. None of the Rigveda Atris have been mentioned.  This Purana wrongly claims that all the Atri clans are descended from the ten sons of Prabhakara. Vayu Purana also mentions that Prabhakara had many children, chief among them being Datta, Durvasa and a daughter named Apala.  But Bhargava remarks that since this Datta (Dattatreya) was Sahasrarajuna’s contemporary he must be regarded as a descendent and not son of Prabhakara. (B-VA: Ch 9 p 217).**

**5.2.5 Strange story of Anasuya    There is an intriguing story in Mahabharata about Anasuya which is contrary to Anasuya’s fame as *Pativrata* in the Dattatreya birth legend. The story which occurs in (Anushasan Parva Ch 14) runs as follows: “Once, Atri’s wife Anasuya, who used to meditate on the Brahman, left her husband. She surrendered to Shiva saying that she would never live under Atri’s shelter and lived without food for 300 years. To propitiate Shiva she used to sleep on *Musals* (rods used for crushing and beating grains).  Shiva smiled and said to her, “Oh Wife of Atri, you will beget a son even without your husband by the grace of Rudra and he will be famous and be known by your name that is Aanasuuya.”  Who this *Aanusuya* is has not been stated anywhere but in the footnote No 99 to Anushasan Parva it is indicated that this child was Durvasa but this is not confirmed elsewhere.**

**It appears very plausible therefore that the authors of the Puranas used Anasuya’s name as Atri’s wife in general both in the creation myth by making her daughter of Kardama/Daksha and in Dattatreya birth.  It will be seen later that in the independent birth legends of both Soma and Durvasa the Atri-Anasuya couple is not involved.**

**5.3 Birth of Soma     Soma, son of Atri, is an important person in history.  It is a common practice in the Puranas to identify an astral body with the person after whom it was named, thus creating considerable degree of confusion for historians. The Lunar line of the Aryan kings is named after him because Soma is another name for Chandra or the moon. Soma’s son Budha married Ila the daughter of Vaivaswat Manu and their son Pururava, adopted by Ila’s brother Sudyumna is considered as the founder of this dynasty in which famous persons like Krishna and the Pandavas were born.**

**To add to the confusion, Soma is also the name of a plant the juice of which was imbibed also offered to gods through yajna offerings. In the hymn (X.124) in which the composers are Agni, Varuna and Soma in which the later implies Soma juice. The Mandala IX in large part is devoted to Soma the plant and the juice. There are no hymns attributed to Soma the person in Rigveda.**

**That Soma was a real person and not the name of the planet Chandra personified is proved by the two Rigvedic hymns by his son Budha. In one hymn (RV X.101) Budha refers to himself as *Budha Saumya* or Budha son of Soma.  In this hymn Budha calls upon people to prepare for ploughing using horses, tending to cattle etc. and prayers to Indra the son of Aditi who would then give then food. Another hymn (RV: V.1) by Budha is co-authored with Gavishtira Atreya. However there are no hymns ascribed to Atri’s son Soma though an entire Mandala is devoted to Soma the plant or its juice.**

### The personal name of the Atri who was Soma’s father is not mentioned anywhere. Soma is described as born out of Rishi Atri’s penance thus making his mother’s name irrelevant. This Atri could not have been Dattatreya’s father. Also because Dattatreya’s disciples, as will be seen from the Chronology, lived several generations after Vaiwaswat Manu while this Atri being Ila’s grand-father-in-law must have lived a generation or two earlier that Manu. Besides it is unlikely that every Atri would have a wife named Anasuya.

### Now let us see the description of the birth of this Soma who was Budha’s father. This story is given in Purana and also Harivansha. According to Harivansha Ch 25, Rishi Atri grew desirous of creating progeny and practiced, with his arms raised, the most excellent penance of silence. In due course his person assumed the moon-like lustre which soon spread over the sky and from his eyes tears began to trickle down and flood the ten quarters. The goddesses of the ten directions gladly held it in their womb but could not bear it for long and the embryo fell through their wombs as a bright ball which was Soma (moon). The other Rishis including Bhrigu praised Soma through Vedic hymns.  Brahma put Soma in a chariot and moved round the earth twenty-one times. Soma’s effulgence spilled on earth and became the medicinal plants to which Soma gives sustenance. Daksha, son of Prachetas Prajapati had twenty-seven daughters whom he gave in marriage to Soma. This legend obviously is a allegorical/mythical description of the birth of moon the planet and not of Soma the person and this birth is related to Atri because Atri was also used for sun in the early Vedic hymns as mentioned earlier.

**Harivansha (Ch 31) mentions another Soma who was the son of Rishi Prabhakara of Atri lineage.  King Roudrashwa (Lunar dynasty) had ten sons and ten daughters.  However this Prabhakara lived about four centuries after the first Soma and historians believe that this is one of the erroneous linkages made in the Puranas.**

**The birth of Budha however is connected with Soma the person.  This Soma performed a *Rajasuya* yajna in which Atri and other rishis participated. Soma became proud and arrogant. He fell in love with Tara, wife of Brihaspati the priest of the Devas and eloped with her. A war lasting for 30 years ensued in which Shukracharya, the priest of the Daityas and Danavas sided with Soma while Devas sided with their priest Brihaspati who was supported by Rishi Angiras.  In the war that ensued Daityas were defeated.  Brahma finally intervened and returned Tara to Brihaspati. However by that time she was pregnant and confessed that the child belonged to Soma. Because Brihaspati prohibited her to deliver the child in his home Tara gave birth to her son in a field. He was an effulgent child and was named Budha (which is also a name for the planet Mercury). Budha fell in love with and married Vaivaswat Manu’s daughter Ila (in Harivansha the name is given as Vairaj Manu) as mentioned earlier. From the dynasty lists and the chronology given later it would be noted that these events must have occurred a little prior to 3100 BC.**

**5.4 Birth of Durvasa     Durvasa is a well-known rishi in the Puranas and the Epics but his name does not appear in the Vedas. He is shown as a demanding and quick tempered, hard-to-please rishi and prone to curse at slightest displeasure. On the other hand he has given handsome boons to those who patiently rendered service to him. He cursed Indra because of disrespect shown to him, king Ambarisha because the latter completed his *vrata* before feeding Durvasa, tortured Krishna and Rukmini and for a minor reason cursed Krishna that he would die of a foot injury.  On the other hand Kunti was awarded boons of mantras by which she could get sons in spite of Pandu’s incapability.**

**Mahabharata (Anushasan Parva Ch 161) mentions Durvasa as an avatar of Shiva but not as a son of Atri and Anasuya.  The story as told by Shri Krishna to Yudhishtira is in short as follows:  Tarakasura whom Skanda had killed had three sons. Following a severe penance Brahma had granted them a boon of three indestructible cities which they could move anywhere in space and which only Lord Shiva could destroy and that too when they were in one line.  Fortified by this boon the three began to attack Devas from the three cities. Devas prayed to Shiva for destroying the three cities.  Shiva used a three pronged arrow in which Vishnu was in the tip, Agni in the blade, Yama in the feathers, Vedas in the bow and Savitri in the string. With this he destroyed the three cities along with the three sons. After destroying the cities the arrow returned to Shiva’s lap in the form of a baby boy. When Uma (Parvati) asked who the boy was Shiva did not reply. But now Indra became jealous and tried to kill the boy by his weapon Vajra. The boy locked and immobilized Indra’s hand. The gods were confused but did not realize that that boy was the great Shiva himself. Brahma meditated on the real form of the boy and realizing that he is Shiva himself made obeisance to him.  The Devas then praised Shiva and then Indra’s hand became normal. The boy grew up and was known as Durvasa.**

**This is the only story available of Durvasa’s birth.  According to it he is an incarnation of Shiva no doubt but *he is not connected with Atri at all* even though tales of Durvasa’s curses range chronologically over two millenniums from about Vaivaswat Manu time (cursing Indra) to Krishna time.**

**Rishis are supposed to be learned and composed persons who have conquered their anger and desire. Though Puranas narrate tales in which rishis get angry and curse the subjects of their anger these tales are more likely to be a means to explain or justify unusual or unwelcome events like the destruction of the Yadavas by a civil war and the death of Krishna by the arrow of a hunter.  It is difficult to understand how Durvasa, with qualities like anger and whimsicality which people on spiritual path are enjoined to avoid, could be called a rishi and how such a person’s words could come true.  It is likely that Puranas have used his character to explain  the unusual events like Pandavas birth etc. It is even possible that he is not a historical person but a convenient character invented by the redactors of the Epics and writers of the Puranas to explain certain strange events mentioned above.**

**In Section 3.4 we have noted that Rama followed Vedic religion and worshipped Indra as the main god and that Shiva has not been mentioned at all in the original Valmiki text.  Shiva, a non-Aryan god was accepted in the Aryan pantheon and identified with Rudra by Mahabharata time (i.e. Sauti’s time in the fifth century BC).  But it is not clear whether he was accepted in Krishna’s time. Mahabharata mentions that Krishna was a worshipper of Shiva and had propitiated Shiva for getting sons for Rukmini and later for another wife Jambavati.  However this part about Shiva worship could be part of the redaction. The redactions were made after Rama was deified as an avatar of Vishnu and probably as a result of this, in order to satisfy Vaishnavaite objections it has also been mentioned that in reverse Shiva worshipped Rama.  Thus the anecdote about Durvasa’s birth must have been be composed sometimes later between Ramayana and Mahabharata times by which time Indra was replaced by Vishnu, Shiva, adapted from the Harappan culture became prominent and began to be called Mahadeva.**

## 6.0 DATTATREYA IN MAHABHARATA

**We have already seen that Dattatreya’s name does not occur in Rigveda or in Ramayana. We shall now examine references to Dattatreya in Mahabharata.**

**The earliest mention of Dattatreya is in Mahabharata. In Anushasan Parva (Book 13) Section 91 (411) it has been mentioned that “In Atri's race was born a Muni of the name of Dattatreya.”  He was a householder who had a son named Nimi and a grandson named Srimat who had died prematurely. There are references elsewhere where it has been mentioned that he was a warrior to start with but became a yogi and philosopher later.**

**The same Anushasan Parva in Section 152 mentions that the Haihaya king Kartavirya who ruled from Mahishmati made large gifts of wealth to the Rishi Dattatreya who being pleased asked him to solicit three boons. He king asked for the following boons: (1) He should have thousand arms while he was with his troops but when at home he should have only two hands like everyone else. (2) He should be able to subjugate the whole earth by his prowess. (3) He ruled the earth carefully. He also asked for a fourth boon by which if he were to go wrong then a righteous person should come forth to set him right. Thus he is mentioned as a rishi and Muni. In Shantiparva (Book 12) the story is again mentioned with an addition that a high souled Brahmin whose retreat was burnt by fire at the instant of Kartavirya cursed the latter that Parashurama would cut off his arms.**

**Thus we see that Dattatreya was not a celibate *sanyasi* but a householder in his early life but must have renounced the world later opting for spiritual life and yoga.**

**The above texts are obviously part of texts added by the redactors (See later) up to 1st century BC and hence until then at least Dattatreya was not considered as a deity. In Puranas he is mentioned as an avatar of Vishnu but it does not mean he is a deity, for there are many avatars of Vishnu, Kapila and Prithu for example, who are not considered as deities.**

## 7.0 DISCIPLES OF DATTATREYA

**Puranas mention six persons as Dattatreya’s disciples. These are: the Daitya king Hiranyakshipu’s son Prahlada (about 3100 BC), the Lunar dynasty kings Ayu (3040 BC) and Yadu (2980 BC), King Alarka of Kashi branch (2400 BC), the Haihaya king Sahasrarjuna Kartavirya (2380 BC) and Jamadagni’s son Parashurama (2340).  The years in bracket are according to the chronology mentioned earlier. There is one more disciple named Sankriti described in *Avadhutopanishad* and *Jaabaaldarshanopanishad* but no details are available about him though there is a rishi named Sankriti contemporary of King Jahnu.**

**Note that these disciples fall into two groups widely separated in time. The older group consists of Prahlada, Ayu, and Yadu. The latter two lived within about 12 decades after Manu. We may try to find the time of Prahlada from an interpretation of the Vaman avatar story in the Puranas in which Vishnu took the form of a dwarf and begged for three steps worth of land from Bali who used rule in the Indus Saraswati region at that time.**

**There is a legend regarding Manu that a fish, said to be an avatar of Vishnu, warned Manu of impending floods and guided him and his people through the floods to a safe place. Where did Manu’s community live before the flood? Bhargava (B-VA: Ch3 p 58) concludes that “… it is highly probable that the Aryans originally lived in the valleys of the rivers Ghorband and Panjshir to the south of the Hindu Kush range. These rivers are probably the same as Susartu and Rasa of the Rig-Veda.”  It is possible that floods in this region forced the inhabitants to migrate to drier regions. This story does not seem to be a myth since it is also repeated by the Persian Aryans in Zend Avesta (B-VA: p 60) who were at that time part of the Vaivaswat Manu’s Aryan group before circumstances centuries later compelled them to separate and settle in Persia.**

**Mazumdar, while interpreting the Puranic events in terms of history relates this event to the story of Vaman avatar of Vishnu. (See *Early Hindu India – A Dynastic Study by A. Mazumdar p 225*). Vaivaswat Manu and his people had to cross the land where Daityas ruled and interprets with the following interpretation. It was a period during which Daityas had defeated Devas (who were another tribe of Aryans) and were ruling in the Indus region.  Due to increasing population Vishnu, an Aditya, prevailed upon Vivaswan, another Aditya to ask the latter’s son Vaivaswat to migrate southwards.  Vishnu accompanied Vaivaswat and his people. They had to cross Bali’s kingdom on the way. Bali was the great-grandson of the Daitya king Hiranyakashipu and an enemy of the Devas.  Knowing that Bali would not permit them to pass Vishnu visited Bali in the guise of a dwarf Brahmin and asked for some land.  Bali who was known for his generosity granted the land. Manu and his people consolidated their position and one day raided Bali defeating him and sending him to *Patala* or nether land which is today known as Bengal region. Though Mazumdar says that Manu did not migrate because of floods but due to overpopulation, his interpretation of Vaman avatar is interesting and plausible. If Bali was contemporary to Manu then Prahlada must have been ruling two generations earlier and must have been contemporary of Rishi Atri, Soma’s father.**

**Prahlada’s being a disciple of Dattatreya seems to be rooted in a story in Bhagwat Purana (Canto 11, Ch 13) in which there is a mention of Prahlada’s meeting of a sage who lived like a python at the bank of the Kaveri river on a ridge of the mountain Sahya, lying on the ground covered by dirt and dust all over his body. On Prahlada’s query as to how a person so learned, skilled and intelligent, capable of speaking nicely and remaining equipoised could remain inert for a long time, the sage tells him that “.... an intelligent person must give up the original cause that leads to all the lamentation, illusion, fear, anger, attachment, poverty, toiling and so on of the human being: the desire for prestige and money. He tells that like bees and snakes who are good gurus he has learned desirelessness and to take only that which satisfies his needs and no more.”   Actually in this tale he is not named as Dattatreya but in some vernacular translations of Bhagwat it is so mentioned.   In Yadu’s case also Bhagwat (Canto 11 Ch 7) mentions that he meets an *avadhuta* whom he asked about from where he had acquired the extraordinary intelligence and instead of going after worldly success was wandering fearlessly and though capable, learned, experienced, handsome and eloquent was yet not a doer, were desireless, free from lust and greed and enjoyed inner happiness. The avadhut then replied that by his intelligence he had learnt under tutelage from many spiritual masters and having gained in intelligence from them was now liberated and was wandering about in this world. the *avadhut* then enumerated these gurus as follows: The earth, the air, the sky, the water, the fire, the moon; the sun, the pigeon, the python, the sea, the moth, the honeybee; the elephant, the honey-thief, the deer, the fish, the prostitute [Pingala], the osprey; the child, the girl, the arrow-maker, the serpent, the spider and the wasp, which were his twenty-four spiritual masters.  He then described what he learnt from each. (These teachings will be discussed in a later document,)**

**Note that Dattatreya’s name has not been mentioned. It is evident that assigning his name to every *avadhuta* is endemic and the result of the imagination of even Saint Eknath and Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati.**

**Regarding Ayu, the related story given in the book Datta-mahatmya by Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati mentions that he approached Dattatreya for a son.  He got a son who was named Nahusha, but the child was kidnapped by the demon Hundasura because of a prediction that the Nahusha would kill him.  The son Nahusha who later killed Hundasura was fostered by Rishi Vasishtha. The problem with the story is that, as can be seen from the chronology in section 4.0 Ayu belongs to fourth generation from Manu while Vasishta belongs to the thirty-seventh, and was a contemporary of king Sudasa famous for the ten-king war.**

**Thus there is not much substance in claim that these three people were disciples of Dattatreya.  It is a typical interpolation by the Puranas besides being anachronistic.**

**What Haihaya king Sahasrarjuna received as service to Dattatreya was a good moral advice and certain boons which unfortunately he did not use wisely. The advice given to Alarka and Parashurama however are on Yoga and spiritual philosophy.  These three disciples fall into a narrow time window of 60 years (2400 BC to 2340 BC) and it is very plausible they were all disciples of Dattatreya. We shall discuss the advice given to them in a later section.**

## 8.0 THE AVATARA CONCEPT

**We now come to the claim or concept that Dattatreya was an avatar of Vishnu.  Now, not all agree with this. In the Nath tradition he is regarded as an avatar of Shiva. Swami Mahendranath (Dadaji) states: “Dattatreya himself was regarded as an avatar of Maheshwara (Shiva), but later was claimed by Vaishnavaites as the avatar of Vishnu. Not such a sectarian claim as it appears, as Hindus regard Shiva and Vishnu as the same or as manifestations of the Absolute taking form”. (See Internet article on Swami Mahendranath, Link given in Bibliography)**

**This brings us to the point: *What makes an avatar?*  Ch X Verse 41 of Bhagvad-Gita says: "Whatsoever being there is, endowed with glory, grace and vigour, know that to have sprung from a fragment of my splendour."**

**Saint Dnyaneshwar calls such a manifestation as an avatar (See Dnyaneshwari (10:306-312)).  This is evidently the basis for considering many great historical personalities as avatars e.g., Bhagwat Purana, a late Purana in Vaishnavaite tradition, mentions twenty-four avatars which include beside Rama and Krishna, such great personalities as: Sanatkumar (the mind son of Brahma), Narada (a Divine Rishi and another mind-son of Brahma), Kapila (the founder of the Sankhya philosophy), Rishabha (founder of Jain religion), Maharshi Vyasa, the king Prithu and Balaram (Krishna’s elder brother) and the great *avadhuta* Dattatreya.  Vishnu being reincarnated is a Vaishnavaite concept that suits his role as sustainer of the universe. This is clearly seen from the dialogue between Narayana and Narada given later.**

**A disturbing aspect of this list is the inclusion of Buddha who preached against the Vedic religion in the list of avatars of Vishnu. Probably persons who compiled the list might not have considered this aspect. Actually Buddhists do not like Buddha to be designated an avatar of Vishnu because it downgrades Buddha’s position as the Supreme Entity according to Buddhist faith.  Jains consider Rishabha as the founder of their religion and put him in the same class.  Kalki avatar that is yet to come is evidently a pure fantasy.  He is supposed to come riding a horse from the northeast to save mankind from the evil.  Why Kalki should come riding a horse and not a flying machine? Is because people who wrote is a millennium ago did not imagine expect technological progress Kalki should really come in a flying machine considering the technological progress.  But who knows? Perhaps by the time the avatar takes place the days of technology might be over due to resource depletion and we might return to horses and primitive life.**

**The concept of avatar has been explained in the dialogues between Yudhishtira and Bhishma who was lying on the bed of arrows after his defeat. These dialogues are part of the Mokshadharma section of Shantiparva in Mahabharata. Bhishma mentions Narayana as a Great Being who is the Creator of the universe. The explanation is given by Narayana himself to Narada as follows (Sec 337): He is adorned in sacrifices with offerings of clarified butter and other food dedicated with the aid of Vedic mantras. He has no beginning and no end. He is Unmanifest.  He lives in Shweta Dwipa the white island where Narada visits him and being pure and full of devotion is able see Narayana who is not visible to people who are not pure. Narada then praises Narayana (Sec 340) saying, “I am the Supreme Lord and the Preceptor of the universe. That which thou beholdest of me, O Narada, is only an illusion of mine. I now seem to be endued with the attributes of all created things. Thou art not competent to know me. I have disclosed to thee duly my quadruple form. I am, O Narada, the Doer, I am Cause, and I am Effect. I am the sum-total of all living creatures. All living creatures have their refuge in me. Let not the thought be thine that thou hast seen the Kshetrajna. I pervade all things. O Brahmana, I am the Jiva-Soul of all creatures. When the bodies of all creatures, however, are destroyed, I am not destroyed......... At the end of a thousand Yugas I shall once more withdraw the universe into myself. Having withdrawn all creatures, mobile and immobile into myself, I shall exist all alone with knowledge only for my companion. After the lapse of ages I shall again create the universe, with the aid of that knowledge. That which is my fourth form creates the indestructible Sesha. That Sesha is called by the name of Sankarshana. Sankarshana creates Pradyumna. From Pradyumna I take birth myself as Aniruddha. I create (myself) repeatedly. From Aniruddha springs Brahman. The latter takes birth from Aniruddha's navel.”**

**This is the beginning of the Pancharatra philosophy from which Vaishnavism which claims Narayana, later identified with Vishnu, to be the Supreme Being. It is also the beginning of the path of devotion. (Sankarshana is Balaram’s name and Pradyumna, Aniruddha are Krishna’s sons; their names seem to have been used symbolically).**

**Narayana further explains, putting the events in future tense since this dialogue is supposed to have occurred in very early era, that to destroy the evil he would take different forms: a swan, a tortoise, a fish, a boar, man-lion (Narsimha), a dwarf Brahmin Vaman, Bhargava Rama, Dasarathi Rama, Krishna and lastly as Kalki.**

**Buddha’s name comes as avatar first in Varaha Purana. Harivanshakara does not mention the first three avatars. Thus there is no complete agreement about the ten avatars.**

**In the original Valmiki Ramayana and Vyasa’s Bharata as isolated by Yardi (Y-MB, Y-R), Rama and Krishna are not depicted as avatars but as persons. Krishna was not considered as avatar even in Vaishampayana time about a century after the MB war. But within couple of centuries first Krishna and then Rama began to be called avatars of Vishnu.  By Suta and Sauti’s time in the fifth century BC many other avatars were added to the list. The redactions made by them to the epics therefore not only mention them as avatars but the stories imply that they were aware of it. Varaha Purana is the first Purana to give the list of all the ten avatars (YR: Ch2 p 30).**

**Coming back to the point as to what makes an avatar we are now in a position to realize that gods do not take birth as avatars but avatar is designation given by people to great persons who have benefitted society through their superior qualities which may be considered as a divine gift. The first three avatars are not human and have been invented to explain important events through a divine intervention.  Nobody is a born avatar but achieves that level through his actions and public recognition. When such a person dies people create legends of supernatural powers about him; myths replace facts and in due time he is regarded as an incarnation of God or some deity i.e. an avatar.  *God does not incarnate as a human being but people assign god-like qualities to a heroic person and call him an avatar*. Dr. Radhakrishnan (See Bibliography), the great philosopher and former President of India, says in his introduction to his translation of Bhagavad-Gita that "Krishna is one of millions of forms through which the Universal Spirit manifests itself.  The avatar is the demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity.” He implies that in an avatar there is a descent of God into man and for a liberated soul like a saint it is an ascent of man into God.**

**Avatar is not the same as a reincarnation. Reincarnation is a rebirth of a person in another body and at another time and place *for fulfillment of a person’s karmas*. This applies to persons including saints. However the same cannot be said to apply to gods who are not expected to have karmas. As seen from the life histories of both Rama and Krishna both had to suffer during their lifetimes showing the fulfillment of their past karmas.  If we are to believe Uttarkanda (?) then Rama drowned himself depressed by his having to order Laxman’s execution and Krishna died by being shot by an arrow in a depressed state of mind saddened by the decimation of Yadava clan.**

**The concept of avatar is well founded among the Vaishnavaites but not so among other sects.  In this context one cannot fail taking cognizance of the growing trend now-a-days for devotees of prominent saints to call their gurus as avatars of the particular deity whom the saint worshipped.  Many saints of Datta-tradition are adored as Dattatreya avatars by their devotees.  Some are called avatars of earlier saints e.g. Saint Tukaram is often considered as an avatar of Saint Namdeo and Kabir of Tulsidas. But again these are designations awarded by people.**

## 9.0 DATING DATTATREYA’S BIRTH

**We are now in a position to arrive at a plausible date of Dattatreya’s birth in the light of the foregoing discussion.  It is clear by now that:**

* **Soma and Durvasa are not Dattatreya’s brothers.**
* **Dattatreya is not the son of any Atri rishi but belongs to Atri lineage.**
* **His mother’s name is not known but it is unlikely it was Anasuya.**
* **He was not a celibate but a householder.**
* **Dattatreya was guru of Alarka, Sahasrarjuna & Parashurama but not of Prahlada, Ayu & Yadu.**

**Of these disciples Alarka is the earliest (2400 BC). The time needed to live a householder’s life, to renounce it and become an accomplished yogi can easily be some decades and hence one may assume that Dattatreya was born much before Alarka (2400 BC). If we consider this period to be reasonably five decades then, around 2450 BC appears to be the plausible time when Dattatreya was born. This falls, around the time when Rohidashwa of the Solar dynasty and Tritsu and Divodasa (Kashi branch) of Lunar dynasty ruled.  Gopavana Atreya must have been his contemporary but no connection with Dattatreya has been mentioned anywhere.**

**Now, how accurate is this estimate? It is based on the following assumptions: Mahabharata war was in 1100 BC, average period of reign 20 years and Dattatreya was the Guru of Alarka-Sahasrarjuna-Parashurama and not Prahlada-Ayu-Yadu. We can be fairly sure of the latter. But the alternative estimate of 1400 BC as MB war date and an average regnal period of 25 years cannot be completely ignored.  But it is possible to verify its validity indirectly.**

**We have seen that Shiva worship was not prevalent in Rama’s time but became so by Pandava time. The Shiva was a deity of the Indus civilization people as is seen from the archaeological findings at Mohenjo-daro/Harappa.  It has been suggested that when river Saraswati dried up during the period between 1700 BC to 1300 BC these people from the settlements on the banks of the Saraswati river which had nourished the civilization ca. 3000 BC to 1700 BC migrated to the Vedic Aryan regions eastward, northward and southward carrying their civilization which was assimilated in the Aryan civilization. From the Bhargava Time-line it is seen that Rama lived in about 1680 BC which is near about the beginning of the desiccation period. Emigration must have occurred around and after 1700 BC and completed couple of centuries before the Krishna-Pandava time and by then Shiva, identified with Vedic Rudra, must have been adopted in the Indian pantheon.  This is in agreement with the Bhargava chronology.**

**10.0 DATTATREYA IN LATER LIFE**

**It is obvious that at some stage Dattatreya renounced the householder’s life and became a *sanyasi*. He must have learnt yoga and philosophy under some unknown master after which he must have made many disciples. As we have seen above, there were four devotees: Sankriti, Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama. But this information also comes to us through the Puranas which should therefore be treated carefully. For example, Parashurama mentions in Tripura Rahasya of his meeting Dasharathi Rama who defeated him sending him into depression, one of the reasons why he was seeking Dattatreya.  This shows that the story of Parashurama’s meeting Dattatreya is a story composed after Suta added to Ramayana, for it has been shown by Yardi that this story is false.**

**After the meeting of Dattatreya with Parashurama in 23rd century BC we do not hear any more of his activities and it is reasonable to believe that sometimes after this he must have taken *Samadhi* because he is not named as one of the Chiranjeevas or immortals. (The seven Chiranjeevas by boon are: *Bali, Parashurama, Hanuman, Bibhishan, Vyasa, Kripacharya and Ashwathama*).**

**10.1 The Tantric connection    We next see him connected with the Tantrics. There many sects and sub-sects among Buddhists and Hindus.  While Buddhism made great strides in China, Tibet, Ceylon and Far East it was confined to mostly eastern part of India, in and around Bihar.  Many kings were supports of Buddhism and many supported the Hindu system. In the Bihar region in spite of Emperor Harshavardhan’s support it faced a decline. During the early eighth century A.D. Vajrayana sect of Buddhism appeared in eastern India and gained wider acceptance in Bihar and Bengal.  It practiced the ancient Vedic Tantric practices and worship of Mother Goddess. Sub-sects like Sahajayana, Kalachakrayana, and Mantrayana arose out of this new sect.  Sahajayana sect gave birth to the Natha sect which belonged to the Hindu religion.**

**The founder of the Nath sect Matsyendranath became deeply involved with a Tantric sect which was left handed. That is it involved the practice of involved the *Panchmakaras* i.e. use of five “M”s: Mansa (meat), Madira (liquor), Matsya (fish), Mithuna (Sex) and Mudra (posture) in the tantric rites. It was Gorakshanath, the second Nath yogi and disciple of Matsyendranath who, after a great strategy extricated his guru out of the sect and made strict rules about code of conduct including celibacy.  Dattatreya is deeply involved with the Nath sect. He had close interactions with both Matsyendranath and Gorakshanath and is said to have initiated another great Nath named Revannath. The Nath Sampradaya worship ends with obeisance to the Nine Nath yogis (Navnath) but even  before that obeisance is made first to Adinath (Shiva) and then to Dattatreya, showing Dattatreya’s position in the sect. (P.N.Joshi: *Nathsampradaya,* Dhere: *Dattasampradayacha itihaas* p 24)**

**There is a story about Dattatreya told under different contexts which runs like this: Attracted by the effulgent Dattatreya and his yogic prowess several *munis* followed him to gain his grace. Dattatreya, to free himself from them, dived into a lake where he stayed for many years. By doing so, he also hoped to evade an assembly of Munis who remained on the banks of the lake awaiting his return. Dattatreya emerged from the water naked in the company of a beautiful woman. He made love with her, drank liquor, and enjoyed singing and music. In spite of this, the Munis did not abandon him, and Dattatreya, accompanied by his Shakti, continued to engage in these practices and was meditated on by those longing for *moksha*.  In some places this act is explained by the allegory of Dattatreya as Purusha with the beautiful woman as Prakriti and their play as that of the Supreme with Maya. However this story also depicts the Panchamakara practices of left handed Tantrism.**

**Tripura Rahasya is one of the Tantric compositions in which worship of Devi is prescribed.  Dattatreya says:“Therefore that Tripura, the Supreme Force, the Being of all beings, the blessed, the highest, the one consciousness of Siva, who abides as the Self of self, should be worshipped sincerely, exactly as taught by the Guru. The fore-runner of such worship is devotion and praiseworthy earnestness.”(Tripura Rahasya Ch II 71-72). This also shows the Tantric backround of Dattatreya but in its purer form.**

**According to Dhere (*loc cit*) Dattatreya has been passed down to us *via* Tantric traditions which dominated the Buddhists and then adopted in the Hindu religion about 1000 years back. It was Gorakshanath who removed the *left-handed* Tantric traditions using meat, fish, wine, sex etc. from the Nath Sampradaya practices and brought it to the acceptable civil form of today. Shri Dattatreya must have been a very powerful sage existing before this time and sometime over the centuries he was deified to the form of Dattatreya. (R.C. Dhere: loc cit p 42).**

**10.2 Puranic Dattatreya    This was also the time when Puranas were being written in the present form. The writers of the Puranas must have devised the story of Dattatreya’s birth as Atri’s son and avatar of Vishnu thereby achieving the following goals: strengthening the concept of trinity, bringing together the Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites who were ever in conflict with each other and creating a balanced deity acceptable to most sects because Dattatreya caries the attributes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.  However his image as a sage, philosopher and a wandering yogi and *avadhuta* mentioned in Mahabharata remained.  His original one head image became a three headed image after Saint Eknath in sixteenth century wrote the Arati in which he is described as “*Trigunatmaka Traimurti*” (Trimurti with three attributes). The Dattatreya worshipped today is the Puranic Dattatreya and not the historic Dattatreya born in the 25th century BC.**

***In the next part we shall discuss whether this historical finding should affect a devotee.***

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj**

## padukam

# OM.jpg

# PART I-B

# SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF DATTATREYA WORSHIP

## 11.0 DEVOTION AND HISTORICAL FACTS

**Devotees of Dattatreya might be shocked and distressed about the finding in the previous section that Dattatreya was not the son of rishi Atri and Anasuya, that he was not celibate but a householder who in later age renounced the material world and that he is not really an avatar of Vishnu in the traditional meaning of the word.  For centuries devotees have believed the Puranic myths, and our ideas about Hinduism are those moulded by them. For centuries we have not only believed in the mythical legend of Dattatreya’s birth but many talented devotees have built up further myths based on the legend, even composing lullabies to the child Dattatreya.  Kavadibaba (Shri Anantasut Vitthal) for example writes in his book “Datta Prabodha” written in 1860 AD (supposedly on the instructions of Shri Dattatreya himself), a beautiful description of childhood days of Dattatreya and his two brothers and their pilgrimage together. He further expounds spiritual philosophy in great detail through the medium of a dialogue between Dattatreya and Anasuya (See Bibliography). Those details are no doubt fantasies created by the love of a devotee. On the other hand this exposition of the spiritual philosophy is like a “*satsang*” i.e. spending time in the company of a saint, which is of great spiritual benefit to the reader. Datta-Mahatmya by Vasudevananda Saraswati (See Bibliography) is also similarly based completely on Puranic myths. When great yogis like Vasudevananda Saraswati supposed to know past, present and future through their occult powers put their stamp of truth on Puranic myths, how can one blame laymen to whom the Puranas are sacrosanct and word of God and who does not even question why different Puranas give different details about the birth of Dattatreya, Soma and Durvasa?  Or question the Purana claim that Soma the person is the same as Soma the planet Moon?**

**11.01  *Can or should historical facts affect devotion?*The answer to this question is in the negative. Devotion is not based on logic or facts but is an emotional issue. It is intrinsic and more like a relation between a child and its mother. Neither child nor mother bothers about whether the other is pretty or wise and so on. A true devotee of Dattatreya would not bother about whether he has one head or three or whether or not he was the son of Rishi Atri and Anasuya, or when and where he was born. He would be interested in the Principle that is Dattatreya, which for him is the ultimate principle Brahman. Dattatreya’s image, whether as an idol or a picture is merely a convenient visualization that helps him to anchor his awareness. It is a matter of circumstances that he grew up in the traditional beliefs regarding the legends in the Puranas including the image of a deity presented to him by the Puranas.  Devotion to a particular deity, say Dattatreya could be attributed to family traditions but it could also be  intrinsic or inborn due to the link in an earlier life or. Or it could be because of difficult circumstances like some calamity or crisis or deep sorrow that he turned to God and that was Dattatreya. When in dire difficulties or suffering from deep sorrow due to personal loss of close relatives or wealth or when in severe physical distress and there is no one to turn to for help or solace, turning to God remains the only alternative.**

**Look at how an unbearable physical suffering was instrumental for an atheist like Gopalbuva Kelkar to turn to God and finally become a disciple of Swami Samarth of Akkalkot. He had good job in the Railways which he had to leave because of severe chronic abdominal pains. When the pains became unbearable he prayed and made a vow that "If this universe has a God and if He makes my affliction go within eight days then I will not serve anyone other than God anymore." And within eight days his affliction really reduced. Probably these are divine ways of making people come to His inner fold. Once he decided to fulfill his vow he was guided by divine ways towards Swami Samarth. Once he reached Swami Samarth he did not enquire about his antecedents but surrendered to him. (Dhere: Swami Samarth; See Bibliography).**

**This is an example in which personal crisis was the cause of turning to God. Different people worship God (or a deity) for different reasons and devotion is only one of them. More common are those who practice the worship of their deity as part of his family or social tradition.**

**An average Hindu remembers God at various times during his day.  Some remember and pray to God when they wake up in the morning. Many perform at least some sort of worship after their morning bath, generally with flowers, incense sticks and a lamp before a photo or an idol of a deity, praying to God or the deity to shower grace on him and his family, a grace generally for material happiness through wealth, success etc. He visits temples on certain days or when convenient, observes fasts, religious festivals and performs rituals like certain Pujas or reading holy texts for gaining God’s favour.**

**Now, whom does he really worship? In rare cases he worships the highest attrtributeless, formless entity the Brahman, but more commonly he worships some deity in an image which may be an idol or a picture.  Often it may be the family deity who may be Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, Hanuman or a form of the mother deity like Amba, Durga or Mahalaxmi. All are depicted with attributes and their own characteristic forms, like Vishnu with four arms, Dattatreya with one or three heads and six arms, Durga with varying number of arms and so on.  Some learned people explain these deities to be manifested forms of the formless, attributeless Power.  But an average person is more interested in external show of devotion spending enormous amounts of energy and money to make a show of his devotion by performing religious rituals and observing religious festivals in a lavish and noisy manner. These are the external facets of religion which defines the lifestyle discipline peculiar to each sect.  It is this type of devotees that may feel disturbed at these findings which are contrary to whatever he has been conditioned to believe by tradition.  Such people are not spiritual *sadhaks* but only practitioners of religion for whom external exhibition is more important than devotion.**

**10.02   About Mythical Radha   In fact one does not even require a real historical entity for worship. Many mythical characters are often created and come into traditional worship. Mythical stories of their birth and heroic deeds get born.  A glaring case is that of Radha the consort of Krishna who is widely worshipped today in the Vaishnava sects.**

**There is no mention of Radha in Mahabharata or in Harivansha which is supposed to give details of Krishna’s childhood life. Radha has not been mentioned even in a late Purana like Bhagwat Purana.    Bhargava (B-RH Ch 7) mentions that her name occurs only in a portion of Brahmanda Purana and that too an interpolated portion dealing with the adventures of Parashurama. Her name again comes in one of the latest Puranas, the Brahmavaivarta Purana in which she is portrayed as wife of Yashoda’s brother Rayana and hence is an elderly aunt and not a paramour. However the same Purana later presents an absurd story as follows: “Once when Nanda goes to forest for grazing the cattle he takes infant Krishna also with him. Heavy rain and thunder start making Krishna cry. Nanda is not able to stop him crying but just then Radha comes there. Nanda is aware that Krishna and Radha are none other than Vishnu and Laxmi respectively so he hands over Krishna to her.  Radha takes Krishna to a nearby charming jewel studded canopy.  Once under the canopy Krishna becomes a handsome youth and reminds Radha that she is his Power or Shakti. As soon as Krishna said this Brahma comes, marries them and returns to his abode.  Krishna again becomes a child and Radha returns with him to Vrindavan and hands him over to Yashoda.”**

**Radha as portrayed by the devotional tradition is purely mythical. Yardi (Y-R: Ch VII p100) states that her name first comes up only in 9th century AD. It is now a major deity in the Krishna cult.**

**11.1 Devotee types   Spiritual matters are however internal.  Most important for a spiritual *Sadhak* is to have faith in God, especially the deity he worships. A truly spiritual devotees or *sadhaks* is interested only in the attainment of self-realization. In Bhagvad-Gita / Dnyaneshwari devotees are typed into four classes: *Arta* (distressed), *Jijnasu* (curious), *Artharthi* (desirous of wealth) and *Jnani* (enlightened). (Dnyaneshwari 7:108-109).  Majority of the people belong to *Arta* (distressed) and *Artharthi* (desirous of wealth) type. They are not really devotees in pure sense but are seekers of material benefits by pleasing god through special worships or *vratas*. A *Jijnasu* (curious) has chances of becoming a *sadhak* i.e. a spiritual seeker while a *Jnani* (enlightened) has already become one.**

**There is a big difference between a practitioner of religion and a sadhak who practices spirituality.**

**11.2 Spirituality and Religion   Now, what is the difference between spirituality and religion?  There is a big difference.  Spiritual pursuit is aimed towards liberation to be achieved through Self-realization. Its activities like disciplining the mind, meditation etc. are internal. Religion involves activities like various worship rituals, performance of *havan* with offerings in fire, reading of holy books, observance of fasts, recitation of mantras, singing *shamans*, pilgrimages etc. are external activities.  Though they do an amount of satisfaction of having done some service to God, and make the person proud of being religious actually all these observances are a service to only himself because they are done with the intention of pleasing God for his personal material benefits. They bind the person to rules and traditions of the religion and cannot make even slightest contribution to liberation from the birth-death cycles. Religion is both personal and social.  So it binds him to society and makes him participate in group celebrations of religious functions e.g. annual temple festivals or in the present era, public observances of Ganesh Chaturthi and Durga Puja.  It no doubt makes his position in society secure and also provides him with protection from external intrusions, but even so it continues to bind him to the birth-death cycles.**

**11.2.1   Mr. G. K. Pradhan a well-known disciple of Shri Shankar Maharaj has explained in his two novels “Towards the Silver Crests of Himalayas” and “Know Thyself” many aspects of religion and spirituality, through the guru characters patterned after Shri Shankar Maharaj. Three related topics: *Why different religions are founded*, M*eaning of the True Religion*  and  *Meditation*  are summarised below:**

**Why different religions are founded:**

**Individuals, who may be called avatars, messengers of God etc., attain clarity, knowledge, and truth.  In a few cases this understanding dawns upon them accidentally and in many cases it is the result of their sincere search for the truth and the efforts in that direction.  In almost all cases the experiences and findings are the same while the methods of approach are different.**

**The individual methods differ because of circumstances, environment, atmosphere, social set-up and many other factors.  What is important therefore is the problem of understanding and not the matter of approach.  Unfortunately, the methods are given more importance than the problem itself and that is why there is confusion.  The teachings and the broad principles advocated by saints are practically the same.  It is their followers who give more importance to the methods and practices thereby masking the main objective and creating confusion.  The great men had no idea that their followers would confuse the real issue and give prominence to forms and formalities, practices and methods.**

**Unfortunately, everyone thinks that only his own religion or creed is correct and the best and tries to establish his own superiority by insisting that it should be followed by all by force or otherwise.  This leads to continuous conflicts, small and big.**

**Meaning of the True Religion:**

**The word religion is loosely used and not well understood.  True religion is an internal evolution that completely liberates and frees the mind.  It is to be lived and not propagated.  It means consciousness and duty including humanity and love for society, country etc.; internally it includes frustrations and tragedies which make one turn to a Guru or God; Personal troubles are due to projection of his mind and ego.  Once he understands this he can take steps for liberation from the slavery of the mind.**

**Principles of religion have been destroyed or misinterpreted and the ignorant are exploited using the fear of miseries and hopes for better life in the future rather than the present one.  Priests or books do not make a religion.**

**Meditation:**

**Meditation is a movement in silence, in attention, without any choice or conclusion.  It is the action of silence and not of the mind.  Attention is clarity.  It is not any thought that has its roots in past memories.  Meditation or living in the true religious life is the freedom from thought and a movement in the eternal living or in the bliss or ecstasy of truth.**

**Meditation is not an escape from the world; it is the comprehension of the world and its ways and the ways of our mind, which is self-knowledge.  It is freeing of the mind from the known, the detachment from the society and the world and living in it while being totally an outsider.  Your real study starts with the study of your own mind.  Observation of your thought would lead you to the source of the thought, the thinker.**

**This is specifically applicable to the Dattatreya tradition because this tradition is meant to liberate and not to bind. Debates like whether Dattatreya has three heads or one and whether he is son of Atri or not are immaterial because they are external images. What is relevant to a sadhak is what that image symbolizes viz., a divine power which is balanced in the three attributes. The image whichever has been fixed in your mind is the personification of the Brahman of which Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are manifestations.**

**11.3  Introverts and Extroverts   In this connection Yardi (Y-BG: p xi) points out that the classification of spiritual paths in the four types mentioned above is not quite arbitrary.  It has a psychological basis. In Indian philosophy, in Bhagvad-Gita for example, people are classified according to the predominance of particular attributes Sattva, Raja and Tama in them. Modern psychology (Re: Carl Jung) classifies persons somewhat differently.  Man may be classified broadly as *introvert* and *extrovert*.  The former can be further classified as *intellectual introvert* and *emotional introvert*.  The path of knowledge is suitable to the intellectual introvert, the way of action to the extrovert and the way of devotion to the emotional introvert.**

**The introvert seeker, through the grace of his Guru, controls the mind through discipline and yoga and gradually gives up desire and ego, until they no longer interfere with the development of the higher consciousness.**

**In Dattatreya tradition all four paths namely Knowledge (*Jnana*), Yoga, Action (*Karma*) and Devotion (*Bhakti*) are followed according to the inner makeup or nature of a person. Thus the spiritual path for any sadhak is pre-decided even at birth.**

**11.4 Devotion Needs Depth   Barring staunch atheists every human being carries to different degrees a devotion to God in his heart.  It is due to this devotion and an inner intuitive understanding that there is a Superior Power to which one has to surrender that he utters the words like “Oh my God!” when surprised or “Oh God! Please help me!” when in dire difficulties. An honest person thanks God for good things in life but more often God is blamed for one’s misfortunes.**

**11.5 God helps his devotees   All spiritual masters and saints tell that what matters for a *sadhak* is devotion and that has to be deep. People pray to God for this and that but not everybody’s prayers are answered. But true sadhak will pray only for God and Self-realisation through which he experiences Him. God will listen to you only when that call is earnestly made with deep feelings and has good intentions.  The form is immaterial.**

**Devotion is a mental condition with different depth in different persons. Not everybody gets a response from the deity he worships unless his devotion is sincere, desireless and deep. He may get, in wakeful state or when in trance or in dream, a vision of the deity in the form he worships, or he may get signs or omens that the deity has graced him (or is angry with him). A most surprising phenomenon reported by true devotees is that when in extreme crisis the deity comes in human form and mitigates his problems. This is true not only in Hindu religion but in other religions too.**

**Spiritual literature is replete with anecdotes about how God takes care of a devotee who has completely surrendered to Him even without asking for it.  The following true story is given in the biography of the great scholar-writer-researcher-spiritualist Maha-Mahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj of Varanasi. (B. P.  Sinha See Bibliography).  It concerns a Shiva devotee and a yogi-philosopher–saint by name of Swami Shivram Kinkar Yogatrayananda who himself narrated it to M.M. Kaviraj.  Swamiji was poor and had no regular means of livelihood nor did he ask for anything from anybody. One day when Swamiji (living at that time in a place called Varahanagar), was teaching Vedanta to another spiritual seeker by name Swami Abhedananda, he received an insured envelope containing Rs. 30 (a lot of money in those days of early twentieth century) and a letter.  The letter was from a person by name Pramadadas Mitra explaining that “Three days earlier Lord Shiva came in my dream and told me, ‘I have not been accepting your food offerings because my devotee Shivaram Kinkar of Varahanagar has been surviving on only Bel leaves.’  In the dream itself Lord Shiva gave me your address. Accordingly I am sending you Rs 30.”  Swamiji further told M.M. Kaviraj that nobody except himself knew that he had remained without food for three days.**

**Various instances can be found in biographical literature of saints in which the deity they worshipped actually materialized as a human being to help them in the time of their crises. The well known eighteenth century book “Bhaktavijaya” (in Marathi) by Mahipati which gives biographies of many Indian saints like Tulsidas, Kabir, Tukaram, Ramdas, Dnyaneshwar, Namdeo etc. gives many such instances. The book has been translated into English by the Christian missionary late Justin E. Abbott (See Bibliography). Some of the incidents are mentioned in the following:**

**Damajipant was an ardent devotee of Vithoba of Pandharpur who was the village official at Mangalvedhe then under Muslim rule.   When people were starving during a great draught and the king was indifferent to their sufferings, Damajipant, out of compassion, distributed grains from the Government granary to public.  Some people inimical to him complained to the king who demanded that Damajipant pay for the grains or would be imprisoned. At the last minute a person named Vithu who was obviously Vithoba (Krishna) of Pandharpur, came from nowhere and paid the amount.**

**A similar incident is given by P. N. Joshi in the mini-biography of Dasopant in Dattatreya Dnyanakosha (See Bibliography). Dasopnt’s father who was a village clerk of Bidar did a similar donation of grains to starving public as a result of which Dasopant was imprisoned and threatened that he would be converted to Islam if the money was not paid within in a month. At the last moment a person telling his name as Datta Padewar, who could not be any other than Dattatreya, came and paid the dues.**

**A third incident mentioned by Mahipati concerns Sena the royal barber. He had the duty to visit the Muslim king every morning for his tonsorial duties of shaving, haircut etc. One day, just as Sena was delayed because he was deeply engrossed in the worship of Krishna.  The King was annoyed and sent messengers to Sena’s house to call him four times and every time Sena’s wife told him that Sena was not at home. However an evil minded person saw this and complained to the king that Sena was at home.  King ordered Sena to be arrested. But just at that time Vithoba, realizing that his devotee was going to be in trouble came in the guise of Sena and serviced the king with haircut, oil massage etc. King was surprised at the fragrance of oil he had never experienced before and to see in the reflection in water and the mirror the beautiful form of Krishna.   He felt at strange ease at Sena’s (Krishna’s) touch and even cured his maladies.  In a happy mood he gave a lot of gold coins to Krishna in Sena’s form. Krishna went to Sena’s house and deposited the coins in Sena’s bag and vanished.  In a happy mood after his bath king ordered Sena to be fetched. Fearing king’s wrath Sena hurried to the palace and still more surprised when the king clasped his feet in surrender. It was then that Sena realized that Vithoba had saved him. When this was told to the king he was very sorry that he had troubled a god to serve him and he himself surrendered to Sena and became his disciple.**

**There are many stories like this in which Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Ganesh and Devi come to devotee's rescue.  Saint Mira survived the cup of poison given by her husband; Narasi Mehta from Gujarat being completely surrendered to Krishna did not know the ways of the world and often came in financial and social trouble from which Krishna saved him every time. So was Saint Kabir saved by Rama; Krishna is known to have served in the home Saint Eknath for thirty-six years as a servant.  Saint Eknath was also a devotee of Shri Dattatreya and Dattatreya met him and his Guru Janardanswami in the form of a Malang i.e. a Muslim fakir.**

**And these miracles are not confined to the Hindu world. In the Christian lore of the western world also we have the famous story of Bernadette (born Marie-Bernarde Soubirous in 1844 in France) who had the vision of Virgin Mary who showed her the famous healing waters of Lourdes in France.**

**To take examples of two well-known saints of Maharashtra, Shri Parnerkar Maharaj was a devotee of Ganesha. He used to do his “Sadhana" late at night. Even his wife did not know about it. Once she woke up and peeped into the worship room to find her husband talking to Ganesha. Gondavlekar Maharaj was a devotee of Rama and he reached great spiritual heights. Once he asked a person to touch his head and that person heard the sound of Shri Ram’s name coming from it. There is no reason to doubt these stories.**

**How does a deity materialize to help his devotee? Nobody knows. May be the extreme mental state of a devotee, or a person in dire crisis praying for help, makes it possible for the formless to attain a form. Who knows? These matters are beyond material science. In the biography of M.M Kaviraj mentioned earlier a great Spiritualist-scholar Sir Vajrendranath Sheel comments on this issue in reply to a question by M-M. Kaviraj. In those days, in the beginning of the British rule, some people, especially those belonging to the Brahmo-samaj who were greatly influenced by the British education, did not believe in Hindu deities. Many considered Shri Krishna not as a historic person but an imaginary character in the Puranas. In the context of a report that (Maharshi) Aurobindo had a vision of Shri Krishna while in prison, M.M. Kaviraj asked Sir Vajrendranath Sheel whether he believed in Shri Krishna.  Sir Vajrendranath though a Brahmosamaj follower did believe in the historicity of Shri Krishna. Sir Vajrendranath’s reply was: “Whether Shri Krishna was real or not had nothing to do with the vision because it is quite possible that Historic Krishna and Krishna as a principle can exist independent of each other. One would experience according to one’s feelings on the subject. Examples of these can be found in all religions including the Christian. Every saint cannot be a liar. The object of your devotion will make It appear according to how you imagine It to be.”**

**11.6 All paths are equal.  Scriptures depict each deity with different characteristics or attributes. Shiva is called Bholenath because he is simple minded and gets easily pleased with a small service. Devi is a mother and she always helps her devotees in time of crises; so does Ganesh who is a remover of impediments. Vishnu (that includes Rama and Krishna) needs devotee’s love and may wait for an extreme stage before his grace is manifested. But these are the interpretations of scriptures and not necessarily real. It is therefore ridiculous to see people fighting among themselves over matters of which deity is higher in status and better or which path is superior.**

**As Kaviraj has said, “In conclusion, Vedic, Non-Vedic, Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava, Bouddha, Jain are various paths to knowledge. None among them is superior or inferior to the others; all are equal.  One of them may be beneficial to some person and another to another person according to his taste or worth. But even if paths are different they have the same ultimate goal. In the domain of eternal power there are no doubts or misgivings and whatever there may be are like guides. Once they are crossed one attains state of unity with the Ultimate.”  (Sinha p 327)**

**It does not matter therefore whether Dattatreya is the son of Atri or whether he is a composite avatar or when and where he was born or when he was deified.  What matters is the *sadhak’s* devotion. He will manifest to you in the image you worship him. Rest is all material history in which only the intellectuals would be interested. Looking from another angle, just as spiritual paths lead towards the universal truth that is the Brahman, history is also a study to arrive at truth and must be respected because it helps to prevent people from getting misguided through imaginary legends.  But what a spiritualist needs in mainly faith devotion.  It is with this attitude that a devotee should read these items of historical information and leave it at that.**

## 12.0  A POPULAR DEITY

**Lord Dattatreya is a very popular deity in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and South Gujarat. Among the deities worshipped by Hindus Shri Dattatreya is special for many reasons.  He is considered more as a wandering sage, yogi and guru rather than a deity. It is usual to hear from the lips of Datta-devotees frequent utterance: “*Gurudeva Datta!*” It means “Hail Dattatreya the Guru who is like a god!”**

**For devotees he is more a human being than a relatively exalted deity and therefore more accessible. We have already seen in the Puranic birth legend how Dattatreya came to be designated Trimurti or the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva all in one. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are traditionally assigned Raja, Sattva and Tama attributes respectively and are responsible for creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe respectively.  This brings Dattatreya on par with Brahman.**

**Dattatreya as a deity is unique in another sense. While most of the Vedic deities are personifications of nature powers like the sun (Surya), wind (Vayu), rain (Varun), fire (Agni) etc., he is a deity who born a human being. It is true that Rama and Krishna are also deities who were born humans and were later deified as avatars of Vishnu but while Rama and Krishna were kings and rulers, Dattatreya was a householder with children. Even then he attained such a spiritual level that he is mentioned as an avatar of Vishnu by some and avatar of Shiva by some others. His devotees also do not treat him as a deity in the conventional sense of a celestial god but more as a human being.**

**He is revered and worshipped by a wide variety of sects. Being traditionally considered an avatar of Vishnu with attributes of Shiva as well, both Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites who have been for centuries at loggerheads with each other, worship Dattatreya. He is connected with the Tantric sects also and hence is close to Devi worshippers. His importance closely follows that of Shiva in the Nath sect that considers him as his avatar.  In Mahanubhava sect he is considered as the primordial being and he is worshipped even by the Sufi sect of the Muslims.**

**12.1 His Appearance   The most popular and common appearance of Dattatreya is the symbolic one with three heads and six arms. The three heads are of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva respectively. The middle of the three heads is traditionally that of  Vishnu and the one on left is that of Shiva, though in rare cases the middle head is shown as that of Shiva. He is dressed in “Pitambar”, the yellow silk dress of Vishnu. The hands hold Vishnu’s Chakra and conch and Shiva’s trident, *damaru* (small percussion instrument) and *kamandalu* (water pot made of dried gourd). Dattatreya is always shown as accompanied by four dogs supposedly representing the four Vedas and a cow signifying the earth.**

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**Many *sadhaks* worship the Dattatreya *yantra* given above in the belief that they will give better results in his spiritual pursuit.**

**But the three headed image of Dattatreya is relatively new. Ancient depiction of Dattatreya, up to at least 1200 BC is one headed.  It is shown as Trimurti by Saraswati Gangadhar in Gurucharitra written in about 1550 BC. (R.C. Dhere: Dattasampradayacha Itihaas, p 33-40 See Bibliography).  Saint Eknath (1523-1599 AD) who composed the famous Dattatreya Arati “*Trigunatmaka Traimurti Datta Ha Jana*” in Marathi describes Dattatreya as three headed, an image which has taken root.**

**There are many places where Dattatreya is shown with single head (Ekmukhi Datta).  Bhatgaon in Nepal which some think is the birth place of Dattatreya has one headed idol.  The idol in possession of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) as well as the idols installed by him elsewhere are one headed. Kumtha Narayanacharya, a Gaud Sarswat Vaishnavaite has declared in his book *Guruparamparamrita* that worshippers of three headed Dattatreya  are anti-God. (Dhere: *loc cit*).**

**Another popular way he is depicted suits his personality of a wandering yogi in which he is depicted as a *sanyasi* dressed in a deer skin, carrying a *kamandalu* (gourd pot) and a stick.**

**Sometimes Dattatreya is depicted as a *Digambar* i.e. without clothes, and some of his praises refer to this form.  In many places of Dattatreya worship, one can hear the chant: *Digambara, Digambara, Shripadvallabha Digambara,* Shripadvallabha being one of the names of Shri Dattatreya.**

**The smile on his face is compassionate and catching.  The bliss of his *sagun* presence (having form and attributes) is comforting and sweet.  But the bliss of his *nirgun* presence (without form and attributes), even the great *sadhaks* who have experienced it, cannot describe in words.**

**12.2 The Guru Tradition    Dattatreya, being considered as a Guru is mentioned as *Dattaguru*, or Dattatreya the master or teacher.  Guru worship is an integral part of the Dattatreya tradition. The words “Gurudeva Datta” may be heard at all places of Datta worship or in the company of Datta-devotees.**

**In this Guru-tradition one’s Guru, living or otherwise, is worshipped like a deity and is considered even more powerful than God.  Scriptures say: “If God becomes angry then Guru can save you; but if Guru gets angry then even God cannot save you from his anger.”  However, a True Guru (Sadguru) is like a mother, beyond anger.  The feelings of a disciple for his Guru can be seen in the following famous *Shloka*:**

***Gururbrahma, Gururvishnu,* Gururdevo Maheshwara;**

***Guru sakshat Parabrahma, Tasmai Shri Gurve Namah*,**

**Translated, it says: “Guru is Brahma, he is Vishnu and he is also Shiva. Guru is actually the ultimate entity *Brahman*, I bow to such a Guru”.  This Shloka is from Guru-Gita, a bible for Guru-worship and is a part of Skandapurana.**

**12.2.1   Gurucharitra is considered the most holy book in the Dattatreya tradition. The book gives biographical sketch of Shri Shripadshrivallabh and Shri Narashimha Saraswati. It is written by Saraswati Gangadhar, a descendant of Sayandeo a close householder disciple of Shri Narashimha Saraswati. Written in Marathi verse about a hundred years after the latter’s Samadhi in 1458 AD).  It is has about 9000 verses in 52 chapters. Many devotees read at least some verses daily. For special spiritual gains it is read in a week according to a prescribed schedule requiring the reader to observe purity of behavior during the period.  It is surprising to note that though Shri Narasimha Saraswati has been equated to Dattatreya in many places in Gurucharitra worship of Dattatreya is not mentioned anywhere. Worship of Vishnu/Narayana is recommended only in two chapters (39 and 42). Elsewhere only Shiva worship has been described and recommended.**

**Corrupted versions having 53 chapters are being sold in many bookshops. The “purified” version laboriously prepared by Ramchandra Kamat and published by Keshav Bhikaji Dhavale is recommended.   Translations in other languages including English are now available even online.**

**12.3 Padukas    Guru’s feet are the most important object to a disciple. He considers himself fortunate if he can touch the feet of his Guru. Naturally Guru’s *padukas* or sandals are the most important object to be revered and worshipped. Just as a child learns at its mother’s feet so does a disciple learn at his Guru’s feet.  Since Dattatreya is a guru, his *padukas* are installed and worshipped in all Dattatreya tradition temples. Idols of Shri Dattatreya are merely complementary.**

**12.4  Important Days   The full moon day of the lunar month *Ashadha* (the fourth month) in the Hindu lunar calendar is dedicated to the Guru and is called Guru Purnima. This is the greatest day for a disciple who pours all his reverence on his Guru even if the latter is not living or is physically away. (Guru Purnima is also called Vyasa Purnima since Maharshi Vyasa was also great guru and writer of books)**

**Thursday is an important day in Dattatreya a tradition just as Monday is to the devotees of Shiva and Friday to the devotees of Mother Goddess Durga.**

**Other dates of importance are: Gurudwadashi which falls on the twelfth day of the dark night of the Lunar month Kartik (two days before Narakchaturdashi during Deepavali) and Dattapurnima which is considered as the birthday of Dattatreya according to the lunar calendar.  It falls on the full moon day of the month of Margashirsha which comes in December.**

**Guru’s birthday is also important to his disciples. They celebrate it with devotion and fanfare if he is living and if the birthday is known.  For saints who have taken Samadhi, the day of Samadhi is celebrated every year by disciples and devotees of the guru. Guru’s padukas are always installed and regularly worshipped at the place of worship. Swami Samarth gave symbolic padukas to selected disciples who were instructed to install and worship them. Receiving padukas thus is considered a sign of guru’s grace. This Guru tradition is followed at all places of Dattatreya worship.**

**12.5 Dattatreya Temples    Though Dattatreya is believed to be an avatar of Vishnu, unlike Vishnu temples (or those of his avatars Rama and Krishna) are very simple like the Shiva temples, austere and without bright colours.  Shiva temples rarely carry an idol of Shiva.  The object that is worshipped is a *Shivalinga* (*lingam*) and not an idol.  Similarly, in Dattatreya temples it is the *padukas* that are worshipped; idols of Dattatreya (one headed or three headed) even if installed are secondary.**

**Temples dedicated to Shri Dattatreya and his avatars are, like the Shiva temples, extremely simple, in conformity with the austerity of a yogi. There are no bright colours or pomp and show as in the temples devoted to Vishnu and his avatars.  Another notable thing is the discipline shown by the devotees.  In most Indian temples, devotees scramble and push each other to get *darshan (*to see the idol*)*, every one for himself and with no consideration for others. If there is any queue, it is only because it has been forced by the authorities.  By contrast, the devotees visiting Datta temples are much disciplined.  They form queues, help other devotees, and are very particular that those who are be meditating or reading are not disturbed.  They make their obeisance to such persons to show their respect but very silently.**

**The offerings in Shiva temples are austere limited mainly to *Bel* leaves and white flowers; and so are the food offerings.  In Dattatreya temples also only flowers are offered and the food offerings are also limited.**

**In contrast Vishnu temples are colourful.  The religious practices of the Vaishnavaite tradition, unlike those of the Shaivaites are more ritualistic and tend towards enjoyment of life. The idols of Lord Vishnu (or his avatars) are colourful, dressed in bright colours adorned with ornaments.  The offerings made during a worship ritual include a variety of delicacies (known in some parts as *Chappanbhog* or offering of fifty-six kinds of delicacies).**

**12.6 Oudumber Tree   Just as Tulsi is holy to Vaishnavaites and Bel to Shaivaites, in Dattatreya tradition Oudumber tree is considered as holy and greatly revered.  Another tree revered in Dattatreya Tradition is *ashwatha* or Peepal tree (*ficus religiosa*).**

**12.7 Worship of Dattatreya Avatars and Saints   Since Dattatreya tradition is a Guru Tradition is customary to worship gurus and prominent saints of the Guru ancestry.**

**We shall see in later chapters how the Dattatreya’s avatars and his other devotees served people of their times. Their work however did not stop after they passed away. Their compassion and spiritual powers created their own congregation of devotees. After their Samadhi these devotees created establishments or *maths.* These centres have continued the service through the lineage of disciples.  The *maths* and their chiefs are a solace to people who pray to the founding saint or avatar for their grace and for help to come out of their personal difficulties. Many do experience the grace and get relief, otherwise how can their number increase progressively?**

**It is part of Dattatreya tradition to worship these avatars and saints in the same way as they might worship Dattatreya himself.  Devotees do not consider worship of Narasimha Saraswati or Swami Samarth as different from worship of Dattatreya.  Even though it is well known and experienced by many that Dattatreya appears before devotees and graces them, devotees seem to feel nearer to the avatars who, probably being living persons of more recent past, are emotionally nearer than Dattatreya.**

## 13.0 HIS AVATARS

**Four great saints are known as avatars of Shri Dattatreya. They are:**

* **Shripad Shrivallabh, the first avatar born in 1320 A.D. (some say 1350 A.D.) at Pithapur in Andhra Pradesh;**
* **Shri Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1458 A.D.), born at a place called Karanja (Lad Karanja) in Maharashtra;**
* **Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot is considered as the third avatar. It is believed that he is the same  Shri Narasimha Saraswati who had left Ganagapur to retire in kardali forest who reappeared as Swami Samarth three hundred years later in a forest in UP; however according to another version Swami Samarth first appeared as an eight year old boy in the village of Chelikheda about 24 miles from Hastinapur (100 Km north-east of Delhi on the banks of the River Ganga) on the second day of Chaitra month in the year 1149 AD making his avatar even earlier to Shripad Shrivallabh. Such enigmas however are not uncommon among saints.**
* **Shri Manik Prabhu is the fourth avatar born in the erstwhile Nizam state at a place now in Marathwada region of Maharashtra state.**

**The first two avatars, Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasimha Saraswati lived during the reign of Muslim rulers of the Bahamani dynasty which ruled in Maharashtra-Karnataka-Andhra region.  Their task seems to have been to save the orthodox Hindu religion from Muslim tyranny and interference. Shri Narasimha Saraswati is known to have specifically instructed his disciple Sayandeo not to serve Muslims and not allow his sons also to do so in order to avoid danger to his life. Within a century after him some Muslim Sufis became Dattatreya followers, a famous among them being Chand Bodhale.**

**In contrast, the third avatar Swami Samarth (?-1878 AD) lived just when the British were taking over India. This was the time when Muslims and Hindus were no longer enemies politically; on the other hand they tried to unite themselves to rebel against the British in 1857. Swami Samarth had Muslim disciples and his grace extended to several British persons too who approached him for his grace.**

**The fourth avatar Shri Manik Prabhu (1817-1865 AD) born in the Muslim state of Hyderabad ruled then by Nizam has the largest number of Muslims among his devotees and disciples.  In fact the family of Manik Prabhu and their religious activities seem to have been fully supported by the Muslim rulers. Another peculiarity of Shri Manik Prabhu was that while all other avatars of Shri Dattatreya as well as the saints of Datta-tradition are known for their austerity, Shri Manik Prabhu was known for the royal splendour and luxury of his establishment though Shri Manik Prabhu himself was not attached to these.  In fact he always gave away whatever he received in charity.  His sect is called *Sakalmat* *Sampradaya* (loosely translated as the sect of universal thinking).  The basic tenets of this sect are that *if we ignore the differences due to time and geographical location, the basic principle of all religions is the same and all have considered attaining God and liberation to be the main aim.  The differences do not affect equality and brotherhood.*  What we note from this is that the avatars lived and worked in tune with the prevailing environment of their times.**

**While avatars of Vishnu e.g. Parashurama, Rama and Krishna saved *Dharma* through wars, the avatars of Dattatreya seem to have been timed to save the Hindu religion from degradation after Muslim and British conquests. They saved *Dharma* through spiritual guidance and not by punishing the wicked. They have graced hundreds of their disciples and taken them to high spiritual levels; they are still doing so centuries after their leaving the body. The disciples in turn have kept the tradition of this spiritual guidance alive through their spiritual lineage. Some eminent spiritual guides in recent times of this Datta-tradition are: Shri Saibaba of Shirdi, Shri Shankar Maharaj of Pune, Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati and Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**PART II: ADVICE TO ANCIENT DISCIPLES**

**V. V. Shirvaikar**

**INTRODUCTION**

**In this part we shall discuss the advice supposed to have been given by Shri Dattatreya to his six ancient disciples Prahlada, Ayu, Yadu, Alarka and Parashuram.**

**Mahabharata mentions only Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna of the Haihaya lineage as a disciple of Shri Dattatreya.  It has no relevance to the main story of the Bharata the original composition of Maharshi Vyasa and therefore no doubt must be an addition made by the redactors Suta, Sauti etc. to the original Bharata text (See Part I-A of this series).   Puranas, which are dated later than Mahabharata, mention more Dattatreya disciples:  Prahlada, Ayu, Yadu, Alarka, Samvarta (Sankruti?) and Parashuram.**

**As mentioned in Part I-A of this series, there is a chronological conflict in the above list of disciples.  Prahlada was the son of the Daitya king Hiranyakashipu; Prahlada's time is therefore couple of generations before Vaivaswat Manu (3100 BC). Ayu and Yadu were lunar dynasty kings being of the fourth and the seventh generation respectively from Vaivaswat Manu.  Thus these three disciples belong to a time zone nearabout that of Vaivaswat Manu.**

**In contrast Alarka, Sahasrarjuna and Parashuram stand at 36th, 37th and 39th from Vaivaswat Manu i.e. in the time zone 2400 BC - 2340 BC.  (See Chronology in Part I-A).  Samvarta also lived around the same time but details about him are not available.  He is mentioned in Avadhut Upanishad and JaabaaldarshanUpanishad*.*  There is no doubt that Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna had recieved boons from Shri Dattatreya. Based on this it was concluded that Dattatreya was the contemporary of these disciples.**

**When one critically looks at the advice given to the three older "disciples" it would be seen that the advice came from an Avadhuta who the Puranas have taken to be Dattatreya.   We shall however discuss this advice since that too is valuable, and had Dattatreya given the advice it could not have been different.**

## IN THE CONTEXT OF BHAGAVAD-GITA

**Shri Dattatreya’s teachings to Alarka are given in some detail in Markanda Purana. These concern Yoga practice and are substantially the same as what is given in the Yoga Sutras by Pantanjali. This is not surprising since it has also been mentioned elsewhere that Patanjali also obtained the knowledge from Shri Dattatreya.  The advice to Parashurama is contained in the book Tripura Rahasya by Rishi Sumedha or Haritayana written comparatively recently.**

**Many spiritual seekers consider Bhagavad-Gita as a comprehensive guide for their pursuit. Commentaries like Bhavarthadeepika (better known as Dnyaneshwari) written by Saint Dnyaneshwar in the thirteenth century make a better guide because of the detailed explanations of the Shlokas of the Bhagavad-Gita. Gita proposes four paths for spiritual pursuit: (i) Path of Knowledge in which a person contemplates on the relation between himself, God or Brahman, Universe etc. and through meditation on these topics experiences the Brahman i.e, attains Self-realization. (ii) Path of Action in which a person carries out his religious and social duties sincerely, but without any desire for the fruits of his actions.  He offers the fruits to God, thus becoming a non-doer in spite of doing the actions.  This attitude negates his Karmas, Therefore, when all karmas are negated, he is not reborn.  (iii) Path of Yoga in which the seeker practices Yoga and meditation by which the Kundalini force is activated.  This Kundalini force cleans the body and mind and leads to an experience of the Brahman and thus, liberation; and (iv) Path of Devotion (Bhakti) in which the seeker becomes devoted to God. His mind becomes free of all thought except of God and thus the seeker becomes one with Him and gets liberated.  The seeker may, to start with, be interested in devotion with personal materialistic motives but in the end, devotion overrides all worldly desires.**

**Shri Dattatreya’s teachings primarily deal with the yoga path. The path of actions and the path of devotion are not given importance. Bhakti (devotion) is intrinsically implied in this path as a precondition, for the seeker cannot succeed without His grace which can be obtained only through deep devotion.  Dattatreya’s teachings do not mention the Path of Karma.  It is a special feature of Gita that a good virtuous life lived while performing one’s duties without bothering about the fruits thereof can also enable one to attain Moksha. Dattatreya’s teachings do not mention specifically the Path of Knowledge either. Knowledge is synonymous with the experience of the Self. Gita also says the same but mentions the Path of knowledge as a separate path. Though it does not say what the seeker should do, what is implied is reading, contemplation and discussion about the Ultimate until one becomes one with It. As would be seen later in the discussion of Tripura Rahasya, mere learning from books is not knowledge unless it is also experienced by oneself.**

**While advice to Alarka is primarily on the techniques of Yoga and meditation, the discussions in Tripura Rahasya go deep into the philosophy of Consciousness and the yogic path.  Shri Dattatreya’s teachings to these two disciples are therefore more relevant to the followers of the Yoga path.**

**It is not that the devotees of Shri Dattatreya shun the pure Bhakti Path. Actually they have deep devotion about Shri Dattatreya as a Guru, Yogi and a person of Knowledge. As mentioned earlier the worship of Dattatreya differs from the worship of other deities in this important aspect. Very few devotees ask for material benefits from Shri Dattatreya. They get them automatically. And it is believed that if any devotee suffers in life that is because Shri Dattatreya wishes him surrender and come to him so that he gets immersed in the devotional practice. We shall now proceed to discuss first the advice given to the ancient disciples and then the advice to the later disciples.**

## ADVICE TO EARLY DISCIPLES

***Advice To Prahlada*      This episode occurs in the Bhagwat Purana, Canto 7 Ch 13 entitled "The Behavior of a Perfect Person.". (Ref** [**http://www.bvml.org/books/SB/07/13.html**](http://www.bvml.org/books/SB/07/13.html) **).  In the context of a discourse on the behaviour of different *ashramas* (stages of life) and particularly that of *sanyasa*, Narada Muni described a meeting between Prahlada and a saintly person who had adopted the mode of life of a python (allegorially refering to the symptoms of a *paramahamsa*).**

**King Prahlada was travelling with his entourage with the intention of studying the nature of saintly persons.  He arrived at Sahya Mountain on the bank of the river Kaveri where he came across a great saintly person who was lying on the ground, covered with dirt and dust, but his bright aura showed that he was spiritually very advanced.**

**Prahlada immediately offered obeisances to the saintly person who was quite stout in appearance. Prahlada was puzzled because though fat he did not do any work and spent his time lying down.  Prahlada therefore respectfully enquired how he could be so stout since persons of his spiritual advancement generally eat only once in a day.**

**The saint replied that since bodily pleasures did not make a person happy he had stopped taking part in materialistic activities.  Activities like eating, sleeping, sexual enjoyment and protecting themselves from fear cannot be regulated in the case of animals, but for humans these must be regulated. Every action, be it eating or sex must be performed as a duty and not for enjoyment. Since everything is misused by workers who do fruitful work he had retired from all such activities.  The real happiness for all living beings is the spiritual happiness. It can be achieved only when one stops all materialistic activities pleasures from which are only imaginary. Therefore he had ceased from all material activities and was spending his time lying down there.  The conditioned soul living within the body identifies itself with the body and forgets its self-interest. Because the body is material, his natural tendency is to be attracted by the diversions of the material world. Thus the living entity suffers the miseries of material existence.**

**The living entity covered by the material body does not see the happiness within himself but runs after happiness in the material world. He tries to rid himself of the causes of distress but since material nature controls him he is ultimately baffled.**

**Materialistic activities are always mixed with three kinds of miserable conditions--*adhyatmika (spiritual)*, *adhidaivika* *(of destiny)* and *adhibhautika (material)*. Therefore, even if one achieves some success by performing such activities one is still subjected to birth, death, old age, disease and the results of the fruits of his activities.  For example, a rich man, who is a victim of slavery to his senses, is very greedy to accumulate wealth and therefore suffers from insomnia due to fear from all sides, despite his wealth and opulence.**

**Those who are considered materially powerful and rich are always full of anxieties because of governmental laws, thieves and rogues, enemies, family members, animals, birds, persons seeking charity, the inevitable time factor and even their own selves. Thus they are invariably afraid. Therefore persons of intelligence should give up the original cause of lamentation, illusion, fear, anger, attachment, poverty and unnecessary labour. The original cause of all of these is the desire for unnecessary prestige and money.**

**He said, “The bee and the python are two excellent spiritual masters who give us exemplary instructions regarding how to be satisfied by collecting only a little and how to stay in one place instead of moving about. From the bumblebee I have learned to be unattached to accumulating money, for although money is as good as honey, anyone can kill its owner and take it away. I do not endeavour to get anything, but am satisfied with whatever is achieved in its own way. If I do not get anything, I am patient and unagitated like a python and lie down in this way for many days.  Sometimes I eat a very small quantity and sometimes a great quantity. Sometimes the food is very palatable, and sometimes it is stale. Sometimes *prasada* is offered with great respect, and sometimes food is given neglectfully. Sometimes I eat during the day and sometimes at night. Thus I eat what is easily available. To cover my body I use whatever is available, whether it be linen, silk, cotton, bark or deerskin, according to my destiny, and I am fully satisfied and unagitated. Sometimes I lie on the surface of the earth, sometimes on leaves, grass or stone, sometimes on a pile of ashes, or sometimes, by the will of others, in a palace on a first-class bed with pillows.  Sometimes I bathe myself very nicely, smear sandalwood paste all over my body, put on a flower garland, and dress in fine garments and ornaments. Then I travel like a king on the back of an elephant or on a chariot or horse. Sometimes, however, I travel naked, like a person haunted by a ghost.  Different people are of different mentalities. Therefore it is not my business either to praise them or to blaspheme them. I only desire their welfare, hoping that they will agree to become one with the Supersoul (*Paramatman*).  The mental concoction of discrimination between good and bad should be accepted as one unit and then invested in the mind, which should then be invested in the false ego. The false ego should be invested in the total material energy. This is the process of fighting false discrimination.  A learned, thoughtful person must realize that material existence is illusion. This is possible only by Self-realization. A Self-realized person, who has actually realized the truth, should retire from all material activities, living ia a state of Self-realization.”**

**He said, “Prahlada Maharaj, you are certainly a Self-realized soul and a devotee of the Supreme Lord. You do not care for public opinion or the so-called scriptures. For this reason I have described to you without hesitation the history of my self-realization.”**

**After Prahlada Maharaj heard these instructions from the saint, he understood the occupational duties of a perfect person (*paramahamsa*). Thus he duly worshiped the saint, took his permission and then left for his own home.**

**The advice given by the Avadhuta (who is confused with Shri Dattatreya in some Puranas) to King Prahlada  is lucid and requires no comment.  It is basically the same as the lessons from Ishavasyopnishad which Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi taught to Dasganu through the maidservant of Kakasaheb Dikshit of Vileparle Mumbai.  (See Part VII-3)**

***Advice To Ayu*      King Ayu had approached Shri Dattatreya for a son on the advice of the royal priest.  Ayu went in search of Shri Dattatreya and finally found him on Sahya mountain. To avoid Ayu Dattatreya called Maya (Shakti) in the form of a beautiful maiden and indulged in amorous activities with her. However Ayu who was a spiritually elevated person realized that this was all a drama and the woman was really Maya with whom the Adi Purusha Dattatreya was playing. He embraced Dattatreya's feet who warned and told him that he (i.e. Dattatreya) was an impure person and Ayu should leave immediately. When Ayu did not leave Dattatreya demanded human flesh in a skull every day. Ayu agreed. Pleased with Ayu, Datttatreya offered him a boon. Ayu asked for a son which Dattatreya agreed and sent him away with a fruit to be consumed by his queen Indumati.**

**In due course the queen Indumati gave birth to a son.  But the demon Hundasur, who knew of the prediction that this child would be the cause of his death, kidnapped him coming in the form of a maidservant. He gave the child to his queen for killing but taking a liking for the child she secretly sent him to Rishi Vasishta.  The child, now named Nahusha grew up with Vasishta and when he grew up killed Hundasura thus fulfilling the prediction. Vasishta returned Nahusha to king Ayu.  Thus we see that King Ayu was not a disciple n the generally understood maning of the term.**

**There are also many chronological and geographical inconsistencies in the story. The concept of Brahman and Maya, or Purusha and Prakriti was developed many centuries after Ayu.  Ayu ruled from Sapta Sindhu region. Aryans had not yet reached Matapur (Mahur) which is one of the places claimed to be the birthplace of Dattatreya and is located in what is now Vidarbha where Aryans reached only many centuries later.  Also even the first rishi Vasishtha lived many centuries later than Ayu. This story therefore is one of the typical Puranic myths.  (This story is mentioned from Dattamahatmya by Shri Vasudevananada saraswati.)**

***Advice To Yadu*     King Yadu was the son of Yayati and grandson of Ayu.  Yayati had two wives: Devayani and Sharmishtha. Devayani was the daughter of Danava Guru Ushanas Shukracharya (a Bhrigu). She gave birth to two sons: Yadu and Turvasu. Sharmishtha was the daughter of a Danava king Vrishparva and was the mother of three sons: Puru, Druhyu and Anu.   Yayati became prematurely old due to Shukracharya's curse but had an option to pass the aging to one of his sons. None excep Puru agreed to it. Yayati named Puru as his successor, sending the other four sons with smaller kingdoms near the outskirts of his kingdom. Thus Puru was the ancestor of Pandavas and Kauravas who are, in a way, descendants of the Danava Vrishaparva through Sharmishtha while Shri Krishna, a descendent of Yadu, has Bhrigu blood in him.**

**King Yayati’s kingdom must have been adjoining that of Vrishaparva because Yayati is said to have met both Devayani and Sharmishtha while on hunting trips which must have been in the forest separating the two kingdoms.  Vrishaparva and Shukra appear to have come from Gujarat, since their priests the Bhrigus were descendants of Varuna, God of the sea, and have always been associated with this region of India (Original name of Bharuch near Baroda was Bhrigu kaccha). Their territory bordered on that of Yayati who was a follower of the Angirasas.**

**According to the Bhagwat Purana, (Canto 9 Ch 19) Druhyu ruled over the southeastern direction, Yadu over the southern side, Turvasu over the western part and Anu over the north.  Over the years, the Yadu clans inherited the territories to the south-west of the Gangetic plains, between the Chambal River, Betwa and Ken, which correspond to the border areas of the present Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.**

**King Yadu, observing a young Brahmin mendicant wandering around fearlessly, asked him why when everyone else was striving hard for wealth, health, success, knowledge, spiritual gains  etc. he was moving about like a child even though he appeared to be capable, learned, experienced, handsome and eloquent instead of doing any work.  He requested the Brahmin the cause of the inner happiness in spite of his being all alone.**

**The Brahmin replied that he had learnt this art from many spiritual masters who were 24 in number. These were: The earth, the air, the sky, the water, the fire, the moon; the sun, the pigeon, the python, the sea, the moth, the honeybee; the elephant, the honeythief, the deer, the fish, the prostitute (Pingala), the osprey (raven); the child, the girl, the arrow-maker, the serpent, the spider and the wasp.  He then explained what he learnt from each which is summarised below:**

**1. Earth:  I learnt patience and doing good to others.**

**2. Water: I learnt the quality of purity.**

**3. Air: I learnt to be without attachment though moving among people.**

**4. Fire: I learnt to glow with the splendour of Self-knowledge and austerity.**

**5. Sky: I learnt that the Self is all-pervading and yet without contact with any object.**

**6. Moon: I learnt changes belong to the material body but not to the Self which is is always perfect**

**7. Sun: I learnt that like Sun reflected in many pots of water appears to be many, so also Brahman appears different in different bodies caused by the reflection through the mind.**

**8. Pigeon:  Once I saw mother pigeon rushing into a hunter's net out of attachment to her children who were already in the net. From this I have learnt that attachment is the root cause of earthly bondage.**

**9. Python: who eats only what comes to it without going out in search of food, I learnt to be content with whatever I get to eat.**

**10. Ocean: who remains unmoved, even though hundreds of rivers flow into it, so also a wise man should remain unmoved among all the various sorts of temptations, difficulties and troubles.**

**11. Moth: I learnt to control the sense of sight and to fix the mind on the Self.**

**12. Honey-Bee: which gathers honey from various flowers I learnt to beg for alms from many houses so that I am not a burden to any single householder.**

**13. Honey-gatherer:  A honey-gathereer easily takes away all the honey stored by a bee after hard work.  From this I learnt that it is useless to hoard things.**

**14. Elephant: I learnt that one should destroy lust otherwise, blinded by lust even at the sight of a female elephant, one falls into a grass-covered pit trap.**

**15. Deer:  The deer is enticed and trapped by the hunter through its love of music. Therefore, one should never be distracted by sense pleasures which can distract a seeker from his spiritual path.**

**16. Fish:  From the fish who is easily caught by the bait of food I learnt not to be greedy for food lest I get ruined by losing my independence.**

**17. Pingala the prostitute:  I noticed that a prostitute by name Pingala who became hopeless after vainly waiting for customers, made herself feel satisfied with whatever she had earned that day and retired to a sound sleep. I learnt from this fallen woman the lesson that the *abandonment of hope* leads to contentment.**

**18. Raven:  A raven that had picked up a piece of flesh was pursued and beaten by other birds. It dropped the piece of flesh and attained peace and rest. From this I learnt that a man in the world undergoes all sorts of troubles and miseries when he runs after sensual pleasures and that he becomes as happy as the bird when he abandons them.**

**19. Child: I learnt the virtue of cheerfulness from the child who who sucks his milk free from all cares, worries and anxieties, and is always cheerful.**

**20. Maiden:  The maiden was husking paddy. Her bangles made much noise which attracted attention of visitors from the house. To silence the bangles, she removed the bangles one by one. Even when just two bangles were left, they produced some noise. When she removed one and only one remained, it did not make any noise and she was happy. I learnt from the maiden that living among many would create discord, disturbance, dispute and quarrel. Even among two there might be unnecessary words or strife. The ascetic or the Sanyasin should remain alone in solitude.**

**21. Serpent: A serpent does not build its own hole. It dwells in the holes dug out by others. Similarly, an ascetic should not build a home for himself. He should live in a temple or a cave built by others.**

**22. Arrow-maker: I learnt from the arrow-maker the quality of intense concentration of mind.**

**23. Spider:  The spider weaves long threads taken out of his mouth into cobwebs and then gets itself entangled in the net of its own making. Similarly, man makes a net of his own ideas and gets entangled in it. The wise man should, therefore abandon all worldly thoughts and think of Brahman only.**

**24. Beetle: The beetle catches hold of a worm, puts it in its nest and gives it a sting. The poor worm, always fearing the return of the beetle and sting and thinking constantly of the beetle, itself becomes a beetle. I learnt from the beetle and the worm to turn myself into the Self by contemplating constantly on It (Brahman); thus I gave up all attachment to the body and attained liberation.**

**This story of Yadu meeting an Avadhuta is given in Bhagwat Purana Canto 11. It starts at verse 24 of Ch 7 and goes upto the end of Ch 9.  At the end of Ch 9 it has been mentioned based on the verse 4 in Ch 7 of Canto 2 that the avadhuta was Dattatreya.**

**The king Yadu was highly impressed by listening to these enlightening words of Lord Dattatreya and practised constant meditation on the Self.**

## ADVICE TO KARTAVIRYA SAHASRARJUNA

**Now we shall discuss the advice given by Shri Dattatreya to Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parshurama.  We shall start with the Haihaya king Kartavirya Arjuna also known as Sahasrarjuna.**

**Arjuna was the son of Kritavirya of Haihaya lineage in the Yadu line of the Lunar branch. He was Alarka's contemporary. He was a powerful king ruling from Mahishmati (Mahabharata: Anushasan Parva Ch 151-156). It is now known as Maheshwar; it is a town in Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh state in central India, on the north bank of the Narmada River.   The following is based upon the account in Mahabharata.**

**Once Shri Dattatreya (He is mentioned as Rishi Dattatreya here) visited Kartavirya Arjuna.  To welcome sages being the *dharma* of Kshatriyas he humbly offered all his wealth at his feet. Dattatreya was pleased and instructed him to ask for three boons for anything he wanted. Kartavirya asked for the following three boons: (i) “During war I should have one thousand arms and the warriors should see these thousand arms, (ii) during normal life only the usual two hands should be seen.  (iii) I should conquer all earth by my bravery and should rule it carefully and righteously.”  He also requested for a fourth boon: When I deviate from the righteous path I who am blessed by you, should be guided by saints. Dattatreya said “So be it!” and left. Because of these boons he was known as Sahasrarjuna.**

**Markandeya Purana gives a slightly different story. After king Kritavirya’s death, his ministers and priests decided to crown his son Kartavirya Arjuna as their new king. But Kartavirya insisted that he would not become the king unless and until he had attained the status of a yogi. Sage Garga then advised Arjuna to worship Dattatreya who had helped the deities to reunite after they had defeated the demons. Arjuna then went to Dattatreya's hermitage and began to worship and serve him. Pleased by his penance and service, Dattatreya asked Arjuna to seek a boon. Kartavirya asked for such a power as would enable him to perform his duties as a king in a just manner; that nobody should match him in war and that he should have one thousand arms. Also that he should get killed only by such a person who is more virtuous than himself, that he should guide the people towards the right path and may his devotion for him (Shri Dattatreya) be eternal. Dattatreya agreed and then crowned Kartavirya Arjuna (who now began to be known also Sahasrarjuna) as the king. He also received certain *siddhis* from Shri Dattatreya.**

**The power he had gained from the boons made Sahasrarjuna proud. Soon after becoming the king, Sahasrarjuna ordered that nobody in his kingdom should wield a weapon except him. He boasted that nobody could equal him. Just then there was a divine utterance that “You do not know the power of Brahmins who are superior to you. When a Kshatriya protects his people he does it with the help of Brahmins”. But Sahasrarjuna said that a Brahmin was in no way superior to him who was a Kshatriya. Brahmins live by teaching and priesthood under the protection of Kshatriyas. He also said that he would see to it that these proud Brahmins are kept under control and made a living by begging. However when Vayu warned him against this behaviour, he promised to treat Brahmins properly and protect them.**

**Sahasrarjuna started enjoying life.  One day when he had gone for hunting he came across the *ashrama* of Rishi Jamadagni who welcomed the king and treated him and his army well.  Sahasrarjuna noted that realized Jamadagni could do all this on the strength of the Kamadhenu (wish-cow) who provided whatever the Rishi wished. He developed a strong desire to possess this cow and took the cow forcibly to Mahishmati with the help of his men. When Jamadagni’s son Parashurama came to know of this atrocity he picked up his Parashu (axe) and went after Sahasrarjuna. After defeating his army single handedly with his Parashu he killed Sahasrarjuna chopping all his hands and head. His sons fled.  Parashurama then brought the Kamadhenu to Jamadagni and told him what he had done.**

**Jamadagni however reproached Parashurama and told him that he had committed a sin of killing a king who protects people.  Brahmins have achieved a position of respect with their forgiveness. He advised Parashurama to wash his sins by pilgrimage to holy places.  Accordingly Parashurama travelled for a year on pilgrimage.**

**Thus ended Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna who though taught and blessed by Shri Dattatreya forgot his teachings and as a result died a defeated person.**

### ADVICE TO ALARKA

### Alarka belongs to the lineage of Ayu’s son Kshatravriddha. He stands 25th from Manu Vaivaswat.  He was the son of Ritudhwaja (Divodasa according to Bhagawat Purana) and mother Madalasa, daughter of Vishwavasu, the king of Gandharvas. Ritudhwaja had rescued Madalasa from the demon Patalketu after killing him. Patalketu’s brother, in order to take revenge of his brother’s death, once falsely told Madalasa that Ritudhwaja died during a battle. Believing this Madalasa gave up her life.  The Naga king Ashwatar had two sons who were close friends of Ritudhwaja and loved him very much. On their entreaty Ashwatar did a penance and received a boon from Devi Saraswati as a result of which Madalasa was reborn as his daughter. When she grew up, he gave her in marriage to Ritudhwaja who subsequently succeeded his father to the throne.

**Madalasa gave birth to four sons: Vikrant, Subahu and Shatrumardan and Alarka. The first three became ascetics having been taught metaphysical knowledge by their mother. Ritudhwaja prevented Madalasa from giving metaphysical knowledge to Alarka so that he could suceed him to the throne. Madalasa therefore instructed Alarka on morals and the art of ruling the kingdom. When Alarka married she presented him a ring containing a note on how a king should administer the kingdom. When Alarka was crowned a king Madalasa left with her husband to the forest.**

**Alarka ruled justly but always felt that he lacked the experience of real bliss and that something was missing in his life. Very soon, his brother Subahu learnt about his brother Alarka’s progress.  He felt jealous and prevailed upon the king of Kashi to send an envoy to Alarka with a message that he should hand over the kingdom to Subahu. Alarka refused and Subahu, with the help of the king of Kashi, defeated Alarka and conquered the kingdom.**

**Alarka remembered the ring presented by his mother. He opened the ring and found a message: 'When everything is lost, abandon your present advisors and seek company of learned sages.'  Heeding this message, Alarka went and met Shri Dattatreya who assured him of removing his miseries at once. Then he asked for the reasons for his miseries.  Alarka said that he was not bothered about material pleasures but his elder brother Subahu had grabbed his kingdom. He was feeling disenchanted but now being unattached felt neither sorrow nor joy.  Dattatreya made Alarka aware of the fact that it was because of the knowledge he had imparted to him that the 'mist of attachment' had disappeared from his mind.**

**Dattatreya’s teachings to Alarka (Re: Markanda Purana):**

**“Even a little ego develops into a huge tree of ignorance.  Affection is its trunk; home and family are its branches and wife and children are its leaves. Wealth and cereals are its flowers and happiness and sorrow are its fruits. Relation that emerges out of affection is its canopy. This tree continues growing and obscures the path of liberation. The tree is full of desires and those who sit under its shelter can never attain salvation. Felling of this tree is therefore of foremost importance for a person desirous of attaining 'Brahmajitva.'**

**“Getting rid of attachment is the first step towards liberation (*Moksha*). Once this step is achieved he will be free from sorrows and then unite with the Supreme. This unification is called *yoga*. It is essential for a seeker of *moksha* that he should renounce attachment for the worldly objects including close relations.**

**“Knowledge and renunciation are two sides of the same coin and one is necessary to give rise to the other. Just as home shelters the body and food gives energy to sustain it, knowledge helps to attain salvation. Opposite of knowledge is ignorance which is an impediment in the path of salvation.  Every living being receives fruits of his actions, good or bad, and these fruits bind him to the birth and death cycles, preventing salvation. Only carrying out one’s duties without bothering for the fruits thereof can prevent this binding. Only after the fruits of action in the earlier births that have caused his rebirth are “burnt out” can a living being become liberated from the cycles.**

**“When yogis achieve yoga (i.e. the state of union with the Brahman), they live in Brahman. Attainment of this yoga state is difficult. One has to conquer his soul first. For this one has to practice breath control (*Pranayama*) for controlling of physical impurities, determination to control sins, self-restrains to control lust and contemplation on God.**

**“During this process a yogi faces many impediments that can divert a yogi’s mind from his goal.  The yogi should therefore keep his mind occupied in the worship and continuous contemplation on God and seek solace in Him. He should control his senses and eat and sleep less. Once his physical and mental faults are removed and he attains unification with the Brahman through contemplation, then he never separates from the Supreme Being.”**

**To Alarka’s query about the daily routine of a yogi Shri Dattatreya tells him to observe the followingthe following:**

**Purity:  “Respect and insult cause the feelings of love and hatred. Yogis understand insult as respect and vice versa. A yogi should therefore never attend social functions like *shraaddha* and marriage. He should not accept the hospitality of others and should avoid unnecessary journeys. A yogi should seek alms only after the householder and his family has eaten and only from those households whose inmates are gentle, religious and free from blemishes.  He should only accept things like whey, milk, fruits, edible roots, gram flour etc. Before taking his meal, a yogi should offer his food to the five *Prana* deities in his body reciting the following mantras and making the offering after each mantra - *Pranaya Swaha, Aapanaya Swaha, Samanaya Swaha, Udanaya Swaha, Vyanaya Swaha!***

**Yama-Niyama: “Control of senses and greed, celibacy, renunciation and non-violence are the five resolutions (*Yama*) of a yogi. Control of anger, service to the Guru, sanctity, eating less and studying Vedas regularly are the five norms (*Niyama*) for a yogi. A yogi must practice meditation at a desolate place, forest, cave or peak of a mountain. A true celibate has full control over his speech, mind and action. He looks at iron and gold with the same indifference; he neither loves nor hates anybody.**

**Omkar:  “Yogis who follow sincerely the *Yama* and *Niyama* restrictions never lose their supreme position. While contemplating on the Supreme they recite *AUM* which comprises of the three syllables 'A', 'U' and 'M' representing the three attributes (Gunas) Sattva, Tama and Raja respectively. But even then a yogi must guard against some disastrous traps that can make his entire penance useless.**

**Brahman:   “Only when a yogi experiences extreme joy during meditation that he can experience Brahman; a true yogi does not mourn over the loss of physical body because he is immune to both sorrow and affection. But this is difficult to achieve.”**

**Alarka thanked Dattatreya and taking his permission, went back to the king of Kashi and told him to take the kingdom or hand it over to Subahu. The king asked why he, a Kshatriya, was renouncing the kingdom without fighting and Alarka replied that only Brahman is truth, everything else is false. He added that he was going to control his senses and gain perfection in yoga.**

**Subahu then told the Alarka that he had played a drama with the help of the king of Kashi in order to bring Alarka, who was leading a luxurious life but was not really happy with it, towards the path of salvation without any war or bloodshed. He would not have turned towards the path of salvation unless he was pushed to misery. Now that he had achieved this he was also leaving renouncing everything. Subahu then, on king’s request, advised him the importance of achieving the four duties of a man: Dharma (righteous living), Artha (earning livelihood), Kama (keeping the wife satisfied with sex) and *Moksha* (liberation). The king of Kashi returned the kingdom to Alarka who crowned his eldest son and retired to the forest where he practiced the teachings of his Guru Dattatreya and attained salvation.**

**It is clear that these teachings are rooted in Patanjali's Yoga-Sutras which though written in second century BC have material which dates much earlier since it has been mentioned in the Bhagvad-Gita as well as in the Shantiparva of the Mahabharata. It has been claimed that Patanjali himself receied the nowledge from Shri Dattatreya.  We are not in a position to comment on this.**

## ADVICE TO PARASHURAMA

**Parashurama's story is historically linked to that of Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna as would be clear from the story of the latter described earlier.**

**The feud between the Haihayas and the Jamadagni family did not stop after Parashurama killed Sahasrarjuna. Sahasrarjuna’s sons took revenge of the death of their father by attacking Jamadagni’s *ashram* when Parashurama was away.  In spite of the entreaties of Renuka (Parashurama’s mother) they killed Jamadagni while he was in the state of meditation. Parashurama learnt of this when he returned and vowed to decimate the Kshatriyas who had killed a Brahmin. Parashurama took his father’s corpse on one shoulder and mother Renuka on the other and set to go to the Ganges ((actually this must be Saraswati) to perform death rites. While passing through a forest he met Dattatreya in the form of an Avadhuta. Seeing Renuka he stopped Parashurama. Addressing Renuka as Shakti incarnate (Goddess Durga) he worshipped her. She blessed him and told him of her resolve to end her life. She also advised Parashurama to look up to Dattatreya for help when needed.**

**Later, after he had decimated the Kshatriyas twenty-one times he met Shri Rama who defeated and humbled him. But Shri Rama let him go because Parashurama was a Brahmin. Parashurama was dejected. Unexpectedly he met an Avadhuta whose name was Samvarta. He was Brihaspati’s brother and used move around looking like a madman. When Parashurama asked him about the secret of his state he gave an explanation which Parashurama did not understand and when he requested for it again he directed him to Shri Dattatreya.   Parashurama went in search of Dattatreya whom he finally found in the Gandhamadan Mountains.**

**The dialogue that followed is known as “Datta-Bhargava Samvad” (dialogue between Dattatreya and Bhargava i.e. Parashurama). In this dialogue, Shri Dattatreya explains to Parashurama the theory and practice of spiritual pursuit illustrating his statements by certain allegorical stories. It is a most complete guide to the spiritual path.**

**Parashurama, on meeting Dattatreya, prostrated before him.  Shri Dattatreya narrated to him the greatness (*Mahatmya*) of Devi Tripura (the transcendental consciousness shining as the unique mirror of the wonderful universe). Parashurama became abstracted in devotion, his mind becoming still and purer. His eyes glowed in rapture and his hair stood on end and he could not hide his ecstasy. He then fell to the ground before his master Shri Dattatreya and expressed his gratitude requesting guidance about how to worship Devi Tripura. Having satisfied himself as to the fitness of Parashurama, whose zeal for and devotion to Tripura worship were intense he duly initiated him into the method of Her worship. He then permitted Parashurama to go to the Mahendra Hill to practice the sacred worship.**

**Parashurama practiced the worship of Devi Tripura for twelve years. One day he remembered his dialogue with Samvarta during which he was asked to obtain the explanation of what Samvarta had said from Shri Dattatreya. He pondered over and realized that he did not know anything about the workings of the universe, how is it created and how it would end and why it is transient though appearing to be permanent.  He turned over in his mind his life from childhood to the present and realized that throughout his life he had strived to achieve his goals which changed from time to time; but in the end he had not really achieved anything worthwhile.**

**He thought, "The feeling that I should work hard and succeed for gaining happiness is really a misery. The feeling never goes and so does the misery. But in spite of this people, from a beggar in the street to a mighty emperor, continue to strive for apparent gains and continue to be miserable. On the other hand those who need not keep themselves busy in work and who are perfectly content and self-contained are happy. This is rather confusing."  Being thus confused he decided to return to his Guru Shri Dattatreya and seek his advice.**

**Quickly reaching the Gandhmadan Mountain, he met his Guru and prostrated before him keeping his head on his feet.  The Guru was happy to see Parashurama who then asked his permission to present certain doubts he had in mind. Shri Dattatreya gladly consented to remove the doubts.**

**DATTA-BHRAGAVA DIALOGUE**

**Parshurama recounted to his Guru his past actions about destroying all the Kshatriyas and being defeated by Shri Rama.  He had felt mortified by the fact that Shri Rama had let him go because of his being of Brahmin birth.  He had then met Samvarta, a wandering Avadhuta who was very effulgent but apparently deranged.  Just being near him was refreshing and pleasant. He had asked Samvarta about the state he was living in and he had given his an explanation which he had not been able to understand.  When asked to clarify, Samvarta had advised him to meet him (i.e. Shri Dattatreya) for explanation.**

**Samvarta had belittled both the path of actions (Karma) and the path of devotion. He had said that whatever he had gained after pleasing Indra the king of gods through actions like performance of the various rites and ceremonies was very trivial as far as happiness was concerned.  This happiness was not really happiness but a lesser misery. Besides, nothing can mitigate the fear of death that results through one's actions.  (N.B. The Karmas implied here are rituals like yajnas to please gods and not day to day actions.)**

**Devotion was just as imperfect as Karma. Transient devotional states cannot lead to intransient high Truth. Devotional practices are continuous and there seems to be no end to the obligatory duties enforced by devotion.**

**In spite of these strange atitudes, he had found Samvarta to be quite happy and completely free from any sense of obligation to act and thereby face disastrous results. He seemed to laugh at the ways of the world, How did he gain that state? And what did he tell me that I did not understand?  Parshurama then prayed to Shri Dattatreya to kindly explain these points and rescue him from the jaws of Karma.**

**Dattatreya tells Parshuram that people are in the habit of engaging in work under the sense of obligation. It is very much necessary to first investigate, then deliberate and finally use discrimination before undertaking any action. For example Shri Rama, suffered because he did not discrimination and judgment before attempting to capture the golden deer but later with due deliberation he crossed over to Lanka and conquered it.**

**Common people are confused and influenced by the sense of action. But as long as ignorance lasts there cannot be discernment.  The Supreme Tripura Devi the Supreme Force, the Being of all beings, the one consciousness of Shiva, who abides as the Self of self, is the one who controls your thoughts and shines the *Vichara* (meaning the discrimination, investigation, deliberation and judgment) in the mind and therefore should be worshipped sincerely, exactly as taught by the Guru.**

**A pre-requisite for such worship is devotion and earnestness. A man without discrimination thinks that to have dispassion (*vairagya*) means to be miserable (*duhkha*) and that the pleasures of the body are the same as bliss (*sukha*). This ignorance leads to his suffering in the cycle of births and deaths. He commends Parashurama for having having transcended misery by becoming discriminating. Association with the wise helps to avoid misery and obtain salvation as could be seen from the fact that Parashurama himself had reached this stage of spiritual progresss only by his association with Samvarta.  He then illustrates this point through the story of Prince Hemachuda and Hemlekha.**

**Prince Hemachuda who had gone for hunting in the forest is caught in a storm and has to take shelter in the hermitage of Rishi Vyaghrapada where the rishi being away his foster daughter Hemalekha, a beautiful maiden welcomes him. Hemachuda falls in love with Hemalekha. Vyagrapada on his return realizes this and gives her in marriage to Hemachuda.**

## Hemachuda and Hemlekha

**Hemachuda does not know that under the tutelage of Vyaghrapada, Hemalekha herself has reached the spiritual level of a sage.  He finds during their honeymoon that Hemalekha was not much interested in physical pleasures. When questioned she explains that physical pleasures are only of a temporary transient nature and desire for them can never be satisfied. The real happiness comes not by being slave to bodily pleasures but through realization of the Self (i.e. the soul).  She teaches Hemachuda about meditation, control of mind and how one can lead a normal life and enjoy the physical pleasures without being a slave to them by becoming dispassionate. Thus, Hemachuda, and later the whole family as well as other citizens are initiated into Self-realization.**

**Hemachuda being used to the physical pleasures over the years however misses them and feels guilty when he indulges in them. Hemalekha realizes his dilemma and gives him a discourse on the nature of an individual who is caught in the cycle of birth and death because he becomes a slave to sensory pleasures.**

**I-am-the body ignorance    Out of the ignorance an individual identifies himself with his body not realizing that he is not the body but really the immortal soul that resides in the perishable body. The body dies at some stage and the individual is reborn again in another body but the individual is not aware of it. He likes to enjoy the sense pleasures i.e. the pleasures obtained through the five senses (touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell). The desires for these are created in the mind which has basically a fickle nature. His desire for these pleasures and means like wealth to get to them is never satisfied; as soon as a desire is satisfied he seeks more pleasures of the same or diverse kinds, thus becoming a slave to them. He becomes prey to greeed, anger, jealousy and arrogance. Actions done to satisfy these earthly desires finally bind him to the cycle of birth and death because of which he has to go through thousands of rebirths. He can come out of it only when in some birth, out of the grace of the Almighty, he develops discrimination to control his mind and becomes dispassionate i.e. free from the clutches of earthly desires. Then by making his mind steady and free of thoughts he realizes the Self i.e. the experience that he is really the soul and not the body. This realization is the key to his final liberation from birth and death cycles (*Moksha*).**

**To obtain Self realization an aspirant must find the company of a sage in whom he should have complete faith and whose words he should never doubt because the world runs on faith. Also one should not waste time on empty arguments while deliberating on his teachings.**

**Surrender to the Creator      I-am-the body delusion or Maya that leads to desires for transient things like wealth, family etc. and leads to misery can be overcome only through the worship of God who is the Primal Cause or Creator of this universe. He cannot be realized by sensory means.**

**Judging from the magnitude of the creation, His power must be immeasurable. The Creator is perfect in Himself and creates the whole universe without any external aid and is able to protect and elevate His own creatures. One must therefore surrender to Him without reservation. If the Lord of the world be pleased, nothing will be withheld from the devotee. One can approach God for many reasons: for personal problems, to gain wealth etc., or one may simply dedicate oneself to Him.**

**In the case of the first type of devotees, God has to consider the course of destiny which was only ordained by Him. But for the selfless devotee, God is the sole Refuge and therefore He takes care of him without reference to the devotee's predestiny. The notion that one cannot escape one's destiny is applicable only to the weak-minded. Destiny is part of the natural framework of enforcing God’s will; it cannot be prevented however its edge can be blunted by devotion to Him. This devotion is the first step towards the Divine Bliss.**

**God is formless   God witnesses everything. It is He who generates, permeates, sustains and destroys the universe. He is Shiva, He is Vishnu, He is Brahman, the Sun, the Moon, etc. He is the One whom the different sects call their own; but He is not Shiva, nor Vishnu, nor Brahma nor any other exclusively. To assign the creator with a name like say Shiva and assign him a body would make the Creator an ordinary potter making pots endowed with a body and brain. The body is only a tool for a purpose and works through intelligence. Fools like to assign a body to the formless transcendental Being and worship it. But even then He shows them Grace, assuming such a body, for He is unique and fulfils the desires of His devotees.**

**Purity of intellect   The universe manifests in all its variety in Devi Tripura, as if reflected in a self-luminous mirror. The reflection cannot be apart from the mirror and is therefore one with it.  Shiva, Vishnu etc, conceptualized as bodies cannot be considered as one superior to the other since such concepts are applicable only to lower order of beings. Regarding mother Tripura Devi, o*ne can know the mother only if one knows the Self.* This self is within you but it is neither visible nor can be described. It can be realized with the help of pure intellect. *Therefore first the intellect must be made pure and then only nature of the Self should be investigated.***

**Self remains realized at all times   An aspirant does not realize that the Self remains realized at all times.  When thoughts are controlled a blank darkness becomes visible. *In the short interval of time between the two, i.e. the control of mind and appearance of darkness there remains a state free from the effort to control and the perception of darkness.* That is the state of perfect and transcendental happiness. *All are deceived in that state because their minds are accustomed to be turned outward and therefore do not manage to remain in that holy state.*  Realization is attained only by staying still not by intellect but by cessation of thought. Any effort will always make it recede. People who have not achieved Self-realization are unaware of this Truth and inherit sorrow.**

**Certain Preconceived notions stand as obstacles in the path of Self-Realization. Some of them are: (i) Identification of the body with the Self resulting ultimately into birth-death cycles. (ii) Considering the world to be different from the Self which really is Consciousness and the mirror on which the phenomena are simply reflected. (iii) Considering other beings to be mutually different and different from the universal Self. Man is not finally redeemed until he has extricated himself from these numberless notions of ignorance.**

**Hemalekha teaches Hemachuda to remain in the state of *Sahajasamadhi* in which he is *perpetually* in the state of Samadhi at the same time performing his normal duties.**

**Concluding this story Shri Dattatreya again reiterates the point made earlier that the primary cause of emancipation was association with the wise and therefore he should follow that advice immediately.**

**Parashurama’s doubts (1)   Parashurama however is not convinced that the objective universe can merely be the consciousness which is not seen but only inferred, and asks his Guru to elaborate on the issue. Continuing with his discourse Shri Dattatreya says,**

**Projection on the screen of Consciousness    “All that is seen must have newly appeared at some time and therefore there must be an antecedent cause for it.  The world changes every moment and therefore must be getting born every moment. There different theories about the nature of the universe but all agree that universe has an origin though Charvakas think that it is accidental in origin. But universe cannot be an accident because without cause and effect relationship there cannot a harmony in nature. The cause may be obvious or may have to be inferred every event being a product of a certain condition or conditions.”  (Shri Dattatreya now goes into intricate discussion about some theories of the creation of the universe none of which can satisfactorily account for creation.)**

**Shri Dattatreya then stresses that the universe must have a Creator, and He must be an intelligent principle, but He cannot be of any known type because of the vastness of the creation. His power is past understanding and is dealt with in the Scriptures, whose authority is incontrovertible. However one cannot confuse the creation with the Creator, the unbounded consciousness. The creation must be considered merely as a picture drawn by him on Self. There is no place beyond consciousness and Consciousness is inescapable.**

**Universe cannot be conceived without consciousness which covers in entirely. The Supreme God is thus the embodiment of pure Consciousness. This whole universe consisting of the mobile and the immobile, arises from, abides in, and resolves into Him. This is the final and well-known conclusion of the Scriptures. The creation is not an object apart; it is a picture drawn on the canvas of supreme consciousness, for there cannot possibly be anything beyond Perfection. Imagination on the contrary, is impractical. The universe has thus originated only as an image on the surface of the mirror of the Absolute. This conclusion is in harmony with all facts. Just as castles in the air are mental figments of men so also is this creation a mental figment of Shiva. Shiva is absolute Awareness, without any form. Shri Tripura is Shakti (energy) and Witness of the whole. That Being is perfect all round and remains undivided.**

**Time and space are the factors of division in the world; of these, space refers to the location of objects and time to the sequence of events. Time and space are themselves projected from consciousness.**

**Consciousness the illuminator   The fact of the existence of things is only illumination of them, and nothing more. Such illumination pertains to Consciousness alone. The things of the world have no substance in them outside of the cognising factor, viz., Intelligence.**

**Note that objects are clearly pictured in the mind even when those objects are unreal. How does it happen? The place of objects is taken up by the peculiar imaginative quality of the mind. When such imagination is deep, it takes shape as creation; thus you see that consciousness was absolute and pure before creation and its peculiar quality or will brought about this image of the world in it.**

**So the world is nothing but an image drawn on the screen of consciousness; it differs from a mental picture in its long duration; that is again due to the strength of will producing the phenomenon.**

**The universe appears practical, material and perfect because the will determining its creation is perfect and independent; whereas the human conceptions are more or less transitory according to the strength or the weakness of the will behind them. A magician's creations are only transitory; a yogi's creations may be permanent; both are external to the creator, whereas the divine creation cannot be apart from the omnipresent Lord. Because the Lord of consciousness is infinite, the creation can remain only within Him and the contrary is pure fancy. Since the Universe is only a projection from and in the mirror of consciousness, its unreal nature can become clear only on investigation, and not otherwise. Distinguish between the changeless truth and the changeful untruth and scrutinize the world comprised of these two factors, changeful phenomena and changeless subjective consciousness, like the unchanging light of the mirror and the changing images in it.**

**The world cannot stand investigation because of its changing unreal nature. The world appears real in the light of ignorance and disappears before right analysis. Long intervals of space reflected in the mirror are themselves in it and yet unreal. "Thus the universe is only the Self - the One and one only."**

**Parashurama then asks how the universe appears to be real to him as well as to others.  Shri Dattatreya now explains the the cause of the illusion which makes one believe the world to be real. He says, “Even the gross body becomes mistaken for crystal-clear consciousness by mere force of habit. Similarly, the universe has repeatedly been taken to be real so that it now looks as if it were actually real. The remedy lies in a change of outlook. He then tells the story of prince Mahasena and the yogi son of the Yogi Tangana.**

## Prince Mahasena and the Yogi

**King Susena of Vanga decides to perform a horse sacrifice (*Ashwamedha*) and as is the custom, sends the sacrificial horse to roam around under the protection of his princes leading a detachment of army. Anybody courageous enough to capture the horse has to fight the army and become the king’s subject if defeated. When the entourage reaches the banks of River Irawati, they pass the hermitage of Rishi Tangana who is in the state of *samadhi*. His son (who is also a great yogi) however notices that the entourage has passed by without showing any respect for his father. He becomes angry and captures the horse. When he is attacked by the army, he enters the nearby hill with the horse and disappears. When the army attacks the hill the son comes out with a huge army and destroys Susena’s army taking many including the princes as prisoners. When king Susena learns about this he deputes his brother Mahasena to meet the Rishi, gain his pleasure and liberate the horse the princes.**

**Mahasena sets forth to the Hermitage of Rishi Tangana where he prostrates before the Rishi. The rishi however is in deep meditation and does not reply. The prince waits for three days at the end of which the Rishi’s son who was watching him all the feels pleased at the reverence shown by the prince towards his father and offers to fulfill his wishes since his father was in the state of *samadhi* to last for twelve years of which seven still remained. Mahasena expresses his desire to speak to his father and having given the promise the son himself goes into *samadhi* and communicates with his father. The Rishi comes out of the *samadhi* and chides his son for being influenced by anger which had caused disruption of an important ritual like a horse sacrifice. He tells him that penance was possible only because a king protects the yogis against obstruction and instructs his son to release the horse and the princes immediately.**

**Mahasena sends the princes and the horse away but himself remains in the hermitage to satisfy his curiosity about the miraculous events he had noticed. He expresses his desire to the sage to learn about how the horse and the princes were concealed in the hill.  The sage informs him that he himself used to be an emperor but had abdicated his throne in favour of his sons to go to forest for penance.  This son was born unto him from his wife who had accompanied him to the forest.  He had initiated him in yoga and with the powers thus gained he was able by the force of his will to create a world of his own inside this hill which he is now ruling. The horse and princes were kept there. On Mahasena’s request the sage asks his son to show him his world inside the hill and then returns to the state of *samadhi*.**

**The son takes Mahasena to the hill which he himself can enter easily by his yogic powers but Mahasena cannot. Using his powers he makes Mahasena leave his body, which he hides in a hole in the ground and takes him inside the hill.**

**World inside the hill   Mahasena sees inside a world similar to the outside world including the various *lokas* like *Satyaloka*, *Vaikuntha* and *Kailas* in this world.  After staying thee for one day they return to the outside of the hill where Mahasena to his surprise sees there is a complete change in the environment.  The people, the river courses, the trees, the tanks, etc., are all different. The son explains that one day that they had spent in his world inside the hill was equivalent to 12000 years of the outside world. The changes he was seeing were the changes that have occurred during the 12000 years and none of his family was alive. His country Vanga is now a jungle infested with wild animals. His brother’s descendant is reigning in Malwa and his own descendant is reigning in the Dravida country on the banks of the Tamraparni.**

**Mahasena is overcome by grief at the loss of his family but is comforted by the yogi’s son who tells him that this grief was useless because his forefathers were also dead and he had never mourned for them. He urges Mahasena to ponder over the question as to who he really was.  Is he the body or something else? The body is merely a conglomerate of different substances and there is no moment in which each of the components is not changing. The people whom you call your family are mere bodies; the bodies are composed of earth; when lost, they return to earth; and earth resolves ultimately into energy. So there is really no loss. When you say “my” body how can you be the body? In fact you are not the body which you discard on death just like a garment.  Mahasena thinks over this and surrenders to the Rishi’s son to become his disciple.**

**Consequently the Rishi’s son explains to him that events in a dream are real while the dream lasts but appear false on awakening. However events in wakeful state are also real while it lasts and become an illusion during the dream state. The appearance of the hills, the seas and the earth itself is constantly changing and therefore they cannot be classed as permanent. There is no unbroken continuity in any object because every new appearance implies a later disappearance. But continuity cannot be denied in the fundamentals underlying the objects. Similarly, dream and wakefulness resemble each other in their discontinuous harmony. This discontinuity defines it as an illusion because it does not last.**

**World created by steady Will   He tells that this world is the result of Brahma's desire. It looks real and permanent because the original desire is so powerful. If Mahasena wishes to create a world that would endure then he must practice focusing of thought which has to be forceful. In addition he must not be aware of the thought because that will disturb the focusing.**

**Referring to the universe inside the hill he had created, he explains how such a vast world could fit in a small hill and how the time scales could be so different. The relation between space and objects and between time and events is created by the senses; there is no intrinsic relationship between them. There is nothing outside the domain of the senses. He asserts that his world is also real but it would disappear instantly if he stops contemplating it. He further tells that just as the dream creations are pictures moving on the mind screens, so also this earth world including him is the frontage of the picture depicted by pure intelligence and it is nothing more than an image in a mirror. He then advises Mahasena to realize that the Self is the self-contained mirror projecting and manifesting this world. The Self is pure unblemished consciousness and that he should quickly realize it and gain transcendental happiness.**

**The world cannot be demonstrably ascertained. Space is simply void serving for the location of materials. The universe is, always and all-through, a phenomenon in the Self. The question then arises how consciousness, being void, is dense at the same time. Just as a mirror, though, dense and impenetrable, contains the image, so also pure consciousness is dense and impenetrable and yet displays the universe by virtue of its self-sufficiency. Though consciousness is all-pervading, dense and single, it still holds the mobile and immobile creation within it, wonderful in its variety, with no immediate or ultimate cause for it. And like the mirror it remains unaffected by the passage of different images and yet continues to reflect as clearly as before, so also the one consciousness illumines the waking and dream states which can be verified by proper meditation.  The absolute consciousness being self-sufficient manifests within itself what looks 'exterior', just like a mirror reflecting space as external to itself.**

***Prakriti* and *Chitta*   The anamnesis (memory of karmas in previous lifetimes) goes by the name of *Prakriti* in dreamless slumber, and Chitta in the other states. It is always comprised of the insentient phase of the tendencies of the mind and the sentient phase of intelligence. Therefore the mind (*chitta*) is *purusha* (the individual) when the sentient phase is assertive, and the same is *avyakta* (unmanifest) when *prakriti* (nature), the insentient phase, is assertive. That *chitta* is tripartite according to its functions, namely, ego, intellect and mind. The diversities in creation are solely due to qualifications limiting the consciousness; these qualifications (i.e., body, limiting of age) are the mental imagery of the creator (consistent with the individual's past merits); when the creative will-force wears away there is dissolution and complete undifferentiation results.**

**Parashurama’s doubts (2)   Parshurama however has some new doubts: (1) How can this intelligence (Consciousness) which always remains as pure knowledge itself and is therefore beyond cognition. Then how can it be realized? (2) What is the nature of liberation, the goal of an aspirant? If one can be liberated while alive, how is the course of his emancipated life regulated? (3) How can sages engage in action while they live all the time in absolute consciousness? (4) How does one explain the differences noticed in the lives of the jnanis? Some of them are active; some teach scriptures; some worship deities; some abstract themselves into samadhi; some lead an austere life and emaciate themselves etc. How can there be such differences in their lives when there can be no difference in the state of liberation common to all? Or are there grades in knowledge and liberation?**

**Thus requested, Shri Dattatreya is pleased with the questions and commended him for being on the right path of investigation ascribing it to the Grace of God. He remarked that Parashurama has rightly understood the nature of consciousness but has not realized it and that without experience knowledge of a thing is no knowledge at all.  To corroborate this last statement he narrates a third story about the sage Ashtavakra and King Janaka of Videha.**

## Story of Ashtavakra

**Varuna, the God of the waters, wants to perform a sacrifice to propitiate Goddess Tripura when king Janaka was also performing a similar sacrifice. Brahmins, learned people, hermits, those well-versed in the Vedas and *yajnas* who were attending King Janaka’s sacrifice ceremony refuse to attend Varuna’s ceremony. This enrages Varuna’s son Varuni who thinks of a stratagem to lure them away from King Janaka. He comes to King Janaka’s gathering and challenges the attending sages to a debate laying the condition that he would debate one sage at a time and if he defeats the opponent then he will throw him in the sea which of course is Varuna’s kingdom. This is agreed upon. Varuni defeats the sages one by one through fallacious logic and consigns them all to the sea where they are made to attend Varuna’s yajna. That includes the sage Kahola who has a learned son named Ashtavakra. As soon as Ashtavakra hears about his father’s defeat he hastens to Janaka's court, challenges Varuni, defeats him and insists that he be sunk in the sea. This exposes Varuni who restores back all the men formerly drowned in the sea.  The sages praise Ashtavakra who gets puffed up with pride and starts behaving offensively before the assembled court. The sages are helpless.**

**Just then, a female ascetic in hermit’s clothes and with matted hair comes there and is highly honoured by the king. The offended assembly looks to her for help. She then speaks to Ashtavakra in sweet and yet firm tones.**

**She charges Ashtavakra of speaking only book knowledge and not the one he has experienced. Ashtavakra is defeated in the debate with her and surrenders to her.**

**Knowing Reality   She then explains to him that there was no one in the assembly who had experienced Reality (Self or Brahman) except the king Janaka and herself.  Experiencing Reality was not a subject for discussion because even the most brilliant logic can only approach it but never attain it. It can however be realized by service to one's Guru and the grace of God. No one can know his own self through teaching of others. He has to realize it for himself which can be done only if his mind is turned inwards. A lamp does not require to be illuminated by other lights in order to be seen. It is the same with the Self. She adds,**

**“That Self or Consciousness (which is knowable as well as unknowable) is absolute and transcends the three states (wakefulness, dream and slumber) and comprises the entire universe making it manifest. Nothing can be apprehended without its light. Nothing can be apparent to a person if there be no consciousness. Even the awareness of your unawareness (in sleep) requires the light of Consciousness. However learned and proficient a person may be the Self cannot be realized as long as thoughts crop up and the mind is not inward. Mind cannot turn inwards unless there is an absence of desire. After the state of dispassion has been reached one can reach the stage of existing as the Self spontaneously without effort. That stage is realized after thoughts are eliminated and investigation ceases. After that you will know all and understand the significance of its being knowable and unknowable at the same time. Thus realizing the unknowable, one abides in immortality for ever and ever.**

**She bids good-bye saying that his doubts will be answered by king Janaka.  Ashtavakra then has discussions with King Janaka who reiterates that Self is neither unknowable nor remains unknown at any moment.**

**What is Perception   Abstract Intelligence being the Self of the seeker, is not cognizable because there is no other agent to know the Self or the light by which to know it.  On the other hand all objects are seen by the illumination of the Consciousness who is the illuminator. Though we think that body perceives objects through its sense organs, in reality it is the Self or abstract intelligence that perceives the objects though a person thinks that he or she does. Perception of an object implies the assumption of its shape by the intellect.**

**Ashtavakra remarks that since in sleep there are no thoughts it should bring Self-Realization. The king replies that in sleep the mind is abstracted but it is veiled by the darkness of sleep and rendered unfit for illumining thoughts.**

**Abstract Intelligence   The three states, namely, Samadhi, sleep and the momentary instant of cognition of objects, are characterized by absence of disturbance. Absolute Reality is manifest in Samadhi; a void or unmanifest condition distinguishes sleep and diversity is the characteristic of cognition in wakefulness. The illuminant is however the same all through and is always unblemished. Therefore it is said to be abstract intelligence.**

**In Samadhi and sleep states their experience persists unbroken for some appreciable period and can be recapitulated after waking up. The experience of cognition because of its fleeting nature goes unrecognized. But samadhi and sleep also cannot be recognized when they are only fleeting.**

**Distinction between sleep and Samadhi   There are two states of mind: (1) Illumination and (2) Consideration. Illumination is association of the mind with external objects and is unqualified by the limitations of objects. Consideration is deliberation on the object seen and the deliberation is qualified by the limitations pertaining to the objects seen; the objects are clearly identified or defined only after the deliberation. Deliberation is again of two kinds: the one is the actual experience and is said to be fresh, whereas the other is cogitation over the former and is called memory. The mind always functions in these two ways.**

**Dreamless slumber (*Sushupti*) is characterized by the illumination of sleep alone and is ignorance and the experience continues unbroken for a time; whereas the wakeful state is characterized by deliberation repeatedly broken up by thoughts and therefore it is said not to be ignorance. Sleep is a state of nescience though it consists of illumination alone yet it is said to be ignorance for the same reason as a light though luminous is said to be insentient.**

***Samadhi is simply absence of thoughts*. Such a state prevails in sleep and at odd moments of wakefulness. Yet, it is not called Samadhi proper, because all the tendencies of the mind are still there in a latent state, ready to manifest the next instant. The infinitesimal moment of seeing an object is not tainted by deliberation on its qualities and is exactly like Samadhi.**

**Fleeting Samadhi is indeed being experienced by all, even in their busy moments; but it passes unnoticed by them, for want of familiarity with it.  Every instant free from thoughts and musings in the wakeful state is the condition of Samadhi.**

**But in Samadhi, Brahman, the Supreme Consciousness, is continuously glowing. She is the one that engulfs time and space, is the destroyer of void, and the pure being - How can She be the ignorance of sleep? Therefore sleep is not the end-all and the be-all."**

**The cycle of births and deaths is caused by ignorance which displays itself as pleasure and pain and yet is only a dream and unreal. Being so, the wise say that it can be ended by knowledge i.e. the wisdom born of realization: viz., "I am That".**

**Only Savikalpa Samadhi can eradicate ignorance.  Nirvikalpa Samadhi can never do it because Nirvikalpa Samadhi is the mere experience of that which is an unqualified expanse of intelligence which is in harmony with everything (including ignorance). It is like the canvas used in painting; the canvas remains the same whatever picture may be painted on it. Unqualified knowledge is simple light; the objects are manifest by and in it.**

**But in Savikalpa state there is a contamination of thoughts but that state itself is not ignorance or delusion.  Pure intelligence (God) in His insentient aspect functions as Maya projecting ignorance as creation. The original cause lies in the knowledge of perfection in the Self.**

**Why fall into Nirvikalpa Samadhi, without gaining the fruit of its wisdom! Even if he should experience it a hundred times it will not liberate the individual. Therefore momentary Samadhis in the state of wakefulness are fruitless.**

**Nirvikalpa Samadhi is characterized by the experience of the true Self alone, namely, Pure Intelligence. Though eternal and resplendent even ordinarily, this Abstract Intelligence is as if it did not exist. Abstract Intelligence is the background on which the phenomena are displayed, and it must certainly manifest itself in all its purity, in they absence, although its appearance may look new at first. It remains unrecognized because it is not distinguished from the phenomena displayed by it. On their being eliminated it becomes apparent. This in short is the method of Self-Realization.**

**Desire for liberation    God inherent as the self is pleased by meritorious actions which if continued through several births (even millions) the desire for liberation dawns. To be born a sentient being requires good luck; even so to acquire a human body requires considerable merit; while it is out of the ordinary for human beings to be endowed with both virtuous tendencies and sharp intellect. Note that human beings form but a small fraction of the animate world, while most human beings are little more than animals, being ignorant of good and bad, and of right and wrong. A few learned people long for heaven after death. Of the remaining few, most of them have their intellects bedimmed by Maya and cannot comprehend the oneness of all (the Creator and creation). Some people go beyond this but many know only the theory and waste their time in fallacious logic. Only those who transcend Maya and please the Goddess of the Self with their devotion can discern well and happily. They then become established in transcendental Oneness and become absorbed.**

**Janaka then told him the scheme of liberation which is essentially the same as what has been stataed in the beginning (see the First Story).**

**Different classes of Jnanis   Dattatreya further explains why different jnanis behave differently.  Dividing jnanis into three classes: (1) the best, (2) middle class and (3) the lowest he explains that:**

**The lowest class of jnanis, though they have achieved Self-realization yet they are influenced by the pleasures and pains accruing to them according to their *prarabdha* (past karma).**

**Jnanis of the the middle class however even while reaping the fruits of their past karma are firmer in their internal happiness like men inebriated with drink.**

**Jnanis of the highest order are never detached from the enjoyment of their bliss even if confronted with a million times more *prarabdha*; they are not surprised at the most unnatural and miraculous happenings; they are not elated by the greatest pleasures, nor depressed by the worst miseries. They are always peaceful and calm within, although they appear to act like common folk.**

**These differences are due to the differences in their intellects and to the degrees of development of Jnana (wisdom). Their activities depend on their predispositions as determined by their past karma. But all their actions are like those of a drunken man.**

**There are differences in states of *jnana* characterized by the aspects and attitudes of intellect and the varieties in its activities" Such differences are quite obvious in Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver) and Siva (the Destroyer) who are jnanis by nature. That does not mean that jnana (realization) admits of variety. These attitudes depend on their *vasanas* (dispositions) and environments. They are Lords of the universe and all-knowing. Their *jnana* is pure and uncontaminated by what they do. Whether a *jnani* is fair or dark in complexion, his *jnana* neither shares these qualities nor the qualities of the mind. As an example we have atri and his sons, Vasishta, Sanak, Sananadan, Sanatkumar, Sanatsujata, Nartada, Ushanas Shukra, Brihaspati, Vyasa, king Janaka and so on who are *jnanis* with differing temperaments.**

**Three types of *vasanas*   There are three types of predispositions or *vasanas*:  (1) Aparadha (fault) is the disposition to doubt the teachings of the Guru and the holy books, (2) Karma (action)    disposition to be unable to enter the stage of contemplation necessary for annihilating the *vasanas*. However well-taught they cannot grasp the teachings because their minds are cramped with predispositions, and (3) Kama (desire). This third group is the most common, consisting of the victims of desire who are always obsessed with the sense of duty leading to a desire to work for some end.**

**Of the three typical *vasanas* mentioned above the *vasana* of action is the most potent and is said to be same as ignorance. He whose mind clings to the ignorance of the necessity of work cannot hope for realization even if Shiva offers to instruct him. Similarly also the person who has the fault of marked indifference to or misunderstanding of the teachings cannot attain realisation. (NB: This discussion applies to *jnanis* and not aspirants.)**

**The *vasana* due to desire is not a very serious obstruction to realization, and if one is free from the fault of mistrust of the Master’s teachings (*Apraadha*), is destroyed by the practice of contemplation. Dispassion need not be very marked in this case. Such people need not repeatedly engage in the study of Scriptures or the receiving of instructions from the Master, but straightaway pass into meditation and fall into samadhi, the consummation of the highest good. They live evermore as Jivanmuktas (emancipated even while alive).**

**Those who are free from all *vasanas* and particularly from the least trace of action-*vasana* are the best of the *jnanis*. They are sages with subtle and clear intellect have not considered it worth while to eradicate their desire etc., by forcing other thoughts to take their place because desires do not obstruct realisation. Therefore their desires continue to manifest even after realization as before it. Neither are they tainted by such *vasanas*. They are said to be emancipated and diverse-minded.**

**On the other hand, a man only slightly affected by these two *vasanas*, and much more so by desires or ambitions will, by repeated hearing of the holy truth, discussion of the same and contemplation on it surely reach the goal though only with considerable difficulty and after a long lapse of time. Such a sage's activities will be small because he is entirely engrossed in his efforts for realisation. (Note. - His activities will be confined to the indispensable necessities of life.)  A sage of this class has by his long practice and rigorous discipline controlled his mind so well that predispositions are totally eradicated and the mind is as if dead. He belongs to the middle class in the scheme of classification of sages and is said to be a sage without mind. Therefore he is not affescted by *Prarabdha* (past *karma*).**

**"The last class and the least among the sages are those whose practice and discipline are not perfect enough to destroy mental predispositions. Their minds are still active and the sages are said to be associated with their minds. They are barely *jnanis* and not *jivanmuktas* as are the other two classes. They appear to share the pleasures and pains of life like any other man and will continue to do so till the end of their lives. They will be emancipated after death.**

**The *prarabdha* of jnanis is still active and sprouts in the mind but only to be burnt up by the steady flame of jnana and since these are scorched at their source there is neither pain nor pleasure.**

**"*Jnanis* of the highest order however, are seen to be active because they voluntarily bring out the *vasanas* from the depth of the mind and allow them to run out. Their action is similar to that of a father sporting with his child, moving its dolls, laughing at the imagined success of one doll over another, and appearing to grieve over the injury to another and so on. The *vasanas* not inimical to realization are not weeded out by the best class of jnanis because they cannot seek new ones to crowd the old out. Therefore the old ones continue until they are exhausted.  Thus you find among them some highly irritable, some lustful and others pious and dutiful, and so on.**

**"Now, the lowest order of jnanis still under the influence of their minds know that there is no truth in the objective universe. Their *samadhi* is not different from that of the rest.**

**Samadhi is being aware of the Self, and nothing else.  It should not be confounded with the Nirvikalpa (undifferentiated) state, for this state is very common and frequent as has been pointed out in the case of momentary *samadhis*.  Every one is experiencing the Nirvikalpa state, though unknowingly. But such unrecognized *samadhis* are of no use. This experience alone does not confer any lasting benefit. But one may apply the experience to reach Sahaja-samadhi state (which is perpetual) and conduct the practical affairs of life .**

**About Hathayogis   A similar state of unrecognized Samadhi becomes possible to the hatha yogis also but they cannot remain in such a state. In the *jnani's* samadhi, both the veil of ignorance and perturbation of thoughts are removed. In the hatha yogi's samadhi, though the Self is naturally free from the two obstacles, yet it remains hidden by the veil of ignorance. The same is torn off by the *jnani* in the process of his contemplation. For a *jnani*, the Self shines in its full effulgence like the Sun unobstructed in the heavens whereas for a hathayogi the mind being associated with *sattva* (quality of brightness) acts in *samadhi* as a thin veil (like light mist) for the self-effulgent principle which differs from sleep only in that in sleep it is like the sun of self covered by dark dense clouds.**

**This is how the sages describe samadhi. “Samadhi is absolute knowledge uncontaminated by objects. Such is the state of the best *jnanis* even when they take part in the affairs of the world." Since the middle class of jnanis have already destroyed their minds, there are no objects for them. Their state is known as the supramental one. The mind is agitated when it assumes the shape of those objects which it mistakes for real and unagitated otherwise. Therefore the latter state alone is supramental.  Since a jnani of the highest order can engage in several actions at the same time and yet remain unaffected, he is always many-minded and yet remains in unbroken Samadhi (*Sahajasamadhi*). His is absolute knowledge free from objects.**

**(Tripura rahasya also contains chapters on Vidya Gita and a chapter which gives dialogue between Prince Hemangada and a Bramarakshasa. But the contents are not very different from what has been summarized earlier.)**

## TRIPURA DEVI AND THE TANTRIC CONNECTION

**We have seen that Dattatreya we worship today is in the image created by the Puranas through the myths of his birth stories.  The earliest image of Dattatreya presented in Mahabharata as preceptor of Sahasrarjuna is that of a yogi sage and Siddha powerful enough to confer boons on the king.  Between these two images lies the image of Dattatreya as a Tantric guru or deity as suggested by stories of his appearance with woman indulging in amorous activuties and eating meat.**

**It appears that Dattatreya worship was adopted by Natha sect which was an offshoot of Sahajayana sect which itself is rooted in the Buddhist sects. Thus it is not surprising that Dattatreya recommends worship of Devi in the form of Tripura Devi and assigns Her highest attaributes even identifying her as Brahman as Consciousness and creator of the universe as can be seen from the following statements in Tripura Rahasya:**

**Ch I (19-22). Being thus requested, Datta Guru satisfied himself as to the fitness of Parasurama, whose zeal for and devotion to Tripura worship were intense; and he duly initiated him into the method of Her worship.**

**Ch  I  (71-72)   Therefore that Tripura, the Supreme Force, the Being of all beings, the one consciousness of Siva, who abides as the Self of self, should be worshipped sincerely, exactly as taught by the Guru. The fore-runner of such worship is devotion and praiseworthy earnestness. That is why *mahatmya* of Devi Tripura was explained to you so that you are endowed with *Vichara* which is the only way to attain the highest Good when it takes root.**

**Ch VII  ( 79-93)  The universe manifests in all its variety in Devi Tripura, as if reflected in a self-luminous mirror. The reflection cannot be apart from the mirror and is therefore one with it.  Siva, Vishnu etc, conceptualized as bodies cannot be considered as one superior to the other since such concepts are applicable only to lower order of beings.**

**Ch IX  (Regarding mother Tripura Devi): O*ne can know the mother only if one knows the Self.* This self is within you but it is neither visible nor can be described. It can be realized with the help of pure intellect. *Therefore first the intellect must be made pure and then only nature of the Self should be investigated.***

**Ch XIV   (44-45)  Such illumination is Her Transcendental Majesty Tripura, the Supreme. She is called Brahma in the Vedas, Vishnu by the Vaishnavites, Siva by the Shaivaites, and Shakti by the Shaktas. There is indeed nothing but She (who is the illuminant and the universal Consciousness). Just as the image is part and parcel of the clear, smooth, compact and one mirror, so also the universe as part and parcel of the perfect, solid and unitary consciousness, namely the Self.**

**Ch  XVIII  (127-130)  Until these two blemishes are washed away by the holy waters of investigation into the Self, neither I, nor Brahma the Creator, nor Vishnu, nor Siva, nor even Sri Tripura the Goddess of Wisdom, can help that person to be emancipated. Therefore, surmount these two hurdles and remain eternally happy.**

**Ch  XIX  (51-56)  Her transcendental Majesty, the absolute-Consciousness Tripura originally pictured the whole universe in Her being, like images in a mirror. She took up the individuality, named Hiranyagarbha the golden egg (the Creator) that contained the embryonic individuals. Considering the predispositions of the (the embryonic individuals enclosed in that egg, She unfolded the Scriptures - the reservoir of sublime truths - for the fulfillment of desires. Since the embryonic individuals were full of unfulfilled desires Hiranyagarbha began to think out the means of their fulfillment. He elaborated a scheme of cause and effect, of actions and fruits, and consequently subjecting the individuals born later on to revolve in that wheel of cause and effect. They take different shapes and are placed in different environments consistently with their predispositions. After passing through innumerable species, the individual evolves as a human being owing to the merit he has accumulated. At first he will take to selfish pursuits. …….**

**Thus we see that in Tripura Rahasya in contrast with other Datta-Tradition texts like Gurucharitra etc, where Lord Shiva is the preferred deity we have Devi as preferred deity.**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION  -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**PART III – FIRST AVATAR: SHRIPAD SHRIVALLABH**

**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

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**SHRIPAD SHRIVALLABH**

**Our main and really speaking the only source of information about Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasimha Saraswati, the first two avatars of Shri Dattatreya, is the famous book Gurucharitra. It is a holy book in the Dattatreya Tradition and a spiritually powerful composition in Marathi verse by Saraswati Gangadhar on the life and teachings of the two saints.  Saraswati Gangadhar was the great-great-grandson of Sayandeo one of the householder disciples of Shri Narasimha Saraswati. He wrote it about a century after Shri Narasimha Saraswati’s *Samadhi* in 1458 AD. The book extols Guru-worship through a number of stories in their life.**

**BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE**

**Shripad Shrivallabh was born in 1320 AD in a Brahmin family at Pithapur (Pithapuram) in Andhra Pradesh. It is now in the Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. It is located on Hyderabad-**[**Vishakhapattanam**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishakhapattanam) **railway line and is about 10–12 km from Samalkot junction.**

**In Pithapur there used to live a Brahmin by the name Appalaraju Sarma belonging to the *Apastambha* branch. His wife Sumati was a *pativrata* (i.e. chaste lady who worships and obeys her husband).  On one *Amavasya* day (day when there is no moon) a *Shraddha* ritual (annual offering to ancestors) was being performed in the house when Shri Dattatreya came in the disguise of a mendicant. Though it is customary to feed the Brahmins invited for the ritual before anybody else eats in the house, Sumati gave alms to Shri Dattatreya who was very pleased and showed her his subtle form of the Trinity. Sumati rushed to him and fell at his feet and offered sincere obeisance. Dattatreya said to her, "Oh mother, ask whatever you desire and you will get it."  Sumati praised him and said that since he had addressed her as mother let it turn out to be true. She said that she had conceived many sons but only two had survived and those too were useless because they were lame and blind. She prayed that she should have a son who was a sage like him. Dattatreya gave her the boon with the condition that she should always listen to her son and vanished, leaving the woman wondering. She told this unusual happening to her husband who was happy with the realization that Shri Dattatreya himself had come and would take birth as his son.  Sumati begged pardon for giving alms before the Brahmins were served, but her husband said that they were fortunate to have had a chance to feed Shri Dattatreya, an act by which the forefathers would be content.**

**Very soon Sumati was pregnant and in due time gave birth to a son. Though not mentioned n Gurucharitra, his birthday is celebrated on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada, the sixth month according to the Hindu calendar. It is also the day of Ganesh Chaturthi, the birthday of Ganapati. His horoscope predicted that the boy would become a great *Tapaswi* (a sage performing penance) who would be a teacher to the world and capable of initiation of disciples. He was named "Shripad", because Dattatreya himself had taken avatar in the form of the boy in order to benefit devotees.**

**When the boy was seven years old the Brahmin performed his thread ceremony.  The boy studied Vedas and became expert in *Mimansa*, *Tarka* (logic) and other Shastras. The boy used to advice about the code of personal and public behaviour and about the atonements for different types of sins to all.  He gave discourses on the various commentaries on Vedanta to the Brahmins.**

***Leaves home on pilgrimage*   When the boy was sixteen his parents began contemplating his marriage but he refused and said that he is a detached person, a celibate (*Brahmachari*) and wishes to go north to do penance and practice yoga. Remembering the instructions of Shri Dattatreya his father had to let him go.  But he also lamented about his hopes that he would be their support in old age since his elder brothers were infirm. Both mother and father wept with grief and fell unconscious. Shripad brought them back to senses, looked benevolently at his two brothers who, with his power, instantly became free of their infirmities and received the knowledge of Vedas, Shastras etc. After instructing the two brothers to take care of the parents and accepting their obeisance, Shripad Shrivallabh left for Varanasi. From there he went to Badarikashram and then to Gokarna Mahabaleshwar on the west coast in Karnataka, the place where the Shivalinga given to Ravana by Shiva himself is embedded. After staying there for three years Shripad Shrivallabh went to Shri Shailam where he stayed for four months and then came to Kuravapur on the banks of river Krishna.**

**It is notable that Shripad Shrivallabh did not become a Sanyasi but lived like an *avadhut* (ascetic).**

**Gurucharitra states that in this Kali age (Kaliyuga) persons born in Brahmin families forgot their prescribed code of conduct and lived a life improper to Brahmins. This avatar was to save the religion by reviving the code of conduct and to protect the devotees.**

**FOUNDATION FOR THE NEXT AVATAR**

***Boon to Ambica*    At Kuravapur the foundation for the next avatar was laid. It happened like this.**

**There was a widow named Ambica whose son was a very dull boy though his late father was a learned person. He forgot immediately whatever he learnt. The father had died broken-hearted due to his son’s dullness. All neighbours used to tease and taunt the boy. The mother and son had to resort to begging for livelihood. Fed up with that kind of life both decided to commit suicide by drowning in the river. When they came to the river they saw Shripad Shrivallabh taking his bath. They went to him and told him of their decision requesting that they should not be stained by the sin of suicide. Shripad Shrivallabh felt compassion for them and told them to observe a *vrata* (a routine with austerity) called *Shanipradosha* which involves worship of Shiva so that she would get a good son like himself at least in the next birth. With his benevolent hands he blessed the boy who became instantly intelligent and learned. Ambica and her son left and spent their life as instructed. In the course of time Ambica died; she was reborn at Karanja as Ambabhavani and became the mother of the second avatar Shri Narasimha Saraswati about which we shall read later.**

***Boon to Washer-man*    While Shripad Shrivallabh was staying at Kuravapur on the banks of the Krishna River, he used to come to the river for the customary thrice daily bath.  A washer man used to visit him daily to make his obeisance and prostrate before him. One day Shripad Shrivallabh casually remarked to him to go and reign as a king. The washer man kept these words in mind.**

**One day a Muslim king came to the river with his retinue for enjoying an outing with his well dressed and ornamented wives. The washer man felt jealous of the king and said to himself, "Which deity could this king have worshipped and which guru he must be having to be able to enjoy such wealth!" When the washer man visited that day Shripad Shrivallabh read his mind and told him that unless one satisfies one's desires the mind does not get cleansed of unfulfilled desires and that causes troubles in future births. Therefore he should take the next birth as a king in a Muslim dynasty. Shripad Shrivallabh further told him that he himself also would be reborn as Narasimha Saraswati and they would meet in the next birth.**

**[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:KuravpurDhyanSthan.jpg)**

**Place of meditation of Shripad Shrivallabh**

**SAMADHI**

**Shripad Shrivallabh took *Samadhi* at Kuravapur on twelfth day in the dark half of the month of Ashwin. It is celebrated now as Guru-Dwadashi. The year of *Samadhi* is given as 1350 AD but there is considerable uncertainty about the date as this makes his age at the time of *Samadhi* as only thirty years (Ref:P.N.Joshi p 46). Before taking *Samadhi* he promised his disciples of his continued presence at Kuravapur. This is evident from the next story.**

**APPEARANCE AFTER SAMADHI**

**Gurucharitra gives an instant of how even after Samadhi Shripad Shrivallabh helped one of his devotees, a Brahmin merchant by the name Vallabhesh.  The latter was proceeding to Kuravapur with the intention of giving meals to Brahmins. Some thieves accompanied him as co-travellers to Kuravapur and killed him one night while he slept. But Shripad Shrivallabh rushed there with his yogic powers and with his trident killed all the thieves except one who pleaded for mercy, not having been part of the plot. Shripad Shrivallabh revived the devotee and vanished. In the morning the devotee woke up and found what had happened through the surviving co-traveller. Devotees feel the presence of Shripad Shrivallabh at Kuravapur even today.**

**The above Vallabhesh is considered to be founder of the Hedgewar family in which Dr. K. B. Hedgewar who founded the** [**Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashtriya_Swayamsevak_Sangh) **belonged to the 9th generation from Vallabhesh.  A temple constructed according to his guidelines was constructed in Pithapuram and is being maintained by Sripada Srivallbha Mahasansthanam.**

**We see in Shripad Shrivallabh a great Sanyasi, dispassionate and compassionate.  He does not stay away from people as many Sanyasis do but encounters people and graces them.  There are some who assert that the Dattatreya avatar was to maintain the caste system. But this seems to be a prejudiced view of people who identify the Hindu way of life with caste system. For, we see from the study of the activities of Shripad Shrivallabh as well as of the other avatars that they gave their grace to all irrespective of not only caste but of religion as well. This is the true picture of Shri Dattatreya who, for the past several millennia has graced and been a guru to countless persons.**

**ABOUT KURAVAPUR**

**Kuravapur is also known as Kuruvapur, Kurugadda or Gurudweepam.  During Nizam days this was known as Kuruvalaya. Situated in the state of Karnataka in India it has become a famous place of lord Dattatreya on account of Shripad Shrivallabh.**

**It is an island in the Krishna River hence one can reach there only by a hired boat.  The difficulties in reaching Kuravapur have not prevented devotees from visiting it in large numbers.  Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) spent the Chaturmasa period (the four monsoon months)” here in the year of 1911. His disciples Shri Rangavadhuta and Gulavani Maharaj were also performed penance here. Important places at Kuravapur are: Striped Shrivallabh *paduka* mandir, a 1000-year old Vata-vriksha (banyan tree), the cave where Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati performed penance and the Dattatreya temple at Sri Vithalbaba ashram.**

**Shripada Shrivallabha stayed here in his later life. The story of the Vallabhesh planning to feed about 1000 Brahmins shows that the village must have been quite big. Now (2006 AD) the population has reduced and there are many fields in between the temple and the village. The village is at one end of the island and the temple is at the other end.**

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**Shripad Shrivallabha *padukas* at Kuruvapur**

**How to reach Kuravapur:  There are two routes to reach Kuravapur: via Raichur in Karnataka state and via Makthal in Andhra Pradesh state.**

**Raichur is about 12 hours train journey from Pune. At Raichur one can hire a bus/rickshaw towards a place called Atkur 40 km away. There is also a six times daily KSRTC bus service from Raichur to Atkur, most buses ending at the bank of Krishna. At Atkur one can hire a small elliptical boat called *theppa* or *butti* to cross the Krishna river and reach Kuravapura at a fee of about Rs 20/-.**

**Makthal (Mahaboobnagar district, Andhra Pradesh) is 68 Km from Mahaboobnagar and 168 Km from Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Mahaboobnagar is also connected by rail route. One has to go by bus either from Mahaboobnagar or by Hyderabad-Raichur bus via Mahaboobnagar and get down at Makthal. One has to hire an auto or taxi (jeep) from Makthal to the river bank 17 Km away. There are two locations on the river bank where Butti or small boats can be hired. One is Panchdeo Pahad and another one is behind Vithal baba ashram (1Km from ashram). One can catch *theppa* to reach this island.**

**Lodging and boarding facilities are not available at Kuruvapur.  It is recommended to reach in the morning hours and return in the evening by 5.00 p.m.  Pilgrims should packed food and snacks etc.  If at all want to stay at nights, the temple Priests will arrange food (with prior intimation after reaching there) for a fee and the pilgrims have to sleep in the premises of the mandir.**

**NOTE:  The Government of Andhra Pradesh is going to construct “JOORALA PROJECT” which is only about 10 Km distance from Kuravapur. The people who are staying in the surrounding area are telling that the Kuravapur Kshetra will be submerged after the project is completed.**

**His role as an avatar**

**Shripad Shrivallabha was born at a time when the region was being attacked by Muslims  Unlike earlier invaders who ultimately became assimilated in the Hindu way of life these invaders did not stop at acquiring the kingdoms but began to forcibly convert people to the Muslim religion, destroy temples, idols and statues.  The practice of the earlier Muslim invaders who invaded mostly the northern regions after conquering a kingdom was to put to death all fighting men and take others as slaves and sell them. Fortunately the Moghuls invaders did not resort to this. Majority of the Hindu population was spared from death and slavery but was subjected to Jizia tax customarily laid on non-Muslims. Instead, persons experienced in administration and governance were inducted in the ruling of the conquered kingdoms. Majority of such people were of course Brahmins and the upper class whose daily routine now changed from the orthodox and adjusted to that of the new rulers. There was naturally a cultural mixing between the Hindu-Muslim communities.**

**The Hindu Muslim situation in the Maharashtra-Karnataka-Andhra is summarized by V.B. Kher in his book “Sai Baba – His Divine glimpses Ch 6, See Bibliography).**

**The Muslim invasion of south started in 1296 when Allauddin Khilji invaded the Yadava kingdom of Devagiri, defeated Ramdeva. It was renamed as Daulatabad. After a lot of internal struggles the Khiljis and Tughlakhs were driven out and in 1347 Hasan became the king, naming himself Abdu-Muzaffar Allauddin Bahaman Shah and the kingdom was known as Bahamani kingdom. We see that even before Samadhi, Muslim rule was well entrenched in the region. The incidence of the washer-man watching wistfully the Muslim king’s picnic also indicates this.**

**In 1300 AD the Sufi saint of Delhi sent 700 Sufi saints belonging to different orders to Deccan. These saints settled in various parts of Deccan. The leader of this group Mutajabuddin Zarzari Zar Baksh settled on the outskirts of Daulatabad. After his death in 1309 his elder brother was sent by Nizam-ud-din Chishti with another band of Sufi saints, whose mission was to spread Islam in the Maharashtra-Karnataka region. Many disciples were attracted towards them and many but not all converted to Islam. Their influence stabilized Muslim rule in Maharashtra. Once this happened, conversion which was voluntary took an aggressive form. The *Dargas* and shrines established by these saints are still popular pilgrimage centres for both Hindus and Muslims.**

**Many Sufis became devotes of Shri Dattatreya. Dattatreya came to be known to the Muslims as Shah Faqir or Shahdatta Alam Prabhu and had many Muslim devotees. We see two centuries later the great Dattatreya devotee Janardanswami (b. 1504 AD)becoming the disciple of Chand Bodhale a Sufi of Kadaria sub-sect.  Saint Eknath was Janardanswami’s disciple and both were given *darshan* by Dattatreya in the form of a Malang i.e. a Muslim fakir.**

**Sri Guru Datha Threya Baba Budangiri Dargah is said to be the oldest Sufi shrine in Chikmagaluru District, Karnataka. The available history says that one Dada Hayath, his real name being ‘Hazrat Shah Jamer Allah Mazarabi’, considered to be a direct disciple of the Prophet, was sent to India in 11th century from Saudi Arabia to spread the message of Islam and peace, in true tradition of Sufism. The historical records tell us that the shrine of Baba Budhan was patronized by both Hindu as well as Muslim kings, both of whom endowed it with large land grants. In edicts issued by the Hindu rulers of Mysore the shrine was referred to, as the Sri Dattatreya Swami Baba Budhan Peetha (‘The Monastery of the Revered Lord Dattatreya Baba Budhan’), while the Muslim custodians of the shrine were granted the honorific title of *jagadguru* or ‘Teachers of the World’.  They were, in addition, the only Muslim religious heads to be exempted from personal appearance in the civil courts of the state.  This shows the cultural exchange as well as the influence of Dattatreya in the Sufi sect. (*Ref* Baba Budangiri: Internet URL see Bibliography)**

**We shall speak more about Sufi aspect in the next part on the biography of the second avatar Shri Narasimha Saraswati.**

**We see that while Shripad Shrivallabha did not move among people he was aware of the Muslim influence in its early stage and laid foundation for the second avatar that carried his work further.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**PART IV – SECOND AVATAR: SHRI NARASIMHA SARASWATI**

**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

**SHRI NARASIMHA SARASWATI**

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**Shri Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1458 A.D.) was born at a place called Lad Karanja in the Akola District in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Karanja station lies on the Murtijapur-Yavatamal section of the railway. This place was identified as Shri Narasimha Saraswati’s birthplace by Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembeswami) during his visit. He felt the presence of Shri Narasimha Saraswati in one of the castles (Wada) there, which was later confirmed by a vision. A temple called Gurumandir has been built there and is active in religious and social welfare activities in the North Maharashtra (Vidarbha) region in the past 70 years.**

**In the Gurucharitra Saraswati Gangadhar has used the character of Siddha said to be a yogi disciple of Shri Narasimha Saraswati to narrate the life story of Shripad Shrivallabha and Shri Narasimha Saraswati to an aspirant devotee Namadharak who is no other than Saraswati Gangadhar himself.  (People who begot children by the grace of Shri Narasimha Saraswati used to name them after him. Namdharak means "holder of the name of the Guru").**

# BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

***His Birth* Ambica, the woman who had received the boon from Shripad Shrivallabh that she would conceive a great son in the next birth, was reborn as Ambabhavani in a Brahmin family at Lad Karanja. She was given in marriage to Madhava, a Brahmin and a devotee of Shiva living in the same village. By the traits carried from earlier birth Ambabhavani continued her *Shanipradosha* *vrata*.  In the course of time she gave birth to a son who instead of crying uttered the sound Aum at birth. Astrologers predicted that the boy would grow to be a great person, a celibate *sanyasi* and a Guru to the world. The boy was officially named Shaligramdeo but was called in practice by the name Narahari.  Up to the age of seven the boy did not speak a word except Aum. The parents were worried about his future and how to perform the thread ceremony mandatory for Brahmin boys.**

**One day the boy communicated by signs that he would speak after the thread ceremony and brought a small iron cup which he had turned into gold by his touch. The parents realized that the boy was an avatar and had divine powers.  They arranged his thread ceremony on a grand scale for which the entire village was invited. Everybody was wondering how the boy's father would teach *Gayatri Mantra* to the dumb boy. But after the father told him the Mantra in his ear and as part of the ritual, it was time to ask for alms from the mother, when the boy surprised everybody by singing the first hymn from Rigveda in a clear voice. Then he sang hymns from Yajurveda and Samaveda also confirming that the boy was an avatar.**

**The boy begged to his parents that he should be allowed to go away on a pilgrimage.  The parents were very sad hearing this and told him that they had hoped he would be their support in their old age.  His mother also argued that “It is proper that a man must pass through the four stages of life namely, Childhood, Celibacy, family life and old age (to be spent in forests) and *sanyasa* should be adopted only after enjoying the family life.**

***Advice to his Mother*   On this the boy gave his mother a sound philosophical advice as follows: “This body is a temporary affair, and passage of every day brings one nearer to his death. Like fish in a small pond which some day is going to become dry people live in a carefree manner not bothering about what would happen to them after death. Age eats away the lifespan therefore the wise should accumulate good karmas from young age itself. One must spend every day accumulating good *karmas*. Every day lost without them is a wasted day. The god of death Yama has no compassion, therefore one must continue doing good actions. ”**

**To console her he gave a boon that she would beget three sons and also a daughter. His mother agreed to let him go on the condition that he should stay until the first son was born.**

**So Narahari remained at home and taught Vedas and *Shastras* to even older seekers of knowledge who wondered at this prodigy. His parents worshipped him as if he was a family deity. About nine months later his mother gave birth to beautiful twin boys. After the twins were three months old Narahari, then only eight years of age, left the home for going to the Badri forest, promising his parents they would get two more sons and a daughter. He promised to visit them thirty years later. The whole village accompanied his parents to bid goodbye to the young boy, the small aspirant. Before parting he reminded his mother of her earlier birth and gave her a vision of Shri Dattatreya and gave them assurance that whenever they remember him he would be there with them.**

# RENUNCIATION (*SANYASA*)

***In Varanasi*   Before going to the Badri forest Narahari went to Varanasi where he spent his time practicing yoga and meditation. People used to wonder at this small boy bathing in the Ganges at Manikarnika Ghat thrice daily and spending his time in yogic practices and austerities. One old *sanyasi* by name Krishna Saraswati, who had attained Self-realization, was attracted towards this boy and requested him to be initiated as a *sanyasi* (renunciate) so that he could be empowered later to initiate and guide other aspirants in the spiritual path. Krishna Saraswati was the thirteenth in the lineage of Adi Shankaracharya belonging to the Shringeri branch. Narahari was named Narasimha Saraswati after renunciation and becoming a sanyasi. He stayed for some time in Varanasi and became well-known for his teaching of the Vedas and Shastras to eager students.**

***To Badri*  From Varanasi Shri Narasimha Saraswati went north to Badri forest with his disciples. From there he came to the Ganges near Calcutta, and travelling along the shores reached Prayag. There he initiated a very intelligent and devoted disciple called Madhava and named him Madhava Saraswati. He stayed in Prayag for some time and initiated many very good disciples out of which the main seven were Bal, Krishna, Upendra, Madhav, Sadanand, Dnyanjyoti, and the seventh was a siddha (a yogi with occult powers) who later met and narrated the stories about Shri Guru (as we shall call him now) to Saraswati Gangadhar, author of the Gurucharitra.**

# WANDERINGS TOWARDS THE SOUTH

***Visits parents*   From Prayag Shri Guru went towards the south. After thirty years of wandering Shri Guru returned to his place of birth and met his family (his parents and his brothers and sister Ratnai) as promised. By now people fully realized that they were meeting an avatar of Shri Dattatreya. Everybody in the town invited him for alms. He did not refuse anybody and satisfied their desire by going to their homes at the same time taking many self-forms by his yogic powers. When his parents prayed that they should obtain liberation he explained that when a person adopts sanyasa his forty-two generations become liberated.  He added that in final years they will live in Varanasi where death gives liberation.**

**When his sister Ratnai prayed to him for guidance he advised that serving one’s husband is the best spiritual path for women but foresaw by his divine powers that due to past bad karmas like setting quarrels among neighbouring couples and kicking a cow her husband will be a renunciate in later years and she would get afflicted by leucoderma.  He asked her to meet him at Papanashana Tirtha at Ganagapur when this happens. (Note: Leucoderma used to be considered as a contagious disease in those days. The term Kushtaroga is used loosely both for leucoderma as well as leprosy.)**

**From Karanja he came to Triambakeshwar (near Nasik) where he did pilgrimage along the banks of the river Godavari.  During this pilgrimage he came to Manjarica where he met a Brahmin named Madhavaranya, who was a devotee of Shri Narasimha (the fourth avatar of Vishnu with lion head and human body).  Madhavaranya used to mentally create His form and perform mental worship (*Manaspuja*). When he saw Shri Guru he saw in him the mental form of Shri Narasimha and immediately surrendered to Shri Guru and became his disciple.**

***Cured Brahmin’s colic*   Shri Guru then came to a place of pilgrimage called Vasarabrahmeshwar also along Godavari. While taking bath in the river he saw a Brahmin trying to commit suicide and stopped him from committing this unpardonable sin. The Brahmin told Shri Guru that he was suffering from intolerable colic whenever he ate.  He ate only once in a fortnight or even once a month out of this fear. He had eaten the previous day and was suffering with intolerable colic. Shri Guru promised him a cure. At that time the village official came there and made his obeisance to Shri Guru. He was a Brahmin named Sayandeo serving as local village chief for his livelihood under the Muslim ruler. Shri Guru instructed him to take the colic afflicted Brahmin and feed him sweets and fried food which would cure him of his colic.  Sayandeo promised to do as instructed and requested Shri Guru also to come for meals the next day along with his disciples. Next day, Sayandeo and his wife Jakhai worshipped Shri Guru and his disciples, and served food to all including the colic afflicted Brahmin. The Brahmin was instantly free of his disease and went away happy. Shri Guru noted the deep devotion of Sayandeo and gave him the boon that there would be in his lineage many devotees of Shri Guru.  It is the great-great-grandson of this Sayandeo that has composed the Gurucharitra.**

***Sayandeo saved from Muslim ruler*    Sayandeo praised Shri Guru as being Trimurti himself and prayed that he was serving the Muslim ruler who is notorious for killing Brahmins every year. The ruler has ordered to meet him the next day and was surely going to kill him. Shri Guru assured him that nothing would happen and asked him to visit the ruler without worrying. When the ruler saw Sayandeo he first became angry but Shri Guru frightened the ruler through a vision and thus Sayandeo was sent back with honours and gifts. (Historically, this Muslim ruler was Ahamadshah I, king of Bedar from Bahamani dynasty). Shri Guru then went south asking Sayandeo, who wanted to accompany him, to go back and lead a good family life. He promised that they would meet fifteen years later when he would be staying very near his village.**

***At Vaijnath*   Shri Guru then came to Vaijanath (Parli Vaijanath is in Marathwada and is one of the twelve *Jyotirlinga* places) with his disciples. Due to his growing fame many people came to him to become his disciples but most of them had worldly gains in mind. Shri Guru one day called all his disciples and asked them to go on pilgrimage. He gave them detailed instructions on the important places of pilgrimage and rivers which they should visit and asked them to meet him again at Shri Shailam. He then stayed incognito at Vaijanath for one year. (Only the Siddha remained with him throughout his journeys.) While at Vaijanath a Sanyasi came to him requesting to be accepted as a disciple. When asked how he became a *sanyasi* without a guru, he wept and told that he did have a guru but he had become disgruntled with him and had left hm. His complaint was that his guru gave him improper tasks which he did not like to do. This displeased his guru who said that he had not yet achieved a steadiness of mind. Because of this his guru did not tutor him in *Shastras* etc., hence he had come to Shri Guru seeking his guidance.**

**Shri Guru advised him that what he had done was like cutting one’s own nose to create a bad omen for others and was like defiling a holy place. One should never leave one's guru and illustrated his point through the story of Dhoumya Muni and his three disciples who were tested for complete devotion and surrender to their guru who assigned them difficult household tasks.  Only after they passed the tests did  Dhoumya Muni send them away with blessings to become famous later. The Sanyasi realized his mistake and sincerely repented. Noting his repentance Shri Guru graced him with knowledge and the Sanyasi returned to his guru. This is a lesson in the importance of guru-devotion in the spiritual path.**

# IN OUDUMBAR

***At Bhilawadi*   From Vaijanath Shri Guru came to Bhilawadi, a village on the banks of the river Krishna, about thirty kilometres from the city of Sangli. (This is the place from which Pune gets a major part of the milk supply now.) There is a famous temple of the goddess Bhuvaneshwari in Bhilwadi.  Shri Guru used to live on the opposite (right) bank under an Oudumbar tree (a tree of fig family). A dull Brahmin boy from Kolhapur was praying to the goddess for boon of intelligence and when prayers failed he cut and offered his tongue at her feet. She instructed in a vision that he should meet the powerful yogi staying under the Oudumbar tree across the river. He did so and out of compassion Shri Guru put his benevolent hand on the youth's head and immediately he not only regained his tongue but became learned in Vedas and Shastras immediately. Shri Guru stayed in Bhilawadi for some time quietly, but how can such an effulgent personality remain hidden? His fame spread there too, and after spending the four monsoon months there he decided to leave Bhilawadi. The place where Shri Guru lived under the Oudumbar tree is itself now called Oudumbar and the *Paduka* (sandals) of Shri Guru are installed there. These Paduka are worshipped by those who have a spiritual goal in mind.**

# IN NRISIMHAPUR OR NARSOBAWADI

***Shri Guru comes to Amarapur*   From Bhilwadi Shri Guru came to Amarapur (now known as Ourawad) near the confluence of the rivers Panchaganga and Krishna, near the Shirol village and very near the erstwhile state of Kurundwad.  There is a temple of Amareshwar (Shiva) here where the sixty-four yoginis also reside and it is a centre of spiritual power. There are a number of holy spots around this place. Shri Guru made his camp on the other bank under an Oudumbar tree. He used to go occasionally for alms to Amareshwar. There was a poor but dedicated Brahmin of excellent character in Amarapur to whose house Shri Guru used to go for alms. The Brahmin had a creeper of beans in his front yard. The Brahmin used the beans for his subsistence whenever he could not get sufficient alms. One day Shri Guru told the Brahmin that his days of poverty were over and while returning after taking alms from the Brahmin’s house chopped off the creeper. His wife was struck with grief at the loss of a source of their food but the Brahmin was a stoic who said that the all-pervading God had made arrangements for subsistence of all creatures from a small ant to an elephant before creating them. Whatever happens is the result of our past *karmas*, therefore one should not unnecessarily feel grieved and blame others. He then dug the root of the creeper to throw it away and found a pot of gold coins buried there. Both happily went to Shri Guru and sang his praises. He gave them his blessings and warned them not to reveal their gain to anybody.**

***Sixty-four yoginis*   While Shri Guru lived at Amareshwar the sixty-four yoginis used to come to him at noontime and devoutly take him to their residence inside the river for worship and meals. The Brahmins in the village used to wonder how the yogi survived without alms as he did not usually go asking for them anywhere. They tried to keep a watch without results.**

**But once a boatman tending to his boat near the riverbank saw the sixty-four yoginis visiting Shri Guru and unobtrusively joined the group. When his presence was discovered and he was asked why he had come there the farmer told Shri Guru that he had casually come to see him and praised Shri Guru as being Lord Shiva himself with whose help one can cross this river of worldly existence to get liberated. Shri Guru, pleased at the devotion told him that his days of poverty were over but the day he revealed what he has witnessed he would die.  The boatman became a devout disciple. He used to serve Shri Guru daily and one day Shri Guru graced him by taking him to Varanasi, Gaya and Prayag by his yogic powers.**

***Revives a dead child* During his stay a Brahmin woman from the village Shirol, about ten kilometres away (a large sugar factory has been working at Shirol for some years) came to Shri Guru. She was being tortured by the spirit of a Brahmin whom, in a previous birth, she had owed money before his death. He used to cause her children to be stillborn. Local Brahmins had suggested to her to perform atonement rites to propitiate the spirit but she did not have enough money therefore she surrendered to Shri Guru who liberated the Brahmin from the spirit world. Blessed by Shri Guru the woman then conceived two boys.**

**Advice to child’s mother   At the time of the thread ceremony the younger boy died of tetanus. The woman was mad with grief and would not permit the body to be cremated. At that time Shri Guru came in the form of a Sanyasi and gave her sound advice which is worth knowing. He said, "Do not grieve out of ignorance. Who has remained permanently in this world? Who was it that died and who is it that is born? Wherefrom was it created? The whole process is like bubbles appearing momentarily on water. The body is formed when the five principles (earth, water, wind, fire and sky) come together and vanishes when they separate. The attributes of the five principles using the bonds of love create delusion and call that body as son, friend, wife etc. The sense organs are influenced by the three attributes Sattva, Raja and Tama and the actions are done accordingly. But the doer of the actions has to bear the responsibility for them. In this world all creatures are born according to their *karmas* and live in happiness or in sorrow according to their *karmas*. Nobody is free from the justice of the *karmas*. Man is dependent on the body which is controlled by death. Therefore a person as long as he has the body cannot claim to be independent. A wise person should not rejoice birth nor grieve death.**

**Conception occurs when the formless Brahman assumes a form which later becomes again formless after death. Body is like a bubble. Right from conception it is known as destructible. Body has to suffer as per one's *karmas*. Some die young, some in old age according to their *karmas*. Nobody has conquered death and *karmas*. Because of *Maya* people think that a particular person is father, son, mother, wife, friend etc. One cannot even call this body clean because its creation is accompanied with despicable substances like blood, flesh, faeces and urine.**

**As soon as one is born, his fate is inscribed inside his forehead and that decides which *karmas* he should enjoy and suffer in this birth. Nobody has conquered death and karmas and the body is not permanent. Shri Guru asked, “You yourself have taken birth many times as human, animal, bird and worms. When you were a human being, whose mother were you? Whose wife were you? Tell me that. Who were your parents in earlier lives? Why are you unnecessarily crying for your son? Which son and whose death? Why are you unnecessarily crying by delusion?"**

**All this advice of course did not have any effect on the mother who asked a cryptic question, “If you say fate is superior then why should we be devoted to God? Just as we go to the doctor when a person is ill we approach God and our Guru for their compassion.” The great Guru finally had to perform the miracle of reviving the child.**

***Narasobawadi*   Shri Guru now decided to leave Amarapur. He had lived at Amarapur for twelve years. He left his *Paduka* under the Oudumbar tree for worship instructing the sixty-four yoginis that they should make it their abode also. The place is now known as Nrisimhapur or Narasobawadi and is a place of pilgrimage for all devotees belonging to the Dattatreya tradition. The *Paduka* installed there are worshipped daily with regular rituals. This place is easily approachable from Sangli, Miraj, and Kolhapur. The Paduka are called *Manohar Paduka* and are worshipped for fulfilling worldly desires in contrast with the Paduka at Oudumbar which are worshipped with spiritual desire.**

**Importance of Oudumbar tree  One may well ask why Shri Guru prefers Oudumbar tree for residence. A mythological legend is told (in Gurucharitra) that when Vishnu took avatar of Narasimha and killed the demon Hiranyakashipu, (father of Vishnu's great devotee Prahlada) by tearing out his intestines with bare hands, the poison in the intestines caused inflammation to the fingers. Laxmi, consort of Vishnu brought fruits of Oudumbar tree and asked that the nails be inserted into the fruits. This caused the inflammation to subside immediately. Oudumbar tree is a peculiar tree of fig family which gets fruits without flowers. It is a medicinal tree and its extract, commercially available, is used in Ayurveda internally after children recover from an attack of chickenpox or measles to detoxify the body and regulate the disturbed system.**

# IN GANAGAPUR

**From Amarapur Shri Guru went to Ganagapur near the confluence (*Sangam*) of the river Bhima with river Amarja. Shri Guru camped at Sangam about three kilometres from the village Ganagapur without letting anybody know who he was.**

***Barren buffalo gives milk*   There were about hundred Brahmin families in Ganagapur. One very poor Brahmin used to live on alms supplemented by hiring out an old barren she-buffalo for carrying salty soil. Shri Guru used to go to this poor Brahmin’s house for alms in preference to the other rich families who used to wonder why he went to that poor Brahmin depriving himself of the good food they would have given. One day, the buffalo had not been hired and the Brahmin himself had not yet returned from his round for alms in the village when Shri Guru went to his house. He was welcomed by the Brahmin’s wife. She offered him a seat and requested him to wait until her husband returned with good food. Shri Guru asked her smilingly why she was saying there was no food when she could have served him milk since they had a buffalo. She politely told that the buffalo was barren, had never given milk and they were treating it like a he-buffalo hiring it out for carrying earth. But Shri Guru told her that she was bluffing and should immediately go and milk the buffalo. She developed a kind of faith on hearing these words. She took a vessel to milk the buffalo as suggested and was surprised to find that the buffalo really gave two vesselfuls of milk. Happy, the woman realized that her visitor was a Godly person. She warmed the milk and cooled it hurriedly because Shri Guru was in a hurry to go back. Shri Guru drank the milk with pleasure and blessed her saying her house would ever be full of wealth and they would live happily with their sons and grandsons. Shri Guru then went back to Sangam. When the Brahmin returned home he learnt about the miracle. He realized that Shri Guru must be an avatar. They then went to Sangam with Arati and worshipped Shri Guru who again blessed them.**

***Invitation to Ganagapur*   Next day when people came to hire the buffalo the Brahmin refused to give it on hire saying that the buffalo was now giving milk. This surprised everybody and the story reached the ears of the local ruler who inquired and learnt that a great Sanyasi had come and was living at Sangam and it was he who was responsible for the miracle.  He went to Shri Guru with a decorated palanquin all with fanfare and music. On meeting Shri Guru he prostrated before him and praising him profusely begged of him to come and bless the village of Ganagapur by making it his place of abode. Realizing that time had come to give up living incognito he agreed and was taken in a procession to Ganagapur with great pomp.**

***A Brahmarakshasa is liberated*   On entering the village he came near a deserted house with an Ashwattha (pipul or ficus religiosa) tree near it. The tree was the abode of a Brahmarakshasa (a terrible type of spirit) who used to live by eating all creatures including people. The house was therefore deserted. When Shri Guru reached there the Brahmarakshasa came down, touched his feet and requested that he should be liberated. Shri Guru asked him to go to Sangam immediately and take bath there. He would then be liberated and there would not be any more rebirths. Thus the Brahmarakshasa was liberated and Shri Guru decided to make that house his Math (headquarters of a saint).**

***Trivikram Bharati*   In the early days of his stay in Ganagapur he acquiesced to the request of the local ruler for going to Sangam and back under pomp and show. There was a sanyasi named Trivikram Bharati in the nearby village of Kumasi who criticized that a sanyasi like Shri Guru should indulge in pomp and show and called him a hypocrite. Shri Guru visited him and gave him the vision of Narasimha, the deity Trivikram worshipped. Trivikram surrendered to Shri Guru and became his disciple.**

***Egotistic Brahmins humbled*   In a kingdom called Vidura there was a cruel Muslim king who used to hate Brahmins. He declared that he would give money to those Brahmins who would come and recite Vedas to him. (In those days all except Brahmins were prohibited from reading or studying Vedas.)**

**He used to ridicule them about their committing violence by killing sacrificial animals during yajna at the same time criticizing Muslims for similar killings. Wise Brahmins pretended not to know Vedas and avoided reciting Vedas against the code of *Smriti* to a Muslim but some greedy Brahmins did go. One day a pair of Brahmins came to the king saying that they knew the three Vedas and challenged everybody for a debate on Vedas. They bragged before the king about their knowledge who permitted them to go around in his kingdom and hold debate on the Vedas with whoever wanted to do so.  Accordingly they went around and as most of the people did not want to debate with them, collected certificates of victory from them. Ultimately they reached Kumsi where they challenged Trivikram Bharati for debate. Trivikram Bharati refused to debate or to give them the certificate. Instead, to teach them a lesson he took them to Shri Guru who advised them in vain against their egotist pride. They repeated their challenge to Shri Guru who enumerated the contents of the four Vedas explaining how it was impossible for a single person to learn all the Vedas. He warned them not to risk their lives by challenging to the debate. But the Brahmins were adamant.**

***Chandala elevated to a learned Brahmin*   Shri Guru then called a passer-by who happened to be a Chandala i.e. an untouchable person of lowest category as understood in those days. Shri Guru asked one of his disciples to draw seven lines. He then asked the Chandala to cross the first line and asked who he was. As soon as he crossed the line he remembered his previous birth as a *kirat* (a bird trapper) and his name was Vanarakha. Every line he crossed brought to him the memory of his still earlier birth until when the seventh line was crossed he said his name was Adhyapak and he was a high caste Brahmin. Shri Guru sprinkled ashes on him and asked him to debate with the two Brahmin.  The Brahmins were now shivering with fright at this miracle. They praised Shri Guru and begged his pardon but he said that having committed a grave sin they shall have to spend twelve years as Brahmarakshas; but since they had repented they would be relieved after only twelve years.**

**In the discourse that followed Shri Guru told of various sins that cause rebirth in lower castes or even as animals and narrated the rituals for the atonement of various types of sins.**

**The Chandala who still had the Brahmin’s characteristics begged of Shri Guru to allow him to continue as a Brahmin but Shri Guru refused because his body was still that of a Chandala. He gave the example of Rishi Vishwamitra who was initially a Kshatriya and was considered a Brahmarishi only after he had purified his body. He described what kind of behaviour leads to rebirth as a Chandala and about various other sinful behaviours which cause rebirth in painful situations. He also told about various atonements for different types of sins as given in the *Smritis*. Realizing that the Chandala was still under the influence of the power of the holy ashes he arranged that the Chandala should be washed. That brought him back to his usual self and he went home with his wife and children who had come in search of him. Shri Guru then explained to Trivikram Bharati who was wondering how the Chandala regained his original state after washing, that it was due to the application of holy ash to the body that the Chandala became purified but regained his old state once the ash was washed.**

**Shri Guru then explained the importance of application of holy ash through the story of Rishi Vamadeo and Brahmarakshasa.  In this story Shiva and Parvati are described in detail and procedure for applying the ash is described.**

# HELPING THE DEVOTEES

**Shri Guru’s fame as a great yogi and saint spread far and wide. Thousands of people began to visit Ganagapur with their problems. Shri Guru helped mitigate problems of thousands of people who came and prayed to him by his yogic powers. Shri Guru lived in Ganagapur for nearly twenty-four years. His stay in Ganagapur is full of miraculous blessings to his disciples whose number was increasing day by day. A few of the instances described in Gurucharitra are given in the following.**

***Borrowing life from future birth*  A person from Mahur by name Gopinath was childless. After a lot of prayers to Shri Dattatreya and observance of many *Vratas* a son was born whom he named Datta. He was married to Savitri, a very pretty girl.  They were living happily when unfortunately Datta was afflicted with a wasting disease (*Tuberculosis*) which no doctors of that time could cure. As a final effort Savitri suggested that they should visit some great spiritual person by whose grace her husband would surely be cured.  With the permission of her mother-in-law and father-in-law, she put Datta in a palanquin and proceeded to Ganagapur to meet Shri Narasimha Saraswati.**

**After reaching Gangapur, the husband unfortunately died just as Savitri was preparing to go to meet Shri Guru.  It was a great shock and it put her into excessive grief.  While wailing and thinking of committing *Sati* on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, a Sanyasi came and asked her not to grieve because body is impermanent and everybody has to die some day. He gave her advice about the proper behaviour for a *Pativrata* who has an option after her husband is dead either to commit *Sati* or live the austere life of a widow. He quoted the proper way for a widow to behave according to the laws of Smriti. (Readers should note that the custom of Sati is not Vedic. It was not prevalent during the Ramayana time or in the Mahabharata time. None of the widowed queens seem to have committed Sati except Madri, the second wife of Pandu, but even that story has been added to the original Mahabharata much later. The custom of Sati seems to have been introduced much later, no doubt due to the male selfishness.)**

**Savitri chose the path of Sati.  The Sanyasi advised her to meet Shri Guru before the Sati ritual and gave her four Rudraksha beads, two to be tied to the ears of the dead body and two to be worn by her. He also advised her to take the *tirtha* water from Rudra worship performed in the presence of Shri Guru and put it into the mouth of the body as well as sprinkle on it and herself.  When all the preparations for Sati were made Savitri took leave of the Brahmins who were doing the preparations for getting a last *darshan* of Shri Guru before dying. When the young widow went before Shri Guru and bowed to him he blessed her addressing her as one addresses a married lady with living husband. On bowing for a second time he gave the blessing of children. People explained to Shri Guru that her husband had just died and she was going to be self-immolated as Sati. Shri Guru said it cannot be true and asked the body to be brought to him. When the body was brought he asked some *Tirtha* from the Rudra worship which had just been performed to be put into its mouth. To everybody’s surprise the dead husband came to life and they happily worshipped Shri Guru. When a Brahmin asked Shri Guru a very pertinent question that how a person who had died a natural death and not by accident could be revived? Whatever is written in one's fate by Brahmadeo, is it true or false? Shri Guru smiled and told that he had requested for borrowing thirty years of the person's life in the next birth to be used in this birth. Shri Guru then blessed the couple and instructed them to regularly observe certain *vratas*. (The Brahmin who asked the question is roundly abused as a fool and fit for going to hell. The question was an honest question and this incident will surely rankle in the mind of a modern reader.)**

***Leprosy cured (1)*  Shri Guru cured two Brahmins and his own sister Ratnai from leprosy. One of the Brahmins by name of Narahari was instructed to plant a dried branch of Oudumbar tree near the bank of the river at Sangam and water it thrice daily and that he would be cured as soon as the branch sprouts a leaf. The Brahmin did as he was told with full faith in Shri Guru. He continued with devotion to water the dry wood as instructed without taking even a sip of water himself.  People tried to dissuade and ridicule him for watering a dry branch and when they mentioned this to Shri Guru he told them the following story to impress on them the importance of obeying one’s guru. A *Shabar* (a person belonging to a jungle tribe) was serving a prince. While in the jungle on a hunting trip the Shabar came to an old Shiva temple where many broker Shivalingas were strewn around. The Shabar took fancy to one and picked it.  Just then the prince reached there and asked what he was doing. The Shabar told him that he was attracted by the Shivalinga and wanted to worship it but being a Shabar did not know how and would the prince kindly be his guru and teach him how. The prince consented and told him to worship it daily with flowers and offer ashes from a cremation grounds as well as whatever food they eat. Also that after the worship he should put a little of the ashes used in the ashes on his tongue also the offered food. The Shabar agreed and happily went home to tell his young wife who was also pleased.**

**One day the Shabar did not get ashes even after searching in the surrounding villages.  Dejected, he told his wife that he would rather commit suicide than not obey his guru correctly. His wife asked him to burn her in the house and use her ashes. When the Shabar protested saying that she was too young to die and that killing a woman was a great sin she explained that she was his better half and there is no harm in her dying for this body was perishable anyway.  After many arguments the Shabar agreed. The wife entered the house and fastened the door. The Shabar set fire to it and after it burnt down took his wife’s ashes and performed the worship as usual.  After the worship he called loudly for his wife as used to be his custom to give her part of the food offerings.  When his wife really came he was surprised because then he remembered having burnt the house with her inside. The house was also there as before. His wife then told him that when she entered the house she was tremendously felt very sleepy and chilly.  She did not know what had happened and that she woke up hearing his calls.  He realised it was the grace of Lord Shiva and just then Lord Shiva appeared before them and gave them the boon of happiness, kingdom and a place in heaven for eons to come.**

**On the seventh day Shri Guru himself went to Sangam, met the Brahmin and watered the plant from his own *kamandalu*. The dry branch at once sprouted leaves and the Brahmin was cured.  Thus Shri Guru brought back life not only to human beings but in deadwood as well. Narahari spontaneously sang a self-composed poem of praise for Shri guru comparing him to Dattatreya and equating him to the Supreme Brahman.**

**I have quoted this story because it shows the importance of obeying one’s guru who need not be a learned person or a sage or a spiritually elevated person but even a spiritually ordinary person as the prince was can be a guru as long as the disciple feels so.**

***Leprosy cured (2)* The second Brahmin named Nandi tried to propitiate the goddess Tulajabhavani at Tulajapur by performing a *vrata* of fasting for three years in order to get cured of his leprosy. The goddess instructed him in a dream to go to another deity called Chandalaa Parameshwari in Karnataka. He repeated the same austerities there and after seven months this goddess told him in a dream to go to Shri Guru at Ganagapur. He was very angry at this tossing around and for being sent to a human being for getting cured. But he was thrown out of the temple by the priests on the instructions from the deity and finally came to Ganagapur. Shri Guru already knew about all this by his occult powers and as soon as the Brahmin met him he asked him why he had come with doubts in his mind and that too to a human being. The Brahmin realized the powers of Shri Guru from his words. He surrendered to him. Shri Guru instructed one of his disciples that he should be made to take bath at Sangam and be given new clothes. After bath he was cured but a little spot remained on the thigh. Shri Guru told him that that was because he had come without complete faith, with a doubt in his mind and asked him to compose poetry in his praise. After he composed much poetry the spots entirely went away. He became one of the close disciples of Shri Guru and was named Kavishwar by him.**

***Leprosy cured (3)*  As Shri Guru had predicted his sister Ratnai developed leucoderma and came to Papavinashi Tirtha near Ganagapur. Shri Guru met her and revealed many of her sins for which she was now going through this punishment.  She had kicked a cow and started fights between couples. She was also unknowingly responsible for the death of five kittens when she kept the pot in which they were sleeping on fire for boiling water.  Shri Guru told her that her leucoderma would go if she wants to postpone the suffering to next birth. However, Ratnai said she was fed up of rebirths and would like to finish everything in this birth itself and get liberated. Shri Guru accepted, instructed her to take bath daily in Papavinashi Tirtha and get rid of her leucoderma as well as the load of the karmas. The leucoderma vanished in three days.**

***Story of poet Narahari*   Another poet soon joined the ranks of Shri Guru’s disciples. There was a devotee named Narahari living in the nearby village of Hippargi. He was a dedicated devotee of Lord Shiva and used to compose five poems every day but only in the praise of Shri Kalleshwar the form of Lord Shiva. He refused all the suggestions of many people that he should compose poems in the praise of Shri Guru too saying that Shri Guru was a human being and not God and he would not compose any poems in praise of anybody except Kalleshwar. One day Shri Guru was invited to Hippargi. That day, while Narahari was performing the worship of the Shivalinga, he saw a vision of Shri Guru sitting on the Shivalinga accepting his worship. Shri Guru asked him why he was worshipping a human being. Narahari realized that Shri Guru is an avatar and he went and surrendered to Shri Guru saying that he had not known it before but now he knew that Shri Guru was Kalleshwar and now his mind had become stable. Shri Guru accepted him as disciple and took him to Ganagapur.**

***Old Ganga gets children*   Shri Guru blessed Ganga, the sixty year old childless wife of a Brahmin named Somnath with two children even though she was beyond the age of conception. She used to worship Peepul  (Ashwattha) tree for many years with the desire of getting children and used to bring a lamp to Shri Guru daily. On Shri Guru's words the fruits of the worship of the Peepul tree came to fruition and she gave birth to a daughter and then a son.**

***A weaver visits Shri Shailam*   There used to be weaver in Ganagapur who was a great devotee of Shri Guru.  When Shivaratri festival approached people started making a pilgrimage to Shri Shailam, one of the places of Lord Shiva’s Jyotirlingas, so as to be present there on Shivaratri night. The weaver’s parents and brothers also started on the journey and invited him, but he refused saying that his Mallikarjuna (Shiva’s name) was Shri Guru and his feet were like Shri Shailam.  The relatives called him a fool person and proceeded to Shri Shailam.**

**On Shivaratri day Shri Guru asked the weaver why he had not gone to Shri Shailam and the weaver gave the same reason.  Shri Guru asked him to hold his *padukas* (sandals) and close his eyes.  In a moment they were at Shri Shailam by Shri Guru’s power. The weaver opened his eyes and was confused finding himself suddenly at Shri Shailam. Shri guru laughed and asked him to go quickly, get his head shaved (as is the custom), take bath and finish the worship of Mallikarjuna. When the weaver went he met his parents and other relatives who asked him why he came secretly instead of accompanying them. He honestly told that he had started only an hour ago with his Guru and just reached. But nobody believed him and called him a liar.**

**After shaving and bath the weaver bought flowers and began to perform the worship of Mallikarjuna but to his surprise he saw Shri Guru sitting on the Shivalinga accepting the worship.  Surprised, he finished his worship and went to Shri Guru and asked him why people come all the way to worship Mallikarjuna here when they could as well worship him in Ganagapur. Shri Guru laughed and said every holy place has a special power and he told him the story of King Vimarshan from Puranas in which a dog who was killed on Shivaratri day inside a temple while the worship was going on was reborn as the king in the next birth and a pigeon who had circumabulated a temple thrice before being killed by a kite was born as the queen.  Both the king and queen visited the place for that reason.  He then took him back to Ganagapur same way.**

**In Ganagapur nobody would believe him when he told that he had just returned from Shri Shailam with Shri Guru, even when he showed them the flowers etc. However, when his parents and relatives returned a few days later everybody was convinced and surprised.**

***Entire village fed on meals food for three*   Once a poor Brahmin by name of Bhaskar came to Ganagapur with the intention of offering alms to Shri Guru and get his blessings. He had brought with him material like rice etc. sufficient just for three or four persons.  But on the first day itself he was invited to meals by the host who was feeding Brahmins as part of the service to Shri Guru. The Brahmin attended the meals, collected his bundle of his material and used it as pillow for sleeping at night in the caravanserai used by pilgrims.  This happened everyday for three months, for there was not a day when somebody or other did not offer meals.  The local Brahmins who had become conceited by eating free meals full of delicacies every day began to make fun of Bhaskar which Shri Guru overheard and instructed him to give him alms the next day.**

**The next day Bhaskar bought vegetables, ghee etc. enough to feed only three or four persons. But Shri Guru instructed him to invite all. With great faith in Shri Guru he did just that. When time came to actually serve the food Shri Guru asked Bhaskar to place the food vessels near him and covered them with his cloth. He then instructed Bhaskar to begin serving with the condition that the cloth should not be removed from the vessels.  The Brahmins were first fed after which Shri Guru instructed them to invite people from other communities including the untouchables. The entire population of four thousand persons in the village were fed on the small quantity cooked for only three or four persons. In the end what remained was the food originally prepared by Bhaskar. Shri Guru instructed even that to be released in the river so that fish get it.  He then blessed Bhaskar for a good prosperous future.  Thus Shri Guru taught a lesson in humility to the leisure-loving Brahmins of Ganagapur.  We see from this story how devotion and Guru's benevolence can change fortunes overnight.**

***Grace to a farmer*   Shri Guru’s use to go every day for taking bath at Sangam. His path passed along a farm. The farmer used to come daily running as soon as he saw Shri Guru and make an obeisance. But Shri Guru used to walk away without a word. One day Shri Guru asked the farmer what was in his mind that he was coming daily for the obeisance. The farmer humbly said that he and his family were living by Shri Guru’s grace and prayed that he should cast his benevolent eyes on the growing crop.  Shri Guru looked at the crop and asked the farmer whether he would do as told. When the farmer said yes Shri Guru asked him to cut the entire crop by the time he returns from Sangam.**

**The farmer went for permission to the officials who consented only when he agreed to give twice the usual quantity to the treasury. He then called labour and began cutting the crop. His family came crying blaming the farmer for ruining the family by believing the Sanyasi. But the farmer would not budge. He cut the crop and showed it to Shri Guru on his return. Shri Guru said that he had told him in jest but now that he had shown faith and cut the crop benefit will come to him.**

**In a few days cold rain came and ruined everybody’s crop except the farmers. But because he had already cut it, the stalks re-sprouted more than ten times and gave immense yield to the farmer while everybody else in the neighbourhood was ruined. The farmer’s wife was repentant for talking ill about Shri guru and begged pardon. They went to Shri Guru and thanked him and received blessings for a prosperous future.**

***Sayandeo tested*   Fifteen years had passed since Sayandeo, the ancestor (great-great-grand-father) of Saraswati Gangadhar the Gurucharitra author, had met Shri Guru at Vasarbrahmeshwar. Learning that Shri Guru was at Ganagapur he came speedily and made his obeisance to him singing his praises. Shri Guru welcomed him and after inquiring about the welfare of his family invited him to join at noontime meals. Sayandeo prayed to be included in the group of his disciples. Shri Guru told him that being his disciple meant a very hard life and asked whether he was prepared to bear it. Sayandeo replied affirmatively saying that one who serves his Guru is liberated and does not have to suffer. Guru can give him success in all his four duties in life (*Dharma* or righteous living, *Artha* or earning livelihood,, *Kama* or bodily desires and Moksha or liberation). Serving one's Guru is the main duty. Shri Guru permitted him to stay with him.**

**One day Shri Guru decided to test him and took him alone to the forest to spend the night there. During the night Shri Guru by his yogic powers created a thunderstorm. Sayandeo protected his Guru from the winds and rain as much as possible without bothering about personal discomfort. Shri Guru sent him to bring fire from the village so that they can remain warm. Sayandeo went as told and brought fire. When he came back the storm was over. Shri Guru then told him the story of the son of Twashta Brahma who went to Varanasi and pleased Lord Shiva in order to satisfy what his Guru and Guru’s family had asked of him. Later seeing that Sayandeo could bear the hardships of a disciple's life Shri Guru included him in his group of disciples.**

***Do’s and don’ts in daily routine*   Gurucharitra includes a wide range of advice to his devotees.  Some advice is on spiritual aspects, some on the various penances that different devotees should observe; e.g. Sayandeo was instructed to observe Anantvrata that involves worship of Vishnu while the lady from Mahur whose husband was revived by Shri Guru was asked to observe penance on Mondays that propitiates Lord Shiva.**

**The period in which Shri Guru lived was a period of Muslim influence. Traditionally, Kshatriyas are supposed to protect the Dharma i.e. the religious code and protect people from external invasions. Brahmins are supposed to stabilize society internally by practicing and preaching correct ethics. But the Muslim invasions weakened the Kshatriya power and many Kshatriyas as well as Brahmins even served the Muslim rulers. While a small number of principled Brahmins continued with the strict traditional life, a large number of them began to succumb to the wealth and other worldly attractions of the new rule becoming lax in their behaviour. Shri Guru’s advice and spiritual support did a lot to save the Hindu way of life from crumbling under the Muslim influence. This advice reached reading public through the book Gurucharitra written a century later and is still teaching us the moral way of living.**

***Story of the Austere Poor Brahmin*   There was a poor Brahmin in Ganagapur who was very strict in his daily routine and accepted only dry uncooked alms. He never attended public meals offered almost daily by pilgrims visiting Ganagapur. He therefore remained poor but was content. His wife however felt grieved at the poverty and began craving for the tasty preparations of the public meals and the other charitable donations which the women neighbours described to her. She nagged her husband unsuccessfully and as a last resort went to Shri Guru with her complaint. Shri Guru told the Brahmin to accept the next invitation since it was not proper to harbour dissatisfaction at home.  Thus the couple attended the meals at the next invitation.**

**But when the wife began to eat her meals it appeared to her that pigs and dogs are eating food from her plate and other person’s plates too. She told this to her husband and both left in disgust. The couple then went to Shri Guru where the wife swore she would never go to such meals again. Shri Guru then told the unhappy Brahmin that no stain had come on him by this happening and he could continue with his earlier system. He also advised that even though he was strict about not accepting invitations he should never refuse one from a person who is stuck because he could not get anyone else. Refusing such an invitation would be a sin the principle evidently being not to let principles come in the way of helping the needy.**

**Chapters 36 and 37 of Gurucharitra give detailed instructions on how a Brahmin should behave and spend his daily life. On the Brahmin’s request Shri Guru advised him about the kind of homes and people from whom food should be accepted or not accepted.  Also he advised him, on the basis of Parashara *Smriti*, the proper routines for Brahmins to follow right from waking up in the morning until he went to bed.  That included what he should do after waking up, offering of *arghya* to the rising (and also setting) sun, proper way to clean the mouth and teeth, proper way to take bath, performance of *sandhya* ritual (with Gayatri mantra) three times daily, proper way to worship the house deities with sandal paste, flowers, incense and light, proper food and proper way to eat, rituals before, during and after eating, when and where to sleep etc. including the conjugal life.**

***There are some parts of this advice which a modern reader would apparently absurd and anachronistic. This is discussed in some detail towards the end of the chapter (See:* Conflict with science later).**

***Washer-man king*   The washer-man to whom Shripad Shrivallabh had given the boon of becoming a king was born in the next birth in the royal family of the Muslim king of Vidura (Bedar). (Historically his name was Allauddin II of the Bahamani dynasty). Due to the influence of his earlier birth he was kind to Brahmins against the wishes of the Muslim priests. He used to tell them, "You tell that God is everywhere so what does it matter if Hindus worship stone idols? They do it only because it is convenient to imagine an image rather than a formless God."**

**One day the king got a boil on his thigh which nobody could cure. Some Brahmins suggested that it would get cured if a great spiritual person cast his benevolent eyes on the ailing part.  He was sent to a lonely place where he met a yogi who sent him to meet Shri Guru (after telling him a story from the Puranas).  As soon as Shri Guru saw the king the first question he asked was, "Where were you all this time Oh washer-man?" On hearing this, the King remembered his past birth. His boil was cured. He invited Shri Guru to see his wealth and to bless his family. Shri Guru agreed on the conditions that animals would not be killed. He visited the king's palace, asked the King to give up his position to his children and meet him at Shri Shailam.**

# PRELUDE TO SAMADHI

***Decision to leave Ganagapur*   Now that the Muslim king had started visiting Shri Guru there was the danger of other Muslim persons visiting Ganagapur and disturb its traditional religious life. Shri Guru then decided to leave Ganagapur and live incognito elsewhere but publicly announcing that he was going on pilgrimage to Shri Shailam. People in Ganagapur were very unhappy and prayed to Shri Guru saying they would be like orphans if he left them. Shri Guru promised that though physically he might be leaving Ganagapur, he would continue to be there spiritually and his true devotees would be able to see him. He then left Ganagapur with some of his disciples.**

**Before leaving, Shri Guru said, "Do not harbour any doubt about my always being in Ganagapur day and night. I shall accept your worship in formless state in the Math. I love my devotees and it is my assured promise that their wishes will get fulfilled. The Ashwatha tree at Sangam is really a wishing tree. Worship it and come to the Math where I am leaving behind my Nirguna (attributeless) Paduka which you should worship with dedication." And really when people returned after bidding farewell to Shri Guru they saw him at the Math and were assured about Shri Guru’s promise. After a moment this vision vanished and he was visible only to the loving devotees.**

**It is more than six centuries after this event. People visit Ganagapur in large numbers to offer their services to Shri Guru. The services may be donation, reading of Gurucharitra, rituals like *abhishek* (bath) to the Paduka etc. Some come with desires in mind and some with pure devotion.  People find their wishes fulfilled and experience uplift in their spiritual level.   There is a peculiar custom at Ganagapur. Visitors, rich or poor are supposed to beg for food in the morning or noontime. The Brahmins in Ganagapur keep food ready and offer it to the visitors as a daily ritual. Such a ritual obviously can take the ego from a person’s mind.  Persons who are suspected to be possessed by spirits are also taken there to get rid of their affliction.**

***To Shri Shailam*   After bidding farewell to Ganagapur Shri Guru reached the banks of River Patalganga with four of his disciples. There he asked them to make a floating seat with flowers. Before leaving by the boat he said, “I love singing and I shall remain in the home of those who remember me by singing. Such people will not be wanting in anything. Those who will read my biography or read it to others will remain wealthy." He asked the disciples to wait for flowers which would come floating as his grace.  He then left instructing that after picking up the flowers they should go back and spend their days in devotion. After some time four Shevanti (Mums) flowers came floating which each of them picked up as *prasada* and returned to Ganagapur. The names of the disciples who received the flowers were Sayandeo, the two poets Nandi and Narahari and the Siddha who narrated the Gurucharitra to Saraswati Gangadhar.**

**Thus ends the life history of the great yogi Shri Narasimha Saraswati but only the first part of the life history. Saraswati Gangadhar tells in Gurucharitra that Shri Guru disappeared into the Kardali forest.**

**As in the case of Shripad Shrivallabh we see in Shri Narasimha Saraswati also a great, dispassionate and compassionate yogi.  He is a true guide to his devotees, not only giving material benefits but spiritual guidance as well. Like Shripad Shrivallabh Shri Guru gives his grace to all irrespective of his or her caste or even religion.**

**But other evidence shows that he did not take *samadhi* in Kardali forest but went to north where he spent more than three hundred years in austerities and in a state of deep trance. When he came out of *samadhi* he travelled southwards under the name Chanchalbharati and after a lot of travelling finally settled in 1857 at Akkalkot in Maharashtra before finally leaving his body in 1878. This will be told in the Part V on Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot..**

# CALENDER OF EVENTS

**Shri Narasimha Saraswati lived from 1378 CE to 1459 CE  as per most of the scholars. The main events of his life are given below with the possible years and dates are fixed as per the description of the lunar and stellar events calendar mentioned in Shri** [**Guru Charitra**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GuruCharitra)**.  (REF Dhere, Wikipedia - Narasimha Saraswati)**

[**1378 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1378_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Birth**

[**1385 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1385_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **:** [**Upanayan**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanayan) **(Thread ceremony)**

[**1386 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1386_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Left his home**

[**1388 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1388_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Took** [**Sanyas**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanyas)**a**

[**1416 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1416_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Arrival back home at Lad-Karanja**

[**1418 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1418_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Gautami-Tatak-Yatra (travel along the banks of river Gautami)**

[**1420 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1420_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Stay at Parali-Vaijanath**

[**1421 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1421_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Stay at Oudumbar near Bhilawadi.**

[**1422 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1422_CE&action=edit&redlink=1)**-**[**1434 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1434_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Stay at Narasoba Wadi**

[**1435 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1435_CE&action=edit&redlink=1)**-**[**1458 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1458_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Stay at Ganagapur**

[**14 January**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_14)[**1459 CE**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1459_CE&action=edit&redlink=1) **: Samadhi at ShriShaila Mountain**

# A COMMENTARY

***About Kardali Forest***

**Many questions have been asked about where this Kardali forest where Shri Narasimha Saraswati went from Ganagapur. Recently some devotees have organised trips to this place. According to their sketchy description it is located near the Mallikarjuna temple on at Shri Sailam Mountain by the banks of Patalganga Krishna river in Andhra Pradesh. To reach the place of Samadhi one has to first travel by boat and then walk 14 kms up and down in a deep and thick forest. There is no proper route. One has to walk on the rocks in the hills. At least 3 hills are to be crossed. Water is not available but there is a lake of sweet water near the cave of where Shri Narasimha Saraswati took Samadhi.**

***About Gurucharitra*  Gurucharitra is read by thousands of Dattatreya devotees in Maharashtra regularly. Being a powerful text its reading gives the experience of spiritual uplift and a sort of divine ecstasy. It is supposed to be read not like a story book but with proper respect and ritual, after the regular daily bath and in a clean pleasant environment such as at the place of worship at home. But there are people who, out of constraints from their work or business, do not get enough time but manage to perform the reading whenever and wherever possible. The important point to be noted is that it is the devotion that is important and not the ritual.**

**Gurucharitra contains 7421 *ovis* (stanzas) (including 176 Sanskrit Shlokas of Guru-Gita) in fifty-two chapters. (The edition corrected by Mr. Ramachandra Krishna Kamat published by K. B. Dhavale is referred here. Some corrupted editions give fifty-three chapters, but the fifty-first and fifty-second chapters are virtually similar.) The last chapter is what is called *avatarnika* which gives one *ovi* description of the contents of each chapter is a later addition. Many devotees finish the reading in one week (*Saptaha*) or three days or even one day.  In the *saptaha* reading number of chapters to be read each day are specified in the *avataranika*.  During the *saptaha* the devotee has is to observe certain austerities. In the end the *avatarnika* should be read followed by Arati of Shri Dattatreya. (*Avatarnika* is not an original chapter. It was added much later.)**

**Gurucharitra narrates the activities and advice of Shri Guru to the visiting devotees. The narration is through the lips of Siddha, supposedly one of the disciples of Shri Guru. Shri Guru made Ganagapur a place of pilgrimage which thousands visited. Those who begot children as Shri Guru’s grace named the children after him. There was such a person named after Shri Guru hence the appellation “Namdharak” meaning one who holds the name, who sets out in search of Shri Guru and is met on the way by a Sanyasi calling himself Siddha, whose grace he receives. This Siddha takes Namdharak with him to Ganagapur and narrates him the activities of Shri Guru preceding it with stories about the birth of Shri Dattatreya and the birth and activities of Shripad Shrivallabh.**

**Shri Guru explains to his devotees many points of spiritual interest through stories from various Puranas and guides them through instructions according to the mental makeup of the devotee.  Many stories extol the importance of devotion and service of his Guru. One chapter is fully devoted to the Sanskrit text of Guru-Gita from Skanda Purana. It is presented as the conventional dialogue between Shiva and Parvati describing how one should serve one’s Guru.**

**A chapter is devoted to the repercussions (such as rebirth in a certain situation or species) of various kinds of sins and is an important ethical guideline. Two long chapters in Gurucharitra (36th and 37th) are devoted to the advice given by Shri Guru to a Brahmin, on the basis of *Smritis*, on the subject of the proper routines for Brahmins to follow right from waking up in the morning until he goes to bed. To a modern reader born and brought up in an urban environment these two chapters may appear anachronistic and impossible to follow. (In today’s cities one cannot even feed a cow as certain rituals require since cows are banned in many metropolitan cities). It is true that the advice cannot be followed totally in the modern lifestyle of work and urban environment. But the reader should understand that during the times Shri Guru lived this advice was appropriate for maintaining clean hygiene but good morals. With the modern working life with strict duty timings and constraints city life and travel the devotee is compelled to adjust the observances to a convenient level at the same time not letting the devotion and morals go astray.**

**It is surprising that nowhere in Gurucharitra there is a mention that Dattatreya should be worshipped. It is natural that Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasimha Saraswati do not call themselves as avatars of Dattatreya for as mentioned in Part I, avatar is a designation given by the devotees and it is Saraswati Gangadhar who portrays them as avatars of Dattatreya.  During the time of Narasimha Saraswati Muslim rule was well entrenched in Maharashtra-Karnataka—Andhra region. It was the task of Narasimha Saraswati to save the religion from the Muslim influence which he did by proper spiritual advice, by prohibiting people from serving Muslims (as in the case of Sayandeo) but at the same time partly yielding also as in the case of the Muslim king. In situations like this there is always a cultural give and take. This has been discussed at some length in the Part III on Shripad Shrivallabah where we saw Dattatreya being accepted by the Sufi Sect of the Muslims while Hindus accepted their custom of using incense and music during the worship.**

**Conflict with science  A modern reader may find some of the statements in the 37th chapter absurd and not consistent with the modern scientific knowledge. For example there is a statement that a boy would be born if the conception takes place on an even day and a girl if it occurs on an odd day counted after the beginning of menstruation. Modern medical knowledge says that there would be conception only if the intercourse occurred between the ninth and the twenty-first day after the beginning of menstruation and the gender of the child cannot be predicted. A second statement is about the cot used for sleeping. It is said that the weaving of the cot (by string or strip) done on different days of the week gives different results; e.g. one gains wealth by weaving on Sunday, many sons on Thursdays and death on Saturdays. There are similar arbitrary statements about the results of taking ritualistic bath on different days. Modern reader must not allow such statements to affect his mind and form wrong impressions about Shri Guru or Gurucharitra because that was the understanding of those times when science and scientific spirit of experimentation was yet to develop. The reader should remember that in the western world, supposed to be the cradle of modern science and technology today, the situation in those times was worse than that in India because in India we had at least great thinkers (*Rishis*) but there were none of that calibre in the west then. People resorted to superstitions and burned people suspected to be witches in which category even a person prescribing an herbal medicine was included..**

**A pious person generally believes anything written in Puranas and other similar literature. If he is told that observance of Mondays pleases Lord Shiva and Fridays the Devi is a Vedic statement he will blindly believe it without considering the fact that the custom of weekdays did not even exist in the Vedic times and was borrowed from the Chaldeans in middle east only in about second century BC. For the pious devotion is more important than anything else.**

**For the educated person however such illogical statements create an obstacle in his belief in the spiritual path. He should refer to Tripura Rahasya in which Shri Dattatreya himself has stressed that deliberation and discrimination are essential in spiritual path. Every aspect of a situation must be critically analyzed and then only, after using discrimination the next step should be taken. Later he stresses that dull persons cannot advance in spiritual path. He has to wait until a later birth when he is born as an intelligent person. An educated person must therefore examine every statement and must be bold enough to reject what does not appeal to logic. Faith is needed in God and not in the rituals prescribed in the texts unless of course his Guru prescribes it for reasons known to him.**

**One should also note that science does not solve all human problems nor explain all phenomena on this earth. Especially, science does not explain phenomena associated with the soul.  Swami Ram in his autobiographical book “Among the Saints in Himalayas” mentions a yogi known to him who had transmigrated into the body of another person who had just died. Swami Krishnanand mentions in his book “True Experiences”, again an autobiographical book, an incident where he met a yogi in Jagannathpuri in Orissa, who had planned to die soon by his yogic powers and would be reborn as a girl two months later in a village near Kolkata. Swami Krishnanand objected to this statement saying that it would take at least nine months to be reborn as another body, to which the yogi explained that the soul to be reborn attaches to the foetus between seventh and eighth month. Until then, the foetus is merely a blank body of blood, bone and flesh, nourished through the mother’s soul-force and fed by the building essences through the umbilical cord. It is only after the merger of the astral body with it that the unborn baby begins to experience pain and pleasures and remembers its past lives. After birth, the baby’s umbilical cord is cut off and from then onwards it derives the sustaining energy and the life current from the subtle body that has taken over. This is made possible through the silver cord, which joins the subtle body to its physical one. Para-psychological studies support this information. There is another power, which determines, taking into consideration his *karmas,* as to which foetus he is supposed to be attached to. Swamiji did go to Calcutta, met the blacksmith and found that his wife was expecting a baby but not until late March according to the doctors. But the girl was born on the exact date (25-2-1954) as stated by the yogi. What he had told about the girl’s life also came true. The girl named Rekha, was a simple, calm, quiet child and used to spend her time in a nearby temple. One day she was found to be playing fearlessly with a snake. Swamiji met her last when she was fourteen, but could not bring himself to reveal to her parents about her short life.  Now no conventional branch of science can explain this phenomenon.**

**Was Siddha real?   It is clear from the Gurucharitra text that Namdharak is really Saraswati Gangadhar, the great-great-grandson of Sayandeo. Whether Siddha who narrates the Gurucharitra to Namadharak is a real character or an imaginary one is difficult to say. It was customary in many ancient Indian texts to present the composition as a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati, or between Purana characters like the various Rishis and kings. It is likely that Saraswati Gangadhar collected the various legends about Shri Guru and wrote them as if narrated by Siddha. Note that Saraswati Gangadhar being the great-great-grandson of Sayandeo the Gurucharitra events must have occurred at least a century earlier. Siddha must have been more than 150 years old when he narrated the events to Saraswati Gangadhar. Even granting that this is possible for an accomplished yogi, it appears doubtful that Shri Guru would have kept the same disciple with him throughout while sending everybody else away on pilgrimage and leaving him at Ganagapur while going to the Kardali Forest. In all likelihood therefore Siddha must be an imaginary character created by Saraswati Gangadhar. Again this is only of academic interest to devotees. It should also be noted that the poems of praise by the devotees Narahari and Sayandeo are really composed bt Saraswati Gangadhar as is mentioned in the poems itself. If Siddha was real the poems would have been shown as composed by these two people.  Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION -- DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**PART V-A: THIRD AVATAR:**

**SHRI SWAMI SAMARTH OF AKKALKOT**

**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

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**Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot**

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# EMERGENCE OF SWAMI SAMARTH

**We do not talk of the birth of Swami Samarth but only of his appearance. There are two versions of his appearance in public, in one he just appeared mysteriously as an eight year old boy and in another he is the same as Shri Narasimha Saraswati who reappeared after remaining three centuries in Samadhi state. In either story no birth is mentioned.**

**The two versions about the appearance of Swami Samarth are discussed in the following.**

***The first version*  According to the first version Shri Narasimha Saraswati left Kardali Forest and went north to Badri Forest where highly advanced yogis go for meditation.  He spent several years there in *tapas* in the state of samadhi. In the course of time his body was completely covered by anthills. Anthills are common in forests and since it is believed that they are the abodes of snakes people generally do not go near them or disturb them. Thus Shri Narasimha Saraswati was left undisturbed.**

**Nearly three centuries passed. One day a woodcutter was cutting wood in the forest. Accidentally his axe hit the anthill and a yogi injured in the thigh came out. The woodcutter realized that he had done something horrible and was frightened. He prostrated before the yogi begging for mercy, but he was not only pardoned but gained from the yogi’s blessings not only in this world but in the next as well. The person who came out was not physically similar to Shri Narasimha Saraswati. He was effulgent with red complexion, more than seven feet tall with long hands reaching well below his knees. This was the form with which devotees of Swami Samarth of Akkalkot are familiar. This reappearance of Shri Narasimha Saraswati in a new personality is considered to be consistent with the legend that Swami Samarth was not born through the womb.**

**However, some people do not agree with this version because yogis do not choose places easily approachable by public, and therefore it is unlikely that Shri Narasimha Saraswati chose this place for penance. But one cannot deny the possibility what was not approachable can become approachable over a period of three centuries.  Secondly there is a huge contrast not only in the physique but in the nature of the two. Shri Narasimha Saraswati was of medium build while Shri Swami Samarth very tall with long hands. In nature Shri Narasimha Saraswati was a serene person while Shri Swami Samarth was playful like a child.**

***The second version*   According to this version Swami Samarth first appeared in the village of Chelikheda about 24 miles from Hastinapur (Hastinapur is about 100 km north-east of Delhi on the banks of the River Ganga) on the second day of *Chaitra* month (The day after *Gudi Padwa* - Shalivahan Shaka new year) as an eight year old boy in the year 1149 AD.   This is according to the horoscope prepared by Mr. Nana Rekhi, an expert astrologer. This horoscope was approved by Swami Samarth. This was also the opinion of Haribhau Tawade or Swamisut, a close disciple of Swami Samarth. *Chaitra* 2 is celebrated as “*Prakatdin*” i.e. day of manifestation, on a large scale at the Swamisut Math which is now in Chembur Mumbai. Mr Hanmante, author of “A Glimpse of Divinity: Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot” supports this view and gives supporting literature which includes, besides the poems of Swamisut the experience of the vision Mr. Anant Ranjekar, a highly accomplished devotee of Shri Swami Samarth in which Shri Swami Samarth emerged as an eight year old boy in response to the urgings of his child devotee Vijaysingh to come and play a game of marbles. Some devotees typically Shakatai Agate and Nana Gadre have confirmed that Swami Samarth first manifested as an eight year old boy in or near Hastinapur on Chaitra Shuddha 2 about 862 years ago (presumably w.r.t. 1999, the year of publication.)**

**For a layman it would be difficult o decide which version is correct.  Once, a British barrister and a Parsi gentleman came to Akkalkot to meet Swami Samarth. Though they had wanted to ask many questions to Swami Samarth they were so much impressed by the effulgence exuded by him that they asked only one question, “Where do you come from?”  Swami Samarth’s reply was, “I first left Kardali forest and visited cities like Calcutta. After wandering in Bengal I visited Goddess Kali. Then, wandering along the banks of Ganges I visited thousands of places of pilgrimage like Hardwar, Kedareshwar, Gangotri, Badrinath, Dwaraka and Ayodhya and came to the banks of river Godavari. I stayed for many years in Hyderabad and Mangalwedhe. Then I went to Pandharpur, Begampur and Mohol and after staying there for some time I came to Akkalkot and am here since then.  Swami Samarth often said his name was Nrisimhabhan.**

**Acceptance of the second version raises a disparity. If Swami Samarth was born (manifested) in 1149 AD then it means that he was really the first avatar because first two avatars Shripad Shrivallabh (1320-1350AD) and Shri Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1458 AD) lived during his lifetime i.e. 1149 - 1878. It is of course not impossible that Shri Dattatreya took the two avatars while the real first avatar was still living. But where was he during this period?  Devotees have reported the meeting of Swami Samarth and Shri Manik Prabhu (1817-1865) of Humanabad considered as the fourth avatar of Shri Dattatreya. So now we face the incongruity the so-called first two avatars as well as the fourth avatar occurred during the lifetime of Swami Samarth.**

**It has been stressed in Part I that such historical incongruities are only of academic interest and they do not matter for the devotees. For any saint it is after his emergence and interaction with public that his history matters and becomes known. This should be true of Swami Samarth too. His activities after his public emergence have been well described in the diary (*bakhar*) of Kelkarbuva and in the collections of the experiences by Mr. Ganesh Mulekar, both disciples of Swami Samarth.  The book by Mr. Shripadhastri Kinjavadekar is a well researched book in Marathi on the life and work of Shri Swami Samarth based on Guruleelamrit by Vamorkar. In this book Kinjavdekarshastri gives an interesting commentary and interpretation on the activities. Guruleelamrit presents many incidents which were witnessed by Vamanbuwa or were narrated to him by concerned persons. In the following a brief summary of the activities mainly from these two sources is presented.**

# AFTER LEAVING BADRI FOREST

**Swami Samarth, after his reappearance in Badri forest, spent some time in the Himalayan region. Then he went to Varanasi and then to Gangotri. From there he came to a place called Devalgram where he established his *Padukas* and went to Rajur where he established a Math arranging a grant of eight villages as income for maintenance. After a few years he handed this establishment to his disciples and left for further travels. During all these years of travel he was known by many names one of them being Chanchalbharati (However he will be called only by the name Swami Samarth henceforth to avoid confusion). For a *Siddhayogi* (yogi with occult powers) it would not be surprising that his travels are associated with many miracles. In fact in the long run only the stories of the miracles generally survive in the life history of such great persons. This is true in the case of Swami Samarth too.**

**Two stories about Swami Samarth during the period he was in the Himalayan region are given below:**

***The Chinese couple*  While Swami Samarth was sitting in a cave a Chinese couple in search of medicinal plants came there. Seeing this strangely dressed person they started wondering among themselves whether he as a demon, devil or a magician. They made fun of him and after a while engaged themselves in amorous activities. Suddenly a miracle took place. The woman turned into a man. The couple were frightened and realised this was the result of the fun they had made of the strange looking person.  When they surrendered to him Swami Samarth showed his compassion by reverting them to their original state and sent them away advising them to follow a spiritual path.**

***The Deer Family and the Hunters.*  Once when Swami Samarth was sitting in the snow covered forest, four hunters arrived.  Seeing them a frightened deer calf came running to Swami Samarth and hid behind him.  Swami Samarth took the calf in his lap. The hunters saw this and started shooting indiscriminately at Swami Samarth himself. Swami Samarth took couple of stones and threw them in their direction and the hunters became locked in their position not able to move their limbs. After some time, Swami Samarth felt compassion for the hunters who surrendered to him pleading that they had to hunt for their livelihood. Advising them they should show kindness to all living beings and lead a righteous life he let them go.**

**At that moment a deer couple came there looking for their lost calf. They found Swami Samarth sitting quietly there with their calf. The deer couple did not feel frightened probably due to the vibrations of love and compassion saints radiate. They approached Swami Samarth who looked at them and said smilingly, "Oh Brahmin, have you not recognized me? You were my devotee at Ganagapur and were relieved of your disease after serving me. Because you maltreated some saintly persons you were born in animal species.  You have met me because you did some good deeds, too."  Swami Samarth kept his hand on the deer’s head and the deer started speaking: Maharaj, I served you but due to my maltreating the saints I had to be reborn seven times. My first rebirth was that of a Brahmin but a diseased one; second birth was that of a bull and I had to toil; third was that of a *Shudra* in Vaidura where I lived with my wife a life of utter poverty and sorrow; fourth time I was a weaver and again lived a sorrowful life along with my wife; though I lived in Varanasi, due to adulterous life my fifth rebirth was that of a donkey; in the sixth lifetime I was a goldsmith and misappropriated a lot of gold but since my wife gave generous gifts to saints I was reborn as a deer in this seventh rebirth. Due to the merit of earlier service I have been graced with meeting you. Now please free us from these life cycles.**

**The compassionate Swami Samarth said, “After some time I shall wander to the south when you will come and meet me born as a human being. You will be liberated then. Saying this Swami Samarth returned to the cave and the deer couple happily went away with their calf.**

**Swami Samarth left the forest and wandered far and wide throughout India. Some of the events that occurred during these wanderings and how Swami Samarth graced the devotees are described in the following.**

# JAGANNATHPURI

**Swami Samarth wandered to Jagannathpuri (often called only as Puri) famous for the temple of Shri Krishna, his brother Balaram and sister Subhadra. It is one of the four *Peethas* established by Adi Shankaracharya.**

***Alawani Maharaj*  A saint from Baroda by name Alawani Maharaj known for his detached nature had come to Puri with  two or three companions on pilgrimage but all had fallen ill and could neither eat nor go out for alms. (He never ate salt; *lawan* means salt in Sanskrit and hence the name). Other pilgrims, engrossed in their own affairs simply ignored them. Finally, very weak and on the verge of death, Alawani Maharaj prayed to Shri Jagannath to relieve him from the calamity and suddenly there stood before him an effulgent personality with hands on the waist. Alawani Maharaj and his companions at once gained strength and made obeisance to the effulgent person and humbly enquired who he was and where he lived. He replied that he was known as Vriddha (Aged) Narasimha Saraswati and he was everywhere in the world, but Sahyadri mountains, Girnar, Varanasi, Matapur (Mahur), Karavir (Kolhapur), Panchaleshwar, Kuravapur, Oudumber, Karanjanagar, Narsimhawadi and Ganagapur were his favourite places.**

**Just then, enticing odours of food came from the neighbouring house and shortly afterwards Alawani Maharaj and his companions were invited for meals. Swami Samarth instructed them to go ahead and eat. And with that all their illness vanished like magic.**

**Swami Samarth was known as Vriddha (old) Narasimha Saraswati in those days. Due to this miracle and many others his fame spread around Puri. Seeing this, Swami Samarth suddenly disappeared from Puri. This story was told by Alawani Maharaj himself to Vamanbuva Vamorikar the author of Guruleelamrit, a book in verse on the life of Swami Samarth.**

**Alawani Maharaj returned to Baroda and spent his life helping people and in spiritual pursuit. He used to behave like a deranged person to keep unwanted people away.**

# HARDWAR

**From Puri Swami Samarth came to Hardwar where he cured two persons from leprosy. Kinjavadekarshastri has made some very appropriate comments on the background of these cures. The afflictions of the body are always related to afflictions of the mind which occurs first. Swami Samarth removed these mental afflictions first by showing to the afflicted the error of their ways of thinking and behaviour. This was done sometimes through a confession from the afflicted; if the person was arrogant then he would be put through a ridiculous situation through yogic powers making him realize that there are higher powers controlling the affairs of the world. In the above two cases Swami Samarth made them remember their deeds in earlier lives as well as in this life and atone their sins by making them confess publicly.**

***Hypocrite Brahmin humbled :* One day a Brahmin of good social standing but really a hypocrite with bad habits approached Swami Samarth with the intention to ridicule him. The first question he asked was about who Swami Samarth was and wherefrom he had come. Swami Samarth fixed his steady penetrating eyes on the Brahmin which unnerved him. Swami Samarth then asked him loudly whether or not he had killed a cow previous day for its meat. Hearing this question the entire public started shouting against the Brahmin who at once surrendered and prostrated before him. This event cured the Brahmin permanently.**

**Swami Samarth asked the Brahmin to take him to the killed cow. He then challenged him to prove the genuineness of his repentance by reviving the cow. The Brahmin said, "Oh Guru! It can happen only by your grace!", and sprinkled some water from the washing of the feet of Swami Samarth. Everybody was surprised to see the cow come to life.**

**Now that the Brahmin had come on proper path Swami Samarth replied to his question as to who he was etc. He said that he was a Yajurvedi Brahmin, his name was Narasimhabhan, living in Dattanagar and that his place was a Banyan tree. He then coached the Brahmin in reciting Vedas and advised him that one should be respectful to saints and Brahmins; one should be kind, soft spoken and behave discriminating between good and evil and realize God within oneself and perform one’s prescribed duties. So advising Swami Samarth immediately left Hardwar.**

# LAKE NARAYAN

**Next he appeared in Saurashtra at a place called Shrikrishna Trivikram.  Pilgrims visiting Dwarka visited this place in large numbers. There was a lake here named Narayan near the beautiful temple of Shrikrishna Trivikram. People believed that a bath in this lake would wash the sins of many past births. Unfortunately the priests used this belief to exploit pilgrims by charging them large sums of money. (This is a scene in many places of pilgrimage in India and has given a bad name to religion and a weapon to atheists to criticize those who believe in God.) The Chief priest had employed strongmen to prevent people from taking bath without payment. When Swami Samarth came there the strongmen looked at his semi-naked form and started ridiculing him. But Swami Samarth marched ahead with his followers for bathing in the lake and was challenged by the strongmen who demanded money or else. Swami Samarth used his yogic powers to go over their heads and walk on water. He then sat on the water surface as if it was land. The strongmen and their employer priests were now frightened at this display of yogic power they had never seen before. The priests surrendered to Swami Samarth, prayed to him and sang his praises. Swami Samarth then came back on the land. He was then worshipped, and meals were given to the public.**

***Clearing pundit's* *doubts*  There was a learned person (*a* *pundit*) among those present, but though learned he had not attained Self-Realization. He had just seen the miracles and doubts were rising in his mind as to how these miracles were possible. Swami Samarth read his thoughts and remarked to him that he himself was a wanderer so could not be a learned person like him. Realizing that Swami Samarth read his thoughts the learned person surrendered to Swami Samarth.   Swami Samarth asked him where his parents were and was told that they died thirty-six years ago. Swami Samarth then asked, " Is it so? Then who is swinging the cradle of your son at this moment? That is really your father." To the confused man Swami Samarth further told that his father had become a cobra in this birth because of his unfulfilled desires in the last birth. There is no liberation unless desires vanish. Actually, people had seen the cobra and not knowing the truth had gathered there to kill it. The cobra crawled away to lay itself at Swami Samarth’s feet. Holding it in his hand Swami Samarth asked it why he should expect kindness from these people when he himself had not shown it to anyone in his earlier life as a human being. He then asked the snake to enter the lake. Swami Samarth then told those present that the snake will be reborn in a family of yogis and will be progressively liberated. He then vanished from there.**

# DWARKA

**From Lake Narayan Swami Samarth came to Dwarka. There was a yogi named Bhurebuwa who had attained *siddhis* (occult powers). Many people came to him for having his *darshan* and get rid of their problems through his grace. But Bhurebuwa was unhappy not because of material problems but because he had not yet had a vision of Shri Dattatreya.**

**Once, while he was meditating on Shri Dattatreya he fell asleep and saw wonderful scenes like rivers, mountains, oceans etc. Then in that dream itself he came on the banks of a river where he saw Shri Dattatreya in three headed form. Full of emotions he was wet with sweat. He prostrated and was standing when the form of Shri Dattatreya began to vanish and its place was taken by that of Swami Samarth.**

**In the dream itself Bhurebuwa praised Swami Samarth, who asked him what his doubts were. Bhurebuwa had got his doubts while reading Vedanta. The interpretations of the words "Tatwamasi" in Vedanta by the followers of Dualism (*Dwaita*) was given as "You belong to Him" while followers of Monism (*Adwaita*) interpreted it as "You are that". Swami Samarth explained to him the meaning of the sentence elaborately. After his doubts were cleared Bhurebuwa praised swami Samarth and prostrated before him. As he arose from the prostrated position Bhurebuwa went into deep *samadhi* state and began enjoying divine bliss. Swami Samarth kept his benevolent hand on his head and Bhurebuwa at once came out of the dream and found Swami Samarth was really there.**

**Entire Dwarka rejoiced this event and hailed Swami Samarth. Many spiritual aspirants who had seen the Bhurebuwa’s spiritual transformation came to have a *darshan* of Swami Samarth and receive his blessings and guidance. The whole town was engrossed in the festivities.**

**Among them were a congenital blind person named Surdas desirous of seeing Swami Samarth and one Ravji Vamorikar (father of Vamanbuva Vamorikar). Bhurebuwa prayed to Swami Samarth on behalf of Surdas for blessings of gaining his sight and on behalf of Ravji for spiritual blessings. Swami Samarth asked Surdas to open his eyes and he would see.**

**Swami Samarth told Ravji that he had met him in Varanasi twice, once when he had cured his old mother and second time to rid him of some personal difficulties. Ravji then remembered the incidents and recognized Swami Samarth.  Surrendering to Swami Samarth he sang his praises calling him Brahman personified.**

**Swami Samarth was very pleased with Ravji and told him that his eldest son would be a learned person of character and would meet him in south in a Muslim ruled region.  His second son would be a devotee of Shiva and remain a bachelor while his third son would follow the Guru tradition and arrange for the stories of his activities to people. (This third son was Vamanbuva Vamorikar). Swami Samarth was known here as "Shrikrishna Dattatreya Narasimhamuni". Swami Samarth then left for Girnar.**

# MOUNT GIRNAR

**Mount Girnar is a holy place for people belonging to Dattatreya Tradition, Nath sect, devotees of Devi as well as for Jains.  Lord Dattatreya performed penance at the top of the hill. Various *sadhaks* have reported having had *darshan* of Lord Dattatreya during their pilgrimage to Girnar.**

**There are 10,000 steps all the way to the top. The Jain temples are at 3000 steps, Amba temple at 5000 steps, Gorakhnath point at 7000 steps and Dattatreya peak (Dattaparvat) at 10,000 steps. Padukas of Lord Dattatreya have been installed at Dattaparvat.**

**Girnar is near Junagarh in the Saurashtra region of the Gujarat state. Junagarh has a railway station and is on the Rajkot-Dwarka route of Western Railway.  Mount Girnar is known as Raivat Parvat in the Puranas.  It takes 5-7 hrs to climb the 10,000 steps to the Dattaparvat.  There are resting places along the way. For people who cannot climb *palakhi* (dolly) is available at a cost (depending upon a person’s weight).**

**At Girnar Swami Samarth visited the temple of Devi Ambica. She asked him why he had left this main abode of his and where did he go. Swami Samarth replied that he was wandering on the earth for the benefit of people and that he had come there specifically to meet her. He also requested her blessings to be always with him. At this time he was known as Chanchalbharati.**

***Sevadas*  One Sevadas, an aspirant who met Swami Samarth said that because genuine yogis are not to be found in this Kaliyuga, he had come to Girnar to meet such yogis and experience the presence of the deities. Swami Samarth told him that Divine powers that are not affected by the boundaries of time and space always exist. But to meet them one must first raise one's spiritual level and become worthy of such experiences. This is possible only by making the mind pure. Company of saints and actions without desire for fruits helps to achieve this. True Guru’s grace also is necessary to realize God. He advised Sevadas to surrender with all heart to Shri Narasimha Saraswati, who was present on the Girnar Mountain. While Sevadas was listening to this his mind became clear, love for the Supreme sprang in his heart and tears began to flow from his eyes. Once Swami Samarth saw that Sevadas had achieved the fitness he appeared before him in the form of Shri Dattatreya. This happened in the year 1853 AD. Many others also had their doubts cleared and given benediction. A little while later he accepted worship from all the devotees and during the rituals the Shri Dattatreya *Padukas* appeared in place of Swami Samarth's feet.**

# AMBEJOGAI

**Swami Samarth then vanished from Girnar and appeared at Ambejogai in the erstwhile Nizam State, known for the temple of the goddess Ambejogai.  Ambejogai has been the abode of many saints. Here a remarkable miracle was performed by him for saving his devotees. This story is as follows:**

**Swami Samarth’s behaviour here was that of a child.  He mixed among the cowherds. Among them was a very pretty five year old girl who became attracted towards Swami Samarth. She used to chit-chat with Swami Samarth and give him food brought from home. Her poor parents, out of greed made a sneaky plan.  They argued that in the girl would leave their house after marriage anyway so why not dress her as a boy and give her  away to the local childless wealthy moneylender? It would surely benefit them in some way or other and the girl also would live the life of the rich. Then they dressed up the girl as a boy and took her in procession to the moneylender telling him that they had found this pretty boy who was fit to be only in his house. The moneylender thought this to be God’s grace and adopted the boy(?).  The girl dressed as a boy gradually turned into a beautiful youth who was however always worried about her fraud getting exposed. The moneylender then thought of the boy’s marriage and arranged for a good bride. The date was fixed. But when the bride’s people came to apply turmeric to the bridegroom’s body as per the custom they were shocked to find that it was a girl’s and not a boy’s body before them. The moneylender complained to the king who punished the cowherds and passed a death sentence for the girl ordering that the executioners should take her to deep forest and execute her.  Accordingly the executioners took the girl to the forest and made her sit on a rock. She requested for a last wish of meeting Swami Samarth. As soon as she got the permission she ran to where Swami Samarth was sitting and fell at his feet. Swami Samarth at once understood what the matter was and asked the moneylender to be called.  He came with a group of people and saw the girl who was now a real boy by Swami Samarth’s grace without a trace of female attributes.  The moneylender performed the marriage with great pomp. Several sons were born to this boy who developed into good and learned individuals.  The boy himself told this story to Vamanbuwa when they met at the Kamandalutirtha at Girnar.  Only a Siddhayogi could have performed such a miracle which is very similar to the story of Shikhandi in Mahabharata.**

# RAMESHWARAM

**From Ambejogai Swami Samarth went to Rameshwaram in the south. When Swami Samarth arrived there the senior Purohit (priest) in charge of the worship had died and instead of the rights of worship going to his descendants some other persons had forcibly appropriated them. These people started giving trouble to pilgrims by charging exorbitant amounts for everything and abuse them if they did not comply. Finally people came together and on the basis of old documents made a complaint to the king and drove the usurpers away.**

***Clerk's child*   During this period Swami Samarth was quietly sitting in a state of blissful samadhi under a tree. A public institution that provided meals to public was situated near the tree. One clerk in the institution noted that Swami Samarth did not move from his position for three days. He approached Swami Samarth and humbly prayed to him that he would consider himself blessed if he would accept the food he would be sending. Seeing his humbleness Swami Samarth accepted a little food sent by the clerk every day.**

**The clerk was sixty years old and childless. Realizing that Swami Samarth was a Siddha, the clerk and his wife one day prayed insistently to be blessed with a son.  Swami Samarth told him that if they insisted they would get a son but it would be better if he controlled his desires. The couple did not understand what Swami Samarth meant. They got a son and from that time Swami Samarth vanished from there. The clerk continued to keep food under the tree but while earlier Swami Samarth would eat only a little food now the entire dish was being consumed. This created misgivings in the couple’s minds.**

**One day they suddenly saw Swami Samarth in Rameshwaram temple. He seemed to be present everywhere both inside and outside the temple. The old couple was happy. They wanted to put their son at his feet but the son suddenly disappeared. When they called for him he said from the hiding place that he was afraid of the *Sanyasi*. Finally they forcibly brought him to Swami Samarth. The seven year old boy turned into a huge ugly monster and started entreating to Swami Samarth not to kill him and to liberate him. So saying the monster fell down lifeless. Swami Samarth then told the old couple that a spirit living on the tree used to eat the food and he took birth as their son but now he had liberated him. He then gave some ashes to apply to the body to make it turn back into a boy's body and instructed them to cremate it. The desire of the couple for a son did not go away however. Swami Samarth out of compassion blessed them with a son.**

**We see here a typical example of how in spite of the spiritual treasure like Swami Samarth on hand people like the clerk bother only about the materialistic aspects of life out of misguided beliefs like “Without a son one will not get liberation” fostered by *smritis* and how Swami Samarth fulfilled these desires out of compassion.  It is true that one can find mostly only *arta* (distressed) and *artharhi* (desirous of wealth) devotees in this world as mentioned in the seventh Chapter of Dnyaneshwari.**

**There is a lake named Kotitirtha near Rameshwaram.  As in Lake Narayan, here also the priests did not allow people to bathe unless they paid substantial money. Seeing this one day Swami Samarth went there to take bath the priests prevented him and asked for money. Swami Samarth argued that he was a sanyasi and where could he get money from? But the arrogant priest did not listen. Swami Samarth left saying “The thing for which a bath was desirable in this lake is no longer there” and left.  The lake water developed foul odour and was full of worms.**

**Now nobody would take bath in the lake and that affected the income of the greedy priests. They tried all sorts of measures like *abhisheka* and mantras but nothing would help. Finally they went to Shringeri Shankaracharya who went into meditation and found that the reason was they had maltreated a sanyasi who was not an ordinary sanyasi but an avatar; they had under the influence of greed had forgotten simple courtesy and they should pray the sanyasi. Now the behaviour of the priests towards the public changed. As they improved the lake water also improved in quality.  Then one day suddenly they saw Swami Samarth in Rameshwaram. The priests gathered around him and Swami Samarth asked, “How was your trip to Shringeri?  Did you meet Shankaracharya?”  The priests surrendered and Swami Samarth advised them to follow Shankaracharya advice.**

# RAJUR

**After gracing many in Rameshwaram Swami Samarth came to Rajur in Beed district in erstwhile Nizam state (Now in Marathwada region of Maharashtra).**

**There was a decrepit Math in Rajur which Swami Samarth rejuvenated. He initiated many disciples there including one Lalbharati. He arranged for an annual government grant of one thousand rupees which gave some stability to the Math. One day Swami Samarth vanished from there and was seen at Pandharpur walking on the waters of river Chandrabhaga. From Pandharpur Swami Samarth went to Mangalwedhe. Here in Rajur the State grant was stopped by Nizam government after Swami Samarth’s departure. Lalbharati and others were distressed. They searched for Swami Samarth and located him at Akkalkot. He arranged for the grant to be revived but warned Lalbharati that the funds should be used to only help the pilgrims and they should behave properly.**

# MANGALWEDHE

**Swami Samarth appeared in Mangalwedhe in the year 1838 AD and stayed there for twelve years. (From now onwards his movements seem to be well documented).  Mangalwedhe is located about 65 Km southeast of Solapur and about 25 Km south of Pandharpur.**

**Mangalwedhe is the place where Damaji, the great devotee of Vithoba (Pandharpur) lived in the fifteenth century. Damaji was in revenue service. During his tenure the region was afflicted by a famine for seven years from 1468 AD onwards. The kind Damaji could not bear to see people starving. On his own authority, he distributed food from the government granary to the starving poor. Damaji was arrested and asked to pay up for the used grains. An unknown person who gave his name as Vithu came and paid the money and had Damaji released. It was obvious that Shri Vithoba the deity of Pandharpur had come himself in person to save his devotee. Mangalwedhe is known for many other devotees also. Kanhopatra, the daughter of a prostitute is well known among them. Many bad elements including the king of Bedar tried to get her. But she did not want anything other than Vithoba. She has composed many devotional poems. She was forcibly taken away by the king but on the way she requested to be allowed to visit the Vithoba temple in Pandharpur and died leaving her body on the threshold of the sanctum sanctorum there. Her story proves the point made in Dnyaneshwari that when it comes to devotion God is attainable by anybody irrespective of his caste or gender.**

**Swami Samarth instead of coming into the town remained in the nearby forest. His behaviour was, like many accomplished yogis, sometimes like a child (*Balavritti*), sometimes like a mentally deranged person (*Unmattavritti*) and sometimes like a possessed person (*Pishacchavritti*). Whenever he entered the town, which was not often, he used to sit in some dirty place. He was indifferent to good and bad, clean and dirty, whether he was dressed or naked but he remained in a state of bliss.**

***Krishnambhat's cow*   Though a yogi in this state looks like a madman to common people there always are people who can feel their greatness. We have the example of Shri Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon whom Bankatlal and Damodarpant saw sitting naked in the street eating the leftover food thrown in the street. They recognized him as an accomplished yogi and served him, finally becoming his disciples. There was in Mangalwedhe a poor but well charactered Brahmin by name Krishnambhat Kapshikar. When he saw Swami Samarth he recognized him as an unusual person and bowing to him humbly requested to visit his home. Swami Samarth smiled because he knew that Krishnambhat was extremely poor but sincere and promised to visit him. Krishnambhat came home and told this to his wife who also felt happy. They waited for Swami Samarth to come. Suddenly they found Swami Samarth sitting on the front platform of their home. Krishnambhat came and stood before him performing a mental worship. Swami Samarth accepted the worship and asked smilingly, "This is all fine but what are you going to give me to eat?" Krishnambhat and his wife stood there with misty eyes because there was nothing in the house to offer. Swami Samarth again told them, "Why are you standing there? I am hungry. Go and get me something to eat." Both went inside and after some thinking Krishnambhat gave his wife a pot and told her to go out in town and get some milk quickly from somewhere. She went and returned empty handed. They came sadly to Swami Samarth and told him what had happened. Swami Samarth asked why they were going out when they had a cow in the house. The couple told him that the cow no longer gave milk. Swami Samarth first gave them advice on the Self-realization and then asked them to go and milk the cow. The cow began giving milk and Krishnambhat could offer milk to Swami Samarth.   Soon the entire town knew the real capability of Swami Samarth. (Readers may remember the similar miracle by Shri Narasimha Saraswati before he entered Ganagapur.)**

***Janabai sees Vithoba* There was a woman named Janabai belonging to the Shudra caste who was deeply devoted to Vithoba of Pandharpur. She used to visit Pandharpur every year on *Ashadh* *Ekadashi* day to see Vithoba and make her obeisance to Him. This is the time when all Vithoba devotees from all places converge to Pandharpur. The trip is called “*Vari*” and the maker of the trip is called a Varkari. In those days going to Pandharpur was not easy. There were no buses and no arrangements for meals on the way as are available today. People had to walk miles braving rain and sun. There were no public facilities, no medical facilities and no inoculations against cholera which took its toll every year due to unhygienic conditions. People really risked their lives to visit Vithoba at Pandharpur but under the sedation of devotion people forgot all problems and marched ahead towards Vithoba engrossed in the singing His name.**

**This year there came heavy rains which brought floods. Journey to Pandharpur to meet Vithoba seemed impossible. Janabai started crying for she had never missed the annual visit. While she was thus lamenting from her heart there was a flash of lightning and she saw Swami Samarth sitting under a tree oblivious of the rain. She felt consoled and went near him. He noted her desperate state and asked her, "Do you think that Vithal is only at Pandharpur and nowhere else?" He then gave her spiritual advice and power to see Vithal within her. She started seeing Vithal everywhere. Swami Samarth then asked her to close her eyes and then open. When she closed the eyes Swami Samarth got up and stood before her with hands on the waist like Vithoba. When she opened her eyes she saw Vithal in person before her. *Swami Samarth brought to her the realization that the body is Pandharpur and the Soul residing in it is Vithal.* Thus she realized the formless Brahman. From then onwards she did not insist on going to Pandharpur. Instead she would go wherever Swami Samarth used to be at that time. Janabai must be considered to be really fortunate to have received guidance from such a Guru as Swami Samarth. How many people can be so fortunate? One must also ask, how many people are as deeply devoted as Janabai? It is the vibrations of devotion that reach Guru and God and not *bhajans* without feelings.**

***Golden snake*   Swami Samarth performed many miracles at Mangalwedhe. One Basappa saw Swami Samarth relaxing on a bed of thorns in the forest.  Realizing that he was a great yogi Basappa became a devotee of Swami Samarth. He used to stay near him ignoring his wife who was starving and had therefore fallen ill. One day Swami Samarth took Basappa to a forest where he saw horrible snakes. He fell unconscious by fright. Swami Samarth brought him to senses and asked him to return home taking as many snakes as he wanted. Basappa readily agreed to return to his ailing wife because of the fear of the snakes but would not pick up any. Finally Swami Samarth picked up a snake, tied it in a piece of cloth and forced it on Basappa. Basappa ran home to his sick wife who opened the bundle and found a piece of pure gold.**

***Deo Mamaledar*   Though most people approached Swami Samarth for material benefits there were a few who came for spiritual benefits. Among such persons the name of Deo Mamaledar is well-known. His real name was Yashwant Mahadeo Bhosekar from Bhosegaon. He served Swami Samarth with deep devotion while at Mangalwedhe. He was holding the Government post of a Mamaledar (below a collector). He was known both for his spiritual level and for his charitable nature. Once, the district of Thane near Bombay was suffering from famine. People had no jobs and therefore no money to buy grains from government granaries. They began to die of starvation but Government was oblivious to the calamity. One day hundreds of starving persons thronged at Deo Mamaledar's office having heard about his kind nature.  Deo Mamaledar, feeling pity for them, opened the government granary and distributed ten thousand rupees worth of grains among the starving masses who returned to their homes grateful to Deo Mamaledar. However the incident had its repercussions. One person by name Prabhu made a complaint about the incident to the Thane Collector who immediately came with police to audit the situation. Deo Mamaledar was called and the granary opened in his presence. Deo Mamaledar confessed that he had distributed the grains but since government was supposed to protect people and the need was immediate he had ignored the rules. But the Collector was not interested in all this philosophy. He wanted to be a most Obedient Servant of the Government. He ordered to audit the accounts and the cash in the safe. It turned out that everything was accounted for including the ten thousand rupees for the grains. The Collector who was a British person realized that Deo Mamaledar had Divine backing. Though he praised him Deo Mamaledar realized that the impersonal Government atmosphere was not congenial to his spiritual path and tendered his resignation.**

***A Muslim devotee*   A poor Muslim individual in Mangalwedhe who roamed around like a madman surviving only by begging, became a sincere of Swami Samarth. He used to fill his pipe with tobacco and make it ready to smoke. At that time Swami Samarth was camping in the meadow of one Mr Patwardhan. Whenever Swami Samarth came to the town he served him in many other ways.  Many days later Swami Samarth out of compassion kept his divine hand on his head and gave him (spiritual) Knowledge. The man later became an *auliya* i.e. a spiritual person of high attainment who is oblivious to his personal effects or behaviour. Though outwardly he behaved like a deranged person, internally he was immersed in the bliss of the Brahman. This shows that Swami Samarth used to give spiritual benefits to worthy persons.**

***Humbling Ramdasibuwa*  There was an egotistic chief of a Math at Chalambe near Mangalwedhe named Ramdasibuwa. He had a very high opinion about himself in spiritual matters. One day Swami Samarth went to the Math & after partaking of afternoon meals slept inside. Ramdasibuva waited for him to wake up and leave so that he could lock the Math and go about his business. But Swami Samarth continued to sleep. Finally in a fit of anger he locked the Math with Swami Samarth still sleeping inside & went to the town where he spent quite some time. He told his friends how he had locked Swami Samarth inside. On the way back however he was shocked to see Swamiji near the river. Other people also saw him and started questioning Ramdasibuwa. They all came to the Math to find it still locked but Swami Samarth missing from inside. People started ridiculing the chief & his spiritual achievements too. To prove that he had really locked Swami Samarth in Ramdasibuva brought a Vedic pundit Parshurambhat as witness. This changed the attitude of everybody who rushed to the river and prostrated before Swami Samarth. The pundit told Ramdasibuva that taking the name of God does not make one a devotee but being one with him to such an extent that ultimately it results into God taking God's name. This got rid of Ramdasibuva’s ego.**

# MOHOL

***Importance of moral behaviour*. The following story shows how particular Swami Samarth was about**

**morals: Mr Ganesh Sohoni was a government official Mamledar rank in Mohol.  Once there was a *kirtan* (discourse) in his house during the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations. Swami Samarth was also present. It was around midnight and though it was raining Swami Samarth suddenly walked out of the house. Mr. Sohoni followed entreating him to return but Swami Samarth refused declaring that his house was unclean and proceeded towards the forest. Sohoni persistently followed him for couple of miles. When he saw that Swami Samarth would not return he felt hopeless and asked Swami Samarth when he would be able to meet him.  He was told “In the mango season” (in spring).  Sohoni returned. The reason Swami Samarth has left was that Sohoni had kept a mistress in the house. But under the influence of lust Sohoni did not get rid of her.  Sometime later (it was around 1851-52 AD) district collector, Sohoni’s superior visited for inspection and having heard about his habit privately advised him to give up the mistress because it did not become a government officer like him.  Sohoni replied that collector need not bother about it since it was a personal matter.  Collector became annoyed and sometime later Sohoni was prosecuted. Though he was set free by court he had to lose his position and he went to live in Solapur.  In the mango season Swami Samarth came to him with two mangoes, gave them to Sohoni and vanished.  He got an equivalent job in Baroda after he gave up his mistress.  Guru’s instructions should be taken seriously because they are for your good and disobeying one’s Guru can be disastrous. Sohoni must be considered singularly fortunate that Swami Samarth did not forget him and met him as promised.**

***Gaveswami*  Swami Samarth was in Mohol for about five years. In Mohol there was a yogi named Gaveswami who had reached a high yogic level. He had practiced yoga for more than hundred and twenty-five years and lived in seclusion. His entire nature was purified and love was radiating from him. Only thing stopping him from liberation was the blessings of a true Guru. Swami Samarth went to him, saw his advanced state and sent him in the highest samadhi state and liberation.**

**Swami Samarth left Mohol and came to Solapur in about 1854-55. After spending couple of years in Solapur Swami Samarth came to Akkalkot which was to be last of his abodes in this lifetime.**

# EVENTS AT SOLAPUR

**After coming to Solapur in about 1854-55, Swami Samarth stayed in a Shri Dattatreya temple. He used to sit in a corner immersed in the bliss of the Brahman. His only activity used to be playing with marbles, throwing them here and there. People who came to the temple used to ignore him as a madman but one day a person named Chintopant Tol noticed him and felt intuitively that he must be a Siddha. Just then Swami Samarth said loudly, "What business is it of yours whether I am a Siddha or not?” Chintopant realised that this person was a mind reader. At once Swami Samarth remarked, "What does it matter whether I am a mind reader or not?” Now Chintopant was certain that this was no madman but a Siddha. He went to him, touched his feet and requested him to visit his home. Swami Samarth accepted. Chintopant then invited him for meals which also he accepted.  Chintopant was extremely happy.**

***Swami Samarth eats at Chintopant's house*  Swami Samarth came to Chintopant one day as promised.  Chintopant bowed before him, seated him on the best seat and went inside to take bath prior to meals. Just before he was coming out to take Swami Samarth in for meals, one Dajiba Sohoni came to him and whispered to him that Swami Samarth did not bother about the prescribed rules of purity and touchability; he touched anybody and anything and ate with persons of any caste; it would be against rules of Dharma to sit in the same row as Swami Samarth for meals. (In the middle of nineteenth century caste rules were very strict, unlike today). As a result of this brainwashing Chintopant decided to arrange Swami Samarth's seat at right angles to that of the Brahmins’ row as rules permit. With this thought in mind he came to take Swami Samarth inside.  Swami Samarth got up and began to leave the house saying that Chintopant had doubts in his mind and therefore he would not eat in his house. Chintopant realized he had made a mistake. After making entreaties he somehow managed to be forgiven and then Swami Samarth ate at his house. After this incident Swami Samarth often visited Chintopant’s house and had meals.**

***Chintopant's* *son* *is* *late* *in* *office*  One day Swami Samarth came to Chintopant for meals. Chintopant gave him bath, worshipped him and prayed to him to come for meals but that day Swami Samarth kept sitting quietly and would not get up. Chintopant’s son Vishnupant was serving as a clerk in the collector's office and had to reach his office by ten O'clock. Chintopant was worried as the hour approached ten in the morning.  The Collector Mr. Goldfinch as well as his Deputy Mr. Hanmantrao Pitambar were very strict about punctuality. Chintopant therefore suggested that Vishnupant should eat and proceed to office. But Vishnupant was also an ardent devotee of Swami Samarth and refused to eat unless Swami Samarth ate first.  Swami Samarth finally got up for meals at eleven. After his meals Vishnupant went to office with a pounding heart worrying about the dressing down he would get from his superiors. He reached office, removed his coat and went to the head-clerk Mr. Deorao to beg his pardon for being late. Mr. Deorao was surprised. He asked, “What pardon? You have already signed the muster today even earlier than me.” Vishnupant's eyes were wet with feelings of gratitude for Swami Samarth, for he understood that this was his play. When others knew about it they too developed a great reverence for Swami Samarth.**

**Chintopant retired from service shortly afterwards but because of his experience and capability Shahajiraje Bhonsale, the King of Akkalkot state took him in his service. Thus Chintopant moved to Akkalkot from Solapur. He requested Swami Samarth to come with him to Akkalkot but he refused saying that "It is a hot summer at Akkalkot. I will come after rains."**

**Swami Samarth remained in Solapur for some time during which he blessed many in both worldly and spiritual matters. Among them was a north Indian Brahmin named Mukund who was a good *sadhak*. After Swami Samarth gave him proper advice he began observing complete silence and was known as Mounibuva. He reached the Siddha state and many benefitted by his powers.**

# AKKALKOT-THE LAST ABODE

**As the number of devotees increased Swami Samarth decided to leave Solapur. In the meantime Shahajiraje Bhonsale died and Malojirao succeeded him to the throne. Akkalkot received good rains after the Deepavali festival. Now in about 1856 AD, Chintopant once more requested Swami Samarth to come to Akkalkot and this time he accepted. While he was coming to Akkalkot with Swami Samarth on a horse, Chintopant was called away by the Collector. He left Swami Samarth sitting under a tree leaving a servant in attendance. When Chintopant returned he found a frightened servant and no sign of Swami Samarth. The servant told him that Swami Samarth had left saying that nobody owns him. Chintopant was worried stiff but was relieved to find Swami Samarth playing like a child in the Khandoba temple near Akkalkot. Chintopant requested him to come home but Swami Samarth said, "No!  My home is elsewhere." After many unsuccessful entreaties Chintopant bowed and left. It was the fifth of the month of Ashwin bright fortnight of 1779 by Shalivahan calendar (1857 AD) when Swami Samarth first entered Akkalkot. He lived here for nearly 22 years in the final phase of his life until his samadhi in 1878 AD.**

# ASPIRANTS BY THOUSANDS

**Thousands of people visited Swami Samarth at Akkalkot and received blessings. Most people sought material benefits but a small minority were true seekers. We shall be acquainted with both types a little later. Many of these seekers were given *Padukas* (sandals) and sent away with instructions to install and worship them. Thus we see a number of Maths of Swami Samarth at several places in Maharashtra. These Maths are really like temples visited daily by hundreds of people.**

***Math and temple*   There is a basic difference between temple of a deity and temple or Math of a saint. A deity considered celestial is held in awe and even fear by the devotees always creating a subtle barrier between the deity and the devotee. An ordinary devotee of a deity sees and worships only the idol or a picture of the deity. There is no direct communication between the two unless the devotee has reached a very high spiritual level. Thus the devotee performs the worship and walks away having the satisfaction of having done his duty towards the deity or towards God**

**In the case of a saint however the fact that he was a human being before samadhi and was in personal contact with the devotees creates a bond instead of a barrier. A sense of love, of informality and approachability, the faith (and often some experience) that the Guru really looks after their welfare strengthens this bond. This is what has happened in the case of Swami Samarth. His Maths are visited constantly by sincere devotees. And when a devotee who never even saw Swami Samarth develops such a bond imagine how strong the bonds must have been when devotees were in personal contact with him while he was alive in his body and actually talked to them, engulfing them in his vibrations of love and compassion.  Even Swami Samarth’s anger was considered by the devotees like a boon.**

**The events in Solapur and Akkalkot have been well documented and published, mostly in Marathi. The entire collection will spread easily over three hundred pages. Therefore only a few incidents have been selected here for presentation.**

**Mini-biographies of some prominent disciples of Swami Samarth will be presented in the next part: Disciples of Swami Samarth.**

# THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

***No more orthodoxy*  From now on there seems to be basic change in the type of devotees who came to Swami Samarth. During the time of Shripad Shrivallabh there is no record of any Muslim visiting him. In the case of Shri Narasimha Saraswati the only Muslim to visit him was the king used to be washer-man in his earlier birth. Shri Narasimha Saraswati prohibited Sayandeo from serving under or even saluting any Muslim.  His actions were in keeping with the need of those times. Shri Narasimha Saraswati must have realized the basic enmity between the Muslims and Hindus, the difference in the way of life and thinking of the two and how Hindus, especially upper caste Brahmins had to serve compulsorily or reluctantly the ruling Muslims and in the course of time deviated from the orthodox way of life.**

**In the regime of Swami Samarth times had changed. The Muslims were no longer rulers except in smaller states. They were now subdued and the British ruled India. We see the third avatar of Shri Dattatreya mixing with one and all irrespective of their caste or religion and becoming unpopular among the orthodox for it. He did not impose ban on serving the British or learning their language.  His grace extended not only to Muslims some of whom became his disciples but to the British as well, i.e. those who approached him for his grace. This was again in keeping with the times.**

***Adjusting to Geography*  When we examine the history of mankind we always see that whoever came as messenger of God always preached whatever conformed to those times. The changes he proposed were always to the religious practices or concepts prevalent in his own times and for which he had to suffer the wrath of the contemporary rigid orthodoxy.  But this world undergoes constant changes because of which changing natural, political or social environment the teachings can become incongruous.  If the religion spreads to geographical areas far from the place of the birth of the religion then also the religious practices become incongruous.  The practices sometimes involve hygiene (like taking bath or cleaning hands) and diet (like eating certain kinds of meat and vegetables) and create problems.  These practices may not have anything to do with the tenets of the religion but just rules forced on the followers by priests. We can find instances of this in the Judaic religions (i.e. Jewish, Christian and Muslim) and become weapons for the so called fundamentalists to attack the public.  In Hindu and Jain religions also there religious rules involving hygiene and food which while easy to follow in a tropical Indian climate, would be impossible to follow completely for a common man in the Western temperate climates with freezing temperatures and snow and limited capability of growing vegetables.  Geography cannot adjust to man, man and hence religion has to adjust to geography.**

**If this does not happen then the religion becomes inconsistent with the surrounding environment bringing many contradictions in its practice. This can give rise to fundamentalism which upholds ancient values and practices and create dissent within the society. More likely, another messenger of God comes and starts a new religion to fit the new environment.  In the present case we have an avatar of Shri Dattatreya who is not only tolerant to Muslims but even has disciples among them in keeping up with the times.  We notice that stress on ritualistic correctness has given way to spiritual attainment.**

# INITIAL DAYS

***Nirabai’s laddoo*   Hearing that Swami Samarth had arrived in Akkalkot and was at the Khandoba temple many persons came to meet him. Chintopant Tol also came and introduced them. Among them was a very pious person named Pandurang Puranik whose invitation for meals Swami Samarth accepted.   Puranik’s wife Nirabai very devotedly welcomed swami Samarth with garlands etc and placed a dish of snacks before him.  He took a *laddoo* from the dish and gazed at eat instead of eating it. People were frightened lest they have committed some blunder. When Nirabai pleaded that he should begin eating Swami Samarth asked her to bring the part of the laddoo she had held back and kept on the stove.  What had happened is that thinking that swami Samarth may not eat the whole laddoo and it would go waste she had kept half on the stove and given only half to Swami Samarth.  Everybody was amazed at how Swami Samarth could know about this; Swami Samarth ate happily and blessed the couple.  In a way he suggested that one should be free from the tendency to accumulate.**

**Baba Sabnis and Manik Prabhu   At this time one Baba Sabnis came there and prostrated before Swami Samarth. He said I had your *darshan*  at Maniknagar when you had promised to give *darshan* at Akkalkot in future. That has come true. People were astonished to hear this.**

**Manik Prabhu (1817-1865)  is considered as the fourth avatar of Dattatreya (See Part VI).  His domain of activity was the erstwhile Muslim ruled Nizam state.  The context of the above incidence is as follows: Many aspirants came to Manik Prabhu some for their material difficulties and a lesser number for spiritual guidance.  To the latter class belonged one Yadnyeshwar Vaidya Ahmadnagarkar *alias* Bapu Dikshit who stayed at Maniknagar to serve Manik Prabhu. This Bapu Dikshit had a nephew named Vishwanath Vaidya who also lived there along with his friend Baba Sabnis.  These were all religious minded honest persons of clean mentality. They used to sing *Bhajans* to musical accompaniment before Manik Prabhu in the evenings.**

**Once, while Dattatreya bhajans were in progress there was a flash of bright light that almost blinded the people present.  Then Swami Samarth appeared accompanied by two *sanyasis*.  Manik Prabhu rushed forward, made obeisance to Swami Samarth and seated him respectfully on the highest seat there. He seated the other two sanyasis also on other seats.  Sometime later Manik Prabhu told Baba Sabnis that the great Sanyasi was Swami Samarth and will shortly come to live in Akkalkot for benefitting people. He told Vishwanath Vaidya that Swami Samarth was Dattatreya himself and was his (Vishwanath’s) Guru. Also that his youngest brother Vamanrao Vaidya would be a close devotee of Swami Samarth and rise to high spiritual level and spread the Dattatreya Sampradaya. Swami Samarth and Manik Prabhu blessed them. The visiting sanyasis stayed with Manik Prabhu in exclusion of all others the whole night. Next morning Swami Samarth, by mental communication solved all the doubts of Baba Sabnis.   The visitors then left. Manik Prabhu instructed Baba Sabnis to go to Akkalkot and inform people about the forthcoming arrival there of Swami Samarth.   Vishwanath Vaidya also returned home to Vamori and told the good news to Vamanrao giving him the garland worn by Swami Samarth.**

# *Kings’s obeisance*   Swami Samarth then went and stayed in the royal Gnash temple. People started flocking there to have his *darshan.* The news reached the ears of king Maloji of Akkalkot. He came to the temple with garlands, coconut etc. along with his minister Dajiba Bhonsale to meet Swami Samarth and after worshipping him he surrendered to him. Sami Samarth graced both by giving the garland to Dajiba and ochre cloth to the King.  The 22- year stay started

# CHOLAPPA

***Smokes Empty Chillum*   Swami Samarth soon left the temple and camped at a place called "Phatak" (Gate) near the village border which used to be marked by a flag. He stayed there for three days without eating. On the fourth day a Muslim *risaldar* (Chief of cavalry unit) by name Ahmadali saw him and thought he was some mad person. Eager to have some fun at his expense Ahmadali took an empty chillum, put some burning coal in it and asked, "Maharaj, do you smoke?"  Swami Samarth took the chillum without a word and started puffing at it. Smoke started coming out of the chillum. Ahmadali who was laughing was shocked into silence. He was now convinced that this mad looking person was some great yogi. He now became a devotee. He enquired about him and learnt that he had not eaten for three days. Feeling unhappy he arranged for his meals at the house of a Brahmin who lived nearby called Cholappa.  When Cholappa kept the dish of food before Swami Samarth he asked Ahmadali to touch it. Due to the untouchability taboos of those days he was reluctant to do so but Swami Samarth told him smilingly not to be afraid and to hold the dish in hand. Swami Samarth was very happy when he touched it and broke his three days fast.**

**As mentioned earlier Swami Samarth never differentiated between Hindus and Muslims. He used to visit temples as well as mosques and Dargas (mausoleums). The fight between Hindus and Muslims had now given place to their common fight against the British who were trying to bring the entire Indian subcontinent under their rule.**

***Cholappa*   When Swami Samarth saw Cholappa he at once said, “Cholappa, have you forgotten me? You are the son of Ramchandra Saraf, a Brahmin and my dear devotee.”  After meals Swami Samarth went to stay at Cholappa's house.**

**Cholappa used to live with his wife and two sons. Swami Samarth used worship them .to give lots of trouble to the family by behaving like a madman. He used to feed the grains in the house to cows or give it away in alms to beggars and mendicants. He would urinate anywhere in the house. But Cholappa firmly believed that Swami Samarth was an avatar of Shri Dattatreya and tolerated everything. Once Swami Samarth left the house but Cholappa brought him back.**

**After testing Cholappa for a long time swami Samarth set out for a village named Basapur couple of miles away. Cholappa followed him even after swami Samarth angrily told him not to do so advising him to go back home and lead a good family life. But Cholappa refused saying that he would rather leave his house and family but not Swami Samarth’s feet. Seeing the deep devotion Swami Samarth threw his sandals (*padukas*) at him instructing him to worship them regularly. Cholappa was full of joy when he received the *Padukas*.**

**Cholappa began to worship the *Padukas* regularly and soon sick people in the neighbourhood began to get dreams in which they were told to go to Cholappa's house where the Padukas were installed and their visits would be gainful. These *Padukas* are still being worshipped in Cholappa Math at Akkalkot by his descendants.**

**Swami Samarth now became one of the family. But being poor Cholappa could just manage to feed the family and Swami Samarth. Later he received a regular monthly grant of five rupees from the king.  In the course of time Cholappa became greedy and started fleecing Swami Samarth’s visitors one way or other. Later a woman named Sunderabai, about whom we shall read later, came to serve Swami Samarth and undertook to feed him, (for often Swami Samarth required feeding like a child) and look after his comforts. In the course of time she became very powerful but greedy. She managed to remove Cholappa from the service of Swami Samarth by influencing the queen of Akkalkot.**

**According to Kelkarbuva’s *Bakhar,* as Cholappa accumulated wealth his services to Swami Samarth became lax. One day Swami Samarth picked up a cloth lying about and put knots in it to make it into a begging bowl. He then said “Allakh” (as Nath yogis say) and kept the cloth open. People put cash into it. In no time rupees one hundred and twenty-five were collected. He gave it to Cholappa saying, “Cholya, take this. Now I do not owe you anything anymore.” Cholappa had until then collected cash material worth about sixty thousand rupees in which probably rupees one hundred and twenty-five were short to complete a round sum.   Shortly after this, by royal decree it was ordered that a clerk and two policemen would supervise and keep account of the offerings and a committee would overlook the procedure and spend the collections for maintenance as needed.  From that time Cholappa and Sunderbai lost their special position and were treated like any other *sevekaris.***

**Swami Samarth did not see Cholappa when he died. He was highly devoted to Swami Samarth up to the last but his greed took its toll. Swami Samarth loved him like a father and when he died the sorrow was reflected in Swami Samarth's face. When asked by the queen he said that the sorrow was like the separation between persons who were father and son for seven generations.**

# REBELLION OF 1857

**After coming to Akkalkot, Swami Samarth began to play a strange game. He used to bring sticks and arrange its pieces like soldiers at a parade. He would arrange threads of the blanket similarly. When asked he would say he was making platoons. Soon the 1857 war between the British and the deposed Peshwas and other rulers started in which British won. But Swami Samarth knew about the forthcoming war quite in advance.**

***Vasudeo Balwant Phadke* The well-known revolutionary Vasudeo Balwant Phadke was a keen devotee of Swami Samarth. He came to Swami Samarth sometime in 1857 with a sword and requested him to touch the sword and present it to him so that with its strength he can fight the British. Swami Samarth was very happy at his words but his face showed a touch of sadness. Vasudeo Balwant waited for Swami Samarth to give him the sword but Swami Samarth called a nearby servant and asked him to take the sword and keep it on the nearby tree. Vasudev Balwant understood the implication, took the sword and left. That was not yet ripe for such revolutions. Swami Samarth already knew what the outcome of the 1857 revolution would be and he also knew that fighting against the British was beyond the capability of a single person like Vasudeo Balwant however high his ideals may be.**

**SOLACE TO ALL**

**Swami Samarth was very compassionate. He did not tolerate dishonesty, hypocrisy or immorality and nobody could hide them from him because he was omniscient. He would be nasty and abusive in even vulgar language to such people but once they repented and surrendered he would go all the way to help them and fulfil their desires. Many of his kind actions have been recorded but that would be a very small fraction of the total.  What is reported here is a small fraction of even those.**

**As mentioned earlier very few persons came to Swami Samarth for spiritual gains. Most came for their materialistic difficulties. Some wanted a son, some wanted increase in their wealth, some wanted relief from their illnesses and many came to display their own knowledge and to criticise Swami Samarth for his unconventional behaviour as regards the observance of the caste system. All benefitted by their visits. Many self-important pundits were humbled but received Swami Samarth’s grace.**

**To take some example many came for gaining eyesight. Swami Samarth told different medicines to different people, and what were these medicines? One person was asked to put cat’s milk in the eyes, another was asked put horse urine and a third elephant urine. All were cured. What worked was Swami Samarth’s power, the medicines were nominal. One got his sight even after his eyes were touched by a flower from outside.  One cannot look for medical explanations here.**

**People came to cure leprosy and leucoderma, abdominal pains and other afflictions.  Swami Samarth gave strange prescriptions and tasks and if carried with devotion they would get cured.  Swami Samarth even diverted death and revived dead persons as an exception for saints normally do not interfere with course of nature.**

**Many such instances in the pre-Akkalkot phase have already been presented earlier. A few of these incidents and of course those incidents involving spiritual aspirants at Akkalkot are related below.**

***Death transferred to bull*  There was a person named Babasaheb Jadhav in Akkalkot. Swami Samarth knew that time for his death had come. He called him and said, “Eh Kumbhar (Potter, Swami Samarth used to call many people by that name.), message (of death) has come in your name.” Jadhav understood what was meant and was frightened. Clasping Swami Samarth’s feet he said that he wished to continue to serve him. Swami Samarth felt pity for him and said loudly to somebody, obviously the messengers of death, "Go there!", pointing to a bull grazing nearby. The bull at once fell dead and Jadhav continued to live for some more years.**

**There are many instances of Swami Samarth saving lives. Normally saints do not interfere with natural course of events but sometimes they do it for specific reasons. This Jadhav once tried to save a person named Ravanna from snakebite by keeping Swami Samarth's shoes on his head without permission from him. Swami Samarth who was sleeping at that time suddenly got up, threw away all his clothes and was very angry at Jadhav, abusing him left and right. Probably because the sanctity of the shoes had to be kept he asked him to shout in Ravanna's ears loudly calling him by name. After some time Ravanna woke up as if from a deep sleep. There are other instances also when Swami Samarth revived a dead person.**

# EQUALITY TO ALL

***King is slapped*  Swami Samarth who was Brahman personified, did not like hypocrisy, untruth and other undesirable attributes. He did not spare anybody who showed these undesirable qualities and was very blunt about it irrespective of whether the person was rich or poor.  What mattered to him was devotion. He was totally fearless.**

**Once, Malojiraje Bhonsale the king of Akkalkot came to meet Swami Samarth. He was riding on an elephant with all the royal splendour, wearing expensive jewellery. But Swami Samarth did not like this exhibition. When Malojiraje came to him to bow and was keeping his head on his feet, Swami Samarth slapped him hard on face with such a force that the royal bejewelled cap was thrown ten feet away. Malojiraje stood stunned rubbing his cheek. Swami Samarth was enraged and shouted, "You may be great in your house. Why do you bring that greatness here? I make Chess kings like you every day."**

**Malojiraje continued to visit Swami Samarth every Thursday. But he used to come in a simple dress and the palanquin in which he came was now kept far away and out of sight of Swami Samarth.**

***Some more tales about the king*  Malojiraje’s devotion to Swami Samarth had worldly motives. He wanted to be blessed with a son. At the time of the first delivery of the queen people asked Swami Samarth whether it would be a boy or a girl. Swami Samarth said, "Bring bangles." This signified a daughter and it was a daughter this time. Second time Swami Samarth went and sat near the stove indicating it was again a girl. Third time however he said, “Fire the cannon.” This time it was a son.**

**Swami Samarth always used to speak with short remarks using a mixture of Hindi and Marathi often sounding like riddles which had to be interpreted. With practice the persons living in his company could interpret his utterances or actions and advise the visitors accordingly.**

***Dead mouse revived*   One day Swami Samarth suddenly went to the palace. The king learnt of his arrival and hurriedly received him. Later, both sat on the swing facing the worship room. The *purohit* (priest) in charge of worship was at that time preparing sandal paste needed for the worship by rubbing sandalwood on stone. Just then a mouse came and started nibbling at the ghee (clarified butter) kept nearby for wetting lamp wicks. The purohit was enraged at this and threw the sandalwood piece at the mouse killing it. Elated, the purohit picked up the mouse by the tail and came out for throwing it away. Swami Samarth saw him and asked for the mouse. Taking the mouse in his hand he made it pass through the rings of the swing a few times and then keeping it on his palm said, "Go, child!" and the mouse, now alive, jumped and ran away. Everyone was aghast at this miracle.**

***Swami Samarth sees king on deathbed*  Malojiraje was highly devoted to Swami Samarth. He fell ill and he knew death was approaching. He was constantly thinking about Swami Samarth and used to tell everybody to arrange for him to meet him. But Swami Samarth did not come to the palace for nearly a fortnight. But when Malojiraje was about to die he suddenly entered the palace and went to the king who died with his eyes fixed on Swami Samarth.**

# DOUBTS, INSINCERITY AND SINCERITY

**Swami Samarth did not like hypocrisy and insincerity. He used to ridicule and sometimes punish such people. On the other hand he appreciated sincerity and rewarded it. A few examples are given here in this context.**

***Fruits of petty greed*  Swami Samarth used to visit any place or house as pleased him, come sun or rain. One day he went early in the morning to the house of a Brahmin named Ganpatrao Joshi. Ganpatrao was very happy. He gave Swami Samarth bath and dressed him in his yellow silk cloth. Performing his worship in the traditional way with sandal paste, *kumkum* etc. he offered him food and kept his head on Swami Samarth's feet. Just then a thought entered his mind that after leaving his house Swami Samarth might give away his new yellow silk cloth. Swami Samarth read his thoughts and at once removed the cloth from his body and handing it over to Ganpatrao left his house without any clothes on. Joshi tried a lot to make Swami Samarth come back but he said, “You doubted. Now I shall not eat at your house.” Just then another person named Tatya Vaidya came to know about this and invited Swami Samarth to come to his house. Swami Samarth judged the depth of his faith and had meals with him.**

***Stone and mattress are same to a yogi* Once Swami Samarth was lying down on a cushion.  A Puranik (one who gives discourses on Puranas) saw it and remarked why Sadhus (saints) need luxuries like cushions. A month passed. One day Swami took the Puranik for a walk to the nearby village. Towards evening he started climbing a hill with the Puranik accompanying him, The Puranik began hinting that they should return, but Swami ignored his suggestions, went to the top and spread a cloth on a stone and relaxed. The Puranik was worried and frightened because it was cold, dark and he did not have any warm clothes with him. Finally he confessed that he can no longer tolerate the cold and started praying to Swami Samarth who asked him, “So how is the soft cushion?” The Puranik remembered what he had said a month ago and realized that for a yogi, cushion and cold stone are all same. He begged for forgiveness.**

**Swami Samarth was offered all luxuries by his devotees but his attitude was always dispassionate.**

***Fraudulent Sadhus*   Once a person in the garbs of a follower of Kabirpanth sect came to Akkalkot. He used to go around in the streets singing devotional songs with a *veena* in hand. Gullible passers-by were bowing to the saint. Swami Samarth was sitting near the gate of Mr. Ganapatrao Joshi (mentioned earlier). When the saint (!) was passing by Swami Samarth uttered aloud a line of the song  making a vulgar sign to him and started laughing loudly. That gave a hint to the devotees present that the saint was a bogus person. They trailed him and found that it was really so and that he was living with a married woman who had eloped with him. The saint(!) immediately left the town.**

***Five demons*   Once while Swami Samarth was sitting in the house of Mr. Deshmukh one Shivubai brought a small blind boy and told him that the boy had become blind since the time of his thread ceremony. She requested for some remedy. Swami Samarth told her, “Wait. Five demons are coming to test me. The boy will get back his sight at that time.” Just then five dark skinned large bellied Vaishnav Brahmins came with shawls wrapped on their shoulders speaking a mixture of Sanskrit and Kannada. They came and bowed to Swami Samarth who called the blind boy and said, “Ganesh, come here and tell loudly the questions in the minds of these darkies and also their answers.” The boy humbly said, “Maharaj, what can I tell? I do not know anything.”  Swami Samarth removed the string of beads from his own neck and put it in the boy's neck. He took a marigold flower and touched the boy's eyes with it. The boy suddenly got up and started reciting the thoughts of the five Brahmins. The Brahmins were shamefaced. Swami Samarth said to their chief, “You came to test me because I eat from anybody's hand without bothering about the caste. You slandered me and tried to test me but your mother had illegitimate relations with many Muslims and you yourself are born from a Muslim named Imambaksh.” The Chief was shocked and ashamed. He begged forgiveness. The boy regained his sight. This incident was watched by Vamanbuva who has related it in Guruleelamrit as it happened.**

***Ego of Sankeshwar Shankaracharya*   Once Shankaracharya of Sankeshwar Math came to Akkalkot along with his paraphernalia. King Malojiraje arranged for their hospitality. Shankaracharya was made to seat on a throne and worshipped after which all people, which included learned *shastris* and *pundits,* sat for meals. Swami Samarth was not invited but he came with Cholappa to watch the ceremony. Nobody even offered a seat to Swami Samarth except an old Brahmin who got up and taking Swami Samarth by his hands seated him for meals. This caused a stir among the rest of the Brahmins who began to whisper that  this sanyasi went and ate anywhere and with anybody and that he should not be in the row of Brahmins. When the meals were about to start the Brahmins saw that their food was full of worms. They were wondering about this strange happening when the old Brahmin said that this has happened because Shri Dattatreya has been shown disrespect. Hearing this Shankaracharya came down from his high seat to Swami Samarth and prayed for forgiveness. He said that Swami Samarth was actually the world Guru and he should occupy the high seat. Swami Samarth abused him left and right and said, “Yes, I am a disgraced sanyasi. But three *Shastris* who are with you are born from a Muslim. Ask about it to them and to their mother. How did you permit them to sit with you for meals? Does one become a sanyasi just by shaving one's head? Does learning *shastras* make one immune from caste rules?” The said *shastris* were full of shame and they came and prostrated before Swami Samarth begging for pardon. Swami Samarth now felt compassion and the food now became normal.**

***Even minor deities are not spared*Deities we worship are some kind of powers which help to fulfill**

**devotees’ desires when propitiated. Deities like Shri Dattatreya, Shiva, Vishnu and Durga are propitiated for spiritual as well as material goals. Several other deities are propitiated for material goals. How this happens is something we do not know but the experience about it is positive.  Along with good powers there are also evil powers which are to be avoided. There seem to be some minor powers too which local people especially in rural areas worship and propitiate, sometimes with sacrificial offerings. Swami Samarth used to be scornful of such deities.**

**There used to be such a deity by name Ganadevi in the royal garden at Akkalkot. If a child or woman passed nearby in the afternoon or evening it used to give them trouble (probably by affecting their minds) and would not leave them unless offerings of a chicken and coconut was given. (Women and children are believed to be more prone to such afflictions). The deity was represented by a stone smeared with red oxide. Swami Samarth would go and pass urine on it or even defecate on it. Slowly the deity lost its importance and people finally ignored it altogether.**

***Respect for sincerity*  Swami Samarth respected sincerity as much as he detested hypocrisy. Matebuva from Pune was a noted Vedanta philosopher who gave discourses (*Kirtan*) to elucidate the difficult topic of Vedanta philosophy. He was highly devoted to Swami Samarth and in turn Swami Samarth also held him in high respect. Matebuva once performed a “Bhagwat Saptaha” (reading of the entire Bhagwat book in one week). Swami Samarth attended it throughout which was a unique event. Once there was a discourse in the royal garden and people were completely engrossed in it. Swami Samarth was also attending it. During the discourse Matebuva asked, “Whose feet are capable of taking us across this ocean of worldly life towards liberation?” At once Swami Samarth lowered his right foot. Overcome with love and emotion Matebuva ran to Swami Samarth and held that foot to his heart. He said aloud, “Really these are the feet which are capable of liberating.”  Just then Swami Samarth lowered his other foot also which Balappa, another devotee and disciple held. (We shall read more about Balappa later.)**

***Sanyasi sees Shri Dattatreya*   Once a Sanyasi who was a dedicated devotee of Shri Dattatreya came to Akkalkot.  Swami Samarth realizing his deep desire to see Shri Dattatreya changed his form to that of Shri Dattatreya. The Sanyasi was thrilled to see the ochre dressed effulgent form and his emotions had no bounds. His eyes closed but when he opened them it was Swami Samarth standing before him smiling pleasantly.**

***Rider on white horse*   One day Swami Samarth was playing like a child under the oudumber tree in Cholappa’s compound, using the brass face masks of the deities in the worship room to scoop out grains from a bin and putting them back.  While this play was going on, a person riding a white horse tried to enter Cholappa’s house through its small door. The horse got stuck blocking the path.  He had come to meet Swami Samarth but was helpless because the horse could not forward or backward.  People gathered to see the fun. Just then the rider heard Swami Samarth’s voice from inside asking, “Where are the *Pedhas*? The horse will not move until you bring them.”  The horse rider then told the people gathered there that he was afflicted with severe abdominal pains which no medicines or even mantras could cure. He went to Narsobawadi and performed many Gurucharitra Saptahas (ritual reading of entire Gurucharitra in one week).  He made a vow one day that if he got a divine vision of Guru (Narasimha Saraswati) then he would offer one and a quarter rupees worth of *pedhas*.  One day Shri Narasimha Saraswati came in his dream and told him that, “I am now staying in Akkalkot for the benefit of people.  Go there immediately and your work will be done.”  Because I was very weak I bought this new horse. After performing Rudrabhisheka Puja  of the *padukas* and making a vow that after I get well I shall offer meals to people I rushed here on the horse and was guided to this house, but I left behind the parcel of *pedhas*. You have heard now that Swami Samarth already knows about all this and is asking me to bring the *pedhas*.  People were very happy to know that Swami Samarth was Shri Narasimha Saraswati himself. Just then somebody handed the rider the parcel of *pedhas*. The horse then moved backward to clear the entrance. The rider went to Cholappa’s house and had Swami Samarth’s *darshan*. He stood with folded hands before Swami Samarth who called him near and touched his stomach with the brass mask. At once the abdominal pains vanished.  Such was the compassion and omniscience of Swami Samarth.**

***The story of Radha*   Radha was a well-known dancer very proud of her beauty. She heard of Swami Samarth and one day visited him with the intention of testing him through enticement. Swami Samarth was sitting with his devotees and *sevekaris* (servers). Vamanbuva was also present. She bowed to Swami Samarth and sat near him. Her thoughts changed as she watched the effulgence of Swami Samarth. The woman who had made several men dance round her now became humble before this great personality. Swami Samarth looked at her and asked, “Radha, what is the difference between man and woman?” She replied, “Maharaj, there is a difference and therefore we discriminate between man and woman.” Swami Samarth asked, “What is the difference?” At this Radha felt too shy to utter the difference publicly and kept quiet. But when Swami Samarth insisted and finally she said shyly, “Women have breasts etc. which men do not have.” Swami Samarth started laughing. He said, “Radha, now go. You do not have anything more than men. Donate your special feminine organs to this Brahmin here.” Radha left and by the time she reached home her breasts became flat. She became a staunch devotee of Swami Samarth.**

# SUNDERABAI

**There is saying in Marathi that darkness looms below a lamp. The devotees who stayed in the company of Swami Samarth lived as servers to serve him in various ways and get blessed. Very few people however really desired spiritual gains from Swami Samarth. Most servers lived for the free food and other perks available there. Most people came to Swami Samarth keeping in mind material gains like wealth, success, children or cure from illness. Even among this type there were people who used the situation to make money in a shameful way. We have seen how Cholappa fell prey to greed. The worst example was that of Sunderabai a woman who had the best opportunity to serve Swami Samarth but wasted it by using her proximity to Swami Samarth for petty personal gains. In the end she was driven out forcibly and dishonourably.**

**Sunderabai came to Swami Samarth from Solapur with the intention of getting cured of a foot affliction and continued to stay with him as a server. Later she took up Cholappa’s duties like bathing Swami Samarth, dressing him, feeding him, taking him for toilet etc. with Cholappa’s permission. Cholappa gave her the permission in spite of Swami Samarth’s warning him that she will eliminate him.  In the course of time she took control to such an extent that even meeting Swami Samarth required her permission. With her knack of sweet talk she even poisoned the Akkalkot queen's mind against Cholappa and managed to remove him from Swami Samarth's service. She used to demand money from devotees who wished to see Swami Samarth or extract money, food, sweets and gifts from them pretending that she was poor or with some other convenient excuse like she needed money to buy puja material like *kumkum*, camphor and saffron. Often she would accept money from people for arranging to meet him and then she used to order him to get up and meet them. Once a devotee gave two *pedhas* directly to Swami Samarth instead of going through Sunderabai. The same devotee had refused to give her money earlier. Sunderabai became so angry that she caught Swami Samarth by the throat and ordered him not to eat the *pedhas*.  Swami Samarth remarked to Cholappa, “Cholya, the xxxx has become too much arrogant.”**

**Swami Samarth knew about all this but he used to say that she acts like a scarecrow to keep undesirable people away. Swami Samarth used to do whatever she asked him to do. He even**

**defended her sometimes when quarrel arose with other servers.**

**Sometime later she permitted Balappa, a staunch devotee and later successor of Swami Samarth to share some of the services like heating water, cooking etc. which he did earnestly. Sunderabai became unpopular because of her scheming activities and complaints were lodged. Ultimately the Collector ordered her removal and replaced her by a committee. Mr. Barve who was supposed to have executed the order was hesitating to execute it being under the impression that she was a protégée of Swami Samarth but Swami Samarth asked him, “Is this the way you do your duties?” Mr. Barve understood the hint, arrested her, confiscated all the things she had swindled and auctioned them. Thus the long rule of Sunderabai ended.**

**It must have been her good karmas of earlier lives which gave her the rare opportunity to serve Swami Samarth and due to which Swami Samarth tolerated her actions for a pretty long time. But it was the greed which brought her downfall.**

**The committee appointed four servers for taking care of Swami Samarth. One of them was Balappa. Though they were now paid positions all refused to accept payment for the services. For them the service itself was a privilege.**

# MUSLIM DEVOTEES

**We have already seen the case of the Muslim individual from Mangalwedhe spiritually blessed by Swami Samarth. Another Muslim individual who was a Jamadar (Seargent) in the Akkalkot police force person became a disciple of Swami Samarth about which we shall read in the next part: Disciples of Swami Samarth.**

**The following story that happened in 1874 about one Sayyad from Hyderabad is quite amazing.**

**Swami Samarth was sitting in the Deshmukh house one afternoon in the month of Bhadrapada (sixth month).  Vamanbuwa was tuning his *veena* preparatory to giving a discourse. The *sevekaris* were sitting around waiting. Just then Sayyad arrived from Hyderabad for having his *darshan of* Swami Samarth.  He asked the people near the door where Akkalkot Swami was. On hearing this Swami Samarth said, “Swami is sitting on XXXX. Swami is in Akkalkot.  Go, why are you looking for him here?”  (Swami Samarth often used street language.)  Hearing this Sayyad stood stiffened for a few moments.  He lost his consciousness and remained in a trance for some time.  After some time he slowly opened his eyes and tears of love started flowing from his eyes.  He made obeisance in the Muslim fashion and in a choked voice he said, “Oh Swami Maharaj, protector of the poor, you are God. I know my religion well and have read Koran and many religious books. For many years I have been striving hard in religious practices but unfortunately I did not experience anything until now.  Today, as soon as I saw Maharaj I felt the waves of compassion and saw Maharaj inside my mind.  Now my life is fulfilled. I am your servant! Order me to do whatever you want.”  He then gave the offerings he had brought with him and after staying in Akkalkot for a few days in the service of Swami Samarth he took leave and returned happily to his home.**

**When Swami Samarth said Swami is in Akkalkot he must have meant swami is in the mind for, “akkal” in Marathi means mind, intellect or commonsense.  Akkalkot is also often referred to as Pradnyapuri by pundits, “pradnya” meaning intelligence and “puri” meaning town.**

# EUROPEAN ASPIRANTS

**Even at the height of British supremacy and arrogance British people did come to Swami Samarth and other saints. We already saw how the collector who was the superior of Deo Mamaledar held him in high regard.**

***European engineer blessed*  Once a European engineer in railways at Solapur came to meet Swami Samarth. As soon as Swami Samarth saw him he said in Hindi, “You want a son is it not? You will get it within a year.” The engineer had really come with the desire of a son in mind. He was surprised that Swami Samarth had knew it and happy that he had given his blessings. He humbly kept his head on the feet of Swami Samarth in obeisance, something unheard of in those days and returned to Solapur. Within a year he got a son as told by Swami Samarth and he became his ardent devotee.**

***The first photograph*  The honour of taking the first photograph of Swami Samarth goes to the Kodak Company. It is believed this was taken around 1857 and a bright aura is seen around the face.**

**Those were the early days of photography. In India it was quite new and highly expensive. Only royalties could afford being photographed. Kodak Company wanted to increase their business by photographing some great personality by way of advertisement. They decided that Swami Samarth would be a good choice because at that time Swami Samarth’s fame had spread and stories about him used to be published in Mumbai newspapers. Even the British Government in Mumbai had ordered Akkalkot king to take proper care of Swami Samarth. Accordingly Kodak Company sent their best photographer with all the paraphernalia to Akkalkot for photographing Swami Samarth. The photographer was a European.**

**On reaching Akkalkot the photographer contacted some devotees and expressed his intention of photographing Swami Samarth. But they told him to ask Swami Samarth himself. He did that but Swami Samarth did not agree. The photographer now felt challenged and decided to photograph Swami Samarth at any cost. He then arranged his camera and tripod at some distance from where Swami Samarth was sitting under a large tree and waited for a favourable pose. But whenever there was a proper pose and he put his head under the black cloth for inserting the photographic plate, Swami Samarth would turn his back or somebody would come in between. After this happened a dozen times the photographer was quite frustrated. He then removed the camera from there and hid it behind a bush. After some time he was successful in taking a photograph. Overjoyed at having “defeated” Swami Samarth at his game he went and developed the plate, took a print and went to Swami Samarth asking his opinion about it. Swami Samarth without looking tossed it at one of the servers who looked at it exclaimed, “What a wonderful photograph of Shri Rama!” Swami Samarth then took the photo and gave it to another server who looked at it and exclaimed that he had seen for the first time such a beautiful picture of Ambabai. Swami Samarth then showed the photograph to others but nobody said that the photograph was that of Swami Samarth. Finally the photographer said, "Maharaj, the photograph is yours." Swami Samarth exclaimed, "What? Is this my picture?" and gave the picture back to photographer who when he looked at it found it to be that of a monkey. Now everybody began making fun of him.**

**The photographer now realized his mistake in taking the photograph without Swami Samarth's permission. He begged his pardon and said, “Maharaj, in order that your picture should be in every house and because our business also should get the backing of such a great personality as yourself we need a beautiful picture of yours. Kindly give me permission.”**

**Once the photographer showed his repentance and requested humbly for permission Swami Samarth was no longer displeased. He said OK and allowed him to take his photograph.**

**In later years also photographs would come out properly only if Swami Samarth consented otherwise they would be just black. Once, a photographer by name Phadke who wanted to photograph Swami Samarth came to Akkalkot. He was asked by Swami Samarth to come at five in the evening. Phadke came at five but Swami Samarth, instead of sitting for the photograph gave his *Hukka* to him to hold and continued smoking up to seven o’clock when it was quite dark. Then he asked Phadke to take his photograph. When Phadke told him it was too dark Swami Samarth laughed and asked him to go and develop the photographic plate. And the surprising this is that even when photograph was not taken the plate showed a beautiful photograph.**

# SAMADHI

**Swami Samarth took samadhi on the 30th April 1878. It was a Tuesday and the thirteenth day of Chaitra dark fortnight. Swami Samarth had been giving hints of his leaving the body since about a year earlier.  Once he asked Balappa, “I have to go very high. Will you come with me to serve me permanently?”  Balappa was shocked and in reply only bowed to him. After Cholappa's death Swami Samarth had begun thinking of his own samadhi. He also started showing other indications of his departure through bad omens such as overturning the Arati lamp. Sometime later he stopped sleeping on his cot and ordered it to be tied to the tree.**

**A few days earlier to the samadhi he went and stayed for a few days in a Math called Jangam's Math belonging to the Lingayat community. This community worships Shivalinga as symbol of Shiva.  Their priest is called a Jangam. There is a large Shivlinga in the Math. On the fourth day he asked Bavadekar Puranik and other servers to bring some five hundred dry cow-dung cakes and piling them on the Shivlinga set them on fire. He poured five kilograms of ghee, five kilograms of sugar, dry dates, rice, fruits, garlands etc. as used in a *Homa* (*Havan*) ritual (fire sacrifice).  The Lingayat community made a lot of hue and cry fearing that the Shivlinga would be cracked and marched to Swami Samarth in protest but his effulgent personality restrained them. Next morning he ordered the ashes to be removed from the Shivlinga. When this was done and the Shivalinga was washed with lots of water everyone was surprised to find that it was brighter than before.**

**Some days later Swami Samarth came to the house of one Tatya Subhedar followed by his disciples. There was a heavy stone pot lying nearby which he ordered to be thrown into the lake near the Murlidhar temple. While the pot was being thrown in Swami Samarth himself went into the lake in knee-deep water.  As soon as the pot was thrown in and sank he started saying, “Cry, people! Shout people!”**

**A week earlier to samadhi he started singing a *bhajan* of Lord Shiva which the servers heard from him for the first time. While he was at Subhedar's house he got an attack of diarrhoea but next day he felt better and decided to go to a place called Naganhalli. He was taken there in a palanquin. He rested there for four days but again his condition started deteriorating. He then came back to Akkalkot and rested under his favourite banyan tree. Again on the fated Tuesday his condition deteriorated but his daily routines like bath etc. went on as usual. He had already stopped eating, which worried his attendants but nobody dared tell him to eat. Finally they called Sunderabai who somehow managed to feed him two spoonfuls of rice water. She asked when he will be all right. He replied that he now has to enter the stones.  Others also got similar answers. His attendants then stood round him and asked with wet eyes, “Maharaj, what should we do in future?” Swami Samarth asked Shripadbhat, son-in-law of Cholappa to dig the roots of the banyan tree. To Ganpatrao, a server, he asked to remain in the temple. To Balappa he asked to sit in the shadow of the oudumber tree. To others he told that they should behave as their elders were behaving. Then he recited the twenty-second Shloka from the ninth chapter of Gita.**

***But as for men who worship Me, Thinking of Me alone and none other,***

***To them ever absorbed in Me, I grant Yoga and eternal happiness.***

**The attending devotees asked Swami Samarth about any rituals he would like to be performed. He instructed that *abhisheka* (continuous pouring of water or sometimes milk) should be done on the Shivalinga near the well. Swami Samarth used to keep a cow. The cow and its calf used to be tied at Cholappa's house. He asked them to be brought to him. Somebody went there and set the cow free. The miraculous thing that happened was that the cow came by herself straight to Swami Samarth and circumambulated (*pradakshina*) him. She then ate the food set for her and went back to Cholappa's house. He asked whether Saturn was in Pisces and informing that his moon sign (*Rashi*) was Pisces.**

**The day before samadhi he called for his shawl and asked it to be washed in the well and then gave it to a *shastri* named Ramshastri Avadhani.**

**The Mamaledar Mr. Baburao Moghe asked Swami Samarth what he should do with the things left behind and whether anything should be given to any particular person. He was told that not even a rag or loincloth belongs to him then how can he give anything to anybody? Some months earlier Swami Samarth had asked his bed and other possessions to be burnt in a dry well at a place called Shahaganj and finally he had removed his loincloth and burnt it in the well. But the servers managed to salvage some belongings off Swami Samarth without his knowledge. Mr. Moghe had been urging Swami Samarth that it was cold under the banyan tree and he should go inside the house. But Swami Samarth refused to go saying that in future he has to live only under the tree.**

**Swami Samarth was conscious and talking normally up to the last moment. Respecting everybody's wish he took some liquid rice. The servers dried his face with a cloth. He even ate the *betelnut* given by Balappa. Smile always adorned his face. Then he asked Shripadbhat to make him sit up from the lying position. After this was done Swami Samarth sat in Lotus posture (*Padmasan*) and in a moment he left his body permanently at five-thirty in the evening. Everybody burst into tears and started crying, “Maharaj! Maharaj!” The news spread and everybody in the town rushed to have a last look at Swami Samarth.**

**People controlled their grief after sometime. It was now necessary to make further arrangements. The earlier plan was to make the samadhi structure under the banyan tree where Swami Samarth had left his body. But a very senior officer of Akkalkot administration who had a liking for Cholappa decided to make the structure near Cholappa’s house. According to the changed plans an “Aeroplane" was fabricated and the body of Swami Samarth was laid in it on a bed of flowers. Musicians came with their *shehnai*, drums etc. and started playing them. After the rituals of *puja*, *arati* etc. as befitted the passing away of a great yogi were over, the "aeroplane" was brought out in procession and was taken to Cholappa's house where the place for the samadhi had already been prepared. The chief administrator Nanasaheb Barve and the Mamaledar Mr. Baburao Moghe kept the body of Swami Samarth in the place marked for the samadhi. Swami Samarth was still in the *Padmasana* position as the bodies of yogis are kept. The smile was still there on his face. The door of the samadhi was then closed.**

# AFTER SAMADHI

**Swami Samarth may have left his body but his work of helping devotees continues. Everywhere you will find people who will vouch that their desires were fulfilled and their problems solved when they prayed to Swami Samarth. There are cases when Swami Samarth initiated disciples through dreams. There are also occasions when he actually appeared in person and gave his *Padukas* for worship. A well documented instance by Dr. V. M. Bhat mentions the following incident in his book in Marathi "Yogasiddhi and Ishwarsakshatkar" (also published in English by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. But the following is based on the Marathi version.)**

**Dr. Bhat developed heart ailment in 1944 and around this time he had a vision of Swami Samarth in his dream. He was saved from the heart attack and for the next eight years he enjoyed good health. In 1952 he again had heart problem and he settled in Pune after retiring from his profession. During that year he suffered chest pains eight times. One day, Dr. Godbole, Professor of Geology in the College of Engineering, Pune, an acquaintance, came to him one afternoon. He was a devotee of Padgaonkar Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Samarth. He asked Dr. Bhat whether he had heart trouble. There was no reason why Prof. Godbole should have known about it. Dr. Bhat answered in the affirmative. He then asked what the relation between him and Swami Samarth was. Dr. Bhat replied that their only contact was in a dream. Prof. Godbole then wondered why Swami Samarth should have been worrying about him.  He then explained that the previous night Swami Samarth had appeared in his dream and told him that Bhat was having heart trouble and that he should tell him to read *Lalitastotra*. He had therefore found out his address and had come to give him the message. Dr. Bhat was astounded because he had never rendered any service to Swami Samarth and could see no reason why Swami Samarth should have bothered about him.  Prof. Godbole left saying that it was left to Dr. Bhat whether to read the *Lalitastotra* or not and that he would get the book automatically. And he did get the book automatically without searching for it and his heart problems were ameliorated.**

**A large number of anecdotes of personal experiences of people who prayed to Swami Samarth in their time of difficulty and had their problems solved are published in magazines like "Akkalkot Swami Darshan" and one is amazed at the compassion continued to be shown even more than a century after the samadhi.**

# PERSONALITY OF SWAMI SAMARTH

**Except for those to whom Swami Samarth has appeared in dreams or visions most of us know his personality only through photographs, paintings and biographical books. The sharp eyes which look through you, the amused smile which is a mixture of kindness and of humour, the huge frame, the brightness which envelops the whole photograph or picture, all these have no parallel.  Following description of his appearance has been given by Mr. Belsare:**

**Swami Samarth was more than six feet tall, with large stomach, broad shoulders and hands reaching below the knees like Arjuna. His skin was wheat complexioned, reddish and bright. He had large ears and the lobes used to move with his every movement. His face was broad with straight nose and large forehead. His eyebrows were white. His body appeared to be delicate like a rose, and had the marks of age but his enthusiasm was better than a youth's.”**

**He used to be in a state of "*Pishacchavritti*" which has no exact English equivalent but can be broadly described as that of a deranged or a possessed person. The daily routine of a sanyasi is generally to get up early and perform the spiritual routine like Japa, Dhyan etc., but Swami Samarth did not do anything like that. His routines like bath, meals etc. were completely handled by his servers. They too could make him do these only if he so desired. Sometimes he would take bath twice in a day and sometimes did not bother about it for a week. He used to go where it pleased him, be it a cremation ground or the royal palace. His mood could change suddenly and it was a real test for the perseverance of the people who served him. He would remain in playful or angry mood for days at a time.**

**Swami Samarth never observed the rules of touchability or purity prevalent at that time. In fact he tried his best to remove such ideas from devotees’ minds as can be seen from a few incidences. E.g. Balappa was made to drink water from a house under mourning period and the two devotees from Bombay, Govindji and the Kanauji Brahmin were made to offer food to a Muslim fakir and the dog and eat the remains. (See next Part V-B).  Swami Samarth used to become angry if anybody and especially hypocrites raised these issues, and punished them by not eating with them or refusing to accept their food. He also was against any orthodox preaching.  He used to quote from Vedas and also from compositions in Hindi and Marathi.**

**Once, while Swami Samarth was at a nearby village Naldurg, a Puranic gave a discourse in which he stressed the necessity for having a son. He stressed that it is a son that gives access to heaven and without a son there is no future after death. Swami Samarth became angry for preaching this and questioned him whether the great people like Narada, Vyasa, Vamadeva had sons. He also asked whether the Puranic himself had a son. If a son can give *moksha*  to his father then even dogs and pigs would achieve *moksha*.  On the other hand the sins which a father has to commit to support up the son would actually go to hell. The Puranic of course surrendered to Swami Samarth and later had a son too.**

**Unfortunately, the traditions run deep. In spite of these teachings even great disciples like Vamanbuva Vamorikar continued their preaching of the orthodox practice of untouchability and the caste restrictions as can be seen from his Guruleelamrit which is full of such orthodox teachings. For example, Vamanbuva says in the twenty-second chapter (ovi 53 onwards) that a Guru should not be of another caste and should be learned in the Vedas etc., generally implying that he should be a Brahmin. In this he forgot that Tukaram, a Vaishya was a Guru of Rameshwar who was a Brahmin. A good number of disciples of Swami Samarth (e.g. Swamisut and Ananda Bharati) were not Brahmins. In fact one need not belong to any particular caste to be devotee. As said in Dnyaneshwari, “Once a seeker's mind is filled with devotion to Me then his earlier life history is erased. As long as a person does not attain Me there are differences like Kshatriya, Vaishya, woman, Shudra, untouchable etc.  But once they attain Me completely all these differences of caste and gender vanish.  (9:456-461)”**

**His kindness extended even to trees and inanimate things, a sign of a person who sees Brahman in everything. He used to caress trees and stones and ask them what they wanted.**

**More than a thousand persons used to visit him daily. He could read other's thoughts and often used to answer questions even before they were asked. He used to speak in broken Hindi or Marathi and what he said had to be interpreted by the servers who had acquired that skill. His visitors included people from all religions. He was as much drawn to Muslims as to Hindus. He often used to visit the Pirs and Dargas (tombs of Muslim saints) and stay there for a long time.**

***Spiritually charged gown*  I should narrate a personal experience of mine: Some years ago a gown worn by Swami Samarth had come for repairs to my friend Mr Zankar. Mr Zankar is in the tailoring business and used to look after the dresses used at the Shankar Maharaj Samadhi in Pune.  Mr Zankar gave me the folded dress to hold it in my hands. The gown was huge, with a circumference of 72 inches indicating what a huge person Swami Samarth was. My pleasant experience which I can never forget was that as soon as I held the ochre coloured gown in my hands my eyes became heavy and started closing. I nearly went into a trance from which it was difficult to come out. It was amazing to note that this power had continued to remain in the gown even more than a century later.  I cannot even imagine what the visitors must have felt when Swami Samarth was in his body and touched them.**

# HIS ADVICE

**\* There should be no doubts in devotion. God is hungry for your love and devotion.**

**\* One should not even glance at the face of a lazy person. Everyone should work hard and earn his living. God helps those who go on trying.**

**\* One should sincerely do ones duties and remember Swami Samarth.**

**\* It is preferable to be devoted to a Guru than worship stone idols.**

**\* Before bragging about one's learning one should examine how pure one's heart is.**

**\* Also instead of observing outward cleanliness to an extreme be devoted with pure mind.**

**\* To attain liberation do actions without desire for fruits.**

**\* Be shameless when you are Guru's company. Never think that any work given by Guru is small and unimportant.**

**\* Make every moment in life useful without wasting your time.**

**\* He who is righteous wins.**

**\* A *sadhu* is one by seeing whom one's sins are washed and one acquires merit.**

**\* The *karmas* one is born with must be annulled only by experiencing their effects.**

**Swami Samarth spread spirituality network through his disciples about whom we shall read in the next chapter.  His biography would remain incomplete without the account of these disciples.**

**About Akkalkot  Akkalkot is located very near Solapur which is about 5 hours road journey from Pune and about 8-9 hrs from Mumbai. There are regular buses to Solapr and Akkalkot from many major towns in Maharashtra. Solapur is a major railway station on Mumbai-Pune-Chennai route.  Main temple is at the Banyan tree where Swami Samarth used to sit. There is Dharamshala (Place for pilgrims to stay and some minor hotels. Free meals are given to all pilgrims as *Prasad* in the afternoon every day. Cholappa Math where the body of Swami Samarth rests is in the town slightly away from the temple. It is managed by the descendants of Cholappa who live in the adjacent house. Many of the articles e.g. the large vessel in which water for Swami’s bath used to be heated may be seen in the house. The well from which water used to be drawn also is still there in use. One can perform puja, abhisheka etc. here under the priesthood of the descendents who are very hospitable.  There are other maths there e.g. Balappa math.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**PART V-B - DISCIPLES OF SHRI SWAMI SAMARTH**

**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

**DISCIPLES OF SHRI SWAMI SAMARTH**

**CONTENTS: Balappa \* Swamisut \*  Narasimha Saraswati Of Alandi \* Ramanand Bidkar \* Muslim Jamadar Of Maindargi \* Gopalbuva Kelkar \* Vamanbuva Brahmachari \* Krishna Saraswati \* Sitaram Maharaj \* Ananda Bharati \* Anandanath Maharaj \* Shri Shankar Maharaj**

**Swami Samarth had many disciples.  They came from all strata of the society and some were not even Hindus.  This is typical of Dattatreya tradition (and also Nath Sect), for many Muslims do worship Shri Dattatreya even if such worship is against their religion. In fact a few of them revere many other deities too. Perhaps it is only Christians that do not take any cognizance of the traditional Indian deities.**

**A chosen few of the disciples were given Padukas and were instructed to establish Maths from where they were to continue spiritual work and help people. Among the well-known disciples were Cholappa, Balappa, Shri Deo Mamaledar (Nasik), Shri Sitaram Maharaj (Mangalwedhe), Rangolibuva (Malwan), Shri Anandanath Maharaj (Vengurla), Shri Nanaji Rekhi (Nagar), Shri Krishna Saraswati of Kumbhargalli at Kolhapur, Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi, Swamisut and his brother Sachitanand Swamikumar (Mumbai), Vamanbuva Vamorikar (Baroda), Gopalbuva Kelkar (Chiplun), Shri Shankar Maharaj (Pune), Ramanand Bidkar (Pune), the Muslim Jamadar of Maindargi and many more.  Readers have already read about Cholappa in the earlier chapter.   In this chapter we shall see the biographies of some prominent disciples of Swami Samarth.**

**BALAPPA**

**Balappa hailed from Haveri in Dharwad district in north Karnataka. He was a Brahmin by caste but a jeweller and moneylender by profession which made him a millionaire.  With all the wealth at his disposal however he suddenly developed a detachment for worldly things and left his home in search of a Guru at the age of thirty. A few days later he reached Ganagapur where Nirgun (attributeless) Padukas of Shri Narasimha Saraswati have been installed.**

**At Ganagapur Balappa utilized his time very ardently in spiritual rituals (*Anushthan*) and worshipped the Padukas surviving on alms. After two months of such austere practice he had a dream in which a Brahmin came and instructed him to go to Akkalkot and serve Shri Swami Samarth. At the same time he also found a note under his pillow telling him not to hurry. His attitude towards the world slowly changed and he began to see God in everything. One day he saw a scorpion under his dress but due to his changed outlook he let the dangerous creature go unharmed. The same night Swami Samarth came in his dream in *digambar* (without clothes) state. Next day when he had gone for alms he received good food from everybody. Taking this to be a good omen Balappa left for Akkalkot and arrived there on Ramnavami (Rama’s birthday) day. Purchasing a little candy sugar as an offering he went in search of Swami Samarth and found him in the royal garden. Seeing the same form he had seen in the dream he ran to Swami Samarth and grasped his feet. Swami Samarth was also so happy by this meeting with his new disciple that he began embracing the trees nearby. People realized that Balappa was some special person.**

**Balappa camped himself in the Muralidhar temple in Akkalkot. He used to meet Swami Samarth daily. Now, it was Swami Samarth’s custom to give part of the offerings given him by the devotees as *prasad* to everybody but he never gave any of it to Balappa, much to his chagrin. Balappa did not know at that time that Swami Samarth never gave *prasad* to those whom he retained in his service.**

**Some days later Balappa started bleeding from his navel and a small piece of poison came out. Somebody had poisoned Balappa three years earlier through food but due to powers of Swami Samarth nothing had happened to him during all these years and now once more with his grace Balappa was rid of the poison.**

**At this time all the arrangements for serving Swami Samarth were in the hands of Sunderabai.  Balappa managed to get an opportunity to serve Swami Samarth through her.  Initially she gave him the menial task of cleaning the spittoon and the wash bowl, a task which Balappa performed happily. But Swami Samarth still would not give him *prasad*. Finally one day Swami Samarth took out a piece of candy sugar from his mouth and gave it to Balappa.  Afraid that Swami Samarth would take it back Balappa ate it quickly and Swami Samarth had a good laugh at Balappa’s action.**

**Balappa used to be very much obsessed about cleanliness, untouchability etc., exactly opposite to what Swami Samarth used to be.  To cure him of this Swami Samarth asked him one day to bring water from a house which was temporarily considered as impure due to a death in the family. Swami Samarth used to treat Balappa with great respect. Only once did he slap him hard on his back when he had bent for making his obeisance but that was instrumental in clearing all the doubts in Balappa's mind and his *sadhana* became steady. Swami Samarth intended to make him his successor.**

**Other servers, especially Sunderabai became very jealous of the affection shown by Swami Samarth towards Balappa and started to give him trouble. The jealousy went to such an extent that Balappa began thinking of leaving Akkalkot. But Swami Samarth prevented him giving Balappa a seat asking him in a dream to move to a Maruti temple for practicing a special mantra. Now Balappa spent almost all his time in this exercise. After this was over Balappa again went to serve Swami Samarth. In order that he should be awake when Swami Samarth woke up he used to tie his own *shikha* (hair-tuft) to that of Swami Samarth before going to sleep.**

**Some days before leaving the body, Swami Samarth called Balappa and put his ring engraved with letters “Swami Samarth” in his finger, kept his blessing hand on his head and said, "I am now giving you my seal. Make use of it as long as sun and moon exist."  He also put the *rudraksha* bead from his own neck in Balappa's and also put his own clothes on Balappa's body. He gave a banner and his personal Padukas and asked Balappa to install them in a Math. Finally Swami Samarth said, “Sit in the shadow of the oudumber tree."**

**Balappa did as he was told. He built a Math and installed the Padukas therein. It is now known as Balappa Math. He lived for thirty-two years after Swami Samarth took samadhi.**

**SWAMISUT**

**The spiritual life of Swamisut (literally it means son of Swami) is unparalleled in terms of love and sacrifice. His real name was Haribhau Tawade and was Maratha by caste. He had eight brothers and four sisters. Originally from a place called Itia in Ratnagiri district in Konkan region of Maharashtra, Haribhau came to Mumbai at the age of eight for his education. He studied English and got a job in Bombay Municipality. Four or five years later certain events brought him into contact with Swami Samarth. What changed his life completely was when Swami Samarth told him "You are my son.”**

**There was a rich pious person in Mumbai by name Madhavji Govindji who went on a pilgrimage. He took a Kanauji Brahmin with him for assistance during the travels. In due course they reached Ganagapur where they served Shri Dattatreya through fasting and worship. One day he was instructed in a dream by Shri Dattatreya that his avatar was at Akkalkot and his desires would be fulfilled there. Govindji then went with the Kanauji Brahmin to Akkalkot where both began to serve Swami Samarth. The Brahmin would cook food and both would make an offering of it to Swami Samarth daily. One day, when they came with the offering of food, Swami Samarth said loudly in Hindi (he used to speak very often in Hindi), "Go. There is a fakir and his dog in the mosque on the outskirts of the town. Feed the food to them."**

**Both took the food to the mosque as instructed and returned to Swami Samarth with some uneaten food consisting of *Vada* and *Kheer*. Swami Samarth instructed the two to eat the food. Govindji had hesitation in his mind since, according to the tradition of those times the food, having been touched by a non-Hindu fakir was considered as impure.  He did not eat it but the Kanauji Brahmin did so piously. Swami Samarth was angry at Govindji and told him that his devotion was not yet perfect. He gave him *Padukas* and asked him to worship them. But to the Kanauji Brahmin he said, "Go. You will get ten thousand rupees in Mumbai."**

**Govindji returned to Mumbai and did as he was instructed. But the Brahmin was now obsessed with the ten thousand rupees mentioned by Swami Samarth. He would go and pick papers thrown around examining to see whether they were currency notes. One morning he was called by a rich widow from a bungalow and was handed over a bundle of notes worth ten thousand rupees. She was the widow of a rich Bhatia businessman who had recently died. She had decided to give an amount of Rupees ten thousand as secret charity to the first Brahmin she would meet that morning. The Kanauji Brahmin was the lucky person whom she met first that morning and thus the blessings of Swami Samarth yielded fruits.**

**Now, this miraculous story came to the ears of a priest named Lakshman Pandit who was in the service of Govindji. Lakshman Pandit had indulged in some trade which caused losses which led to some outstanding loans.  He prayed to Swami Samarth saying that if the loans were met within a week he would visit Akkalkot immediately and meet Swami Samarth. Now it so happened that Haribhau and his friend Gajanan Khatri had also suffered a loss in some speculative business and were burdened with loans. They came for help to Pandit who agreed to undertake the payment. Now Pandit was in more trouble but miraculously due to some changes in market conditions Pandit made a profit of two thousand rupees and settled his loans.  As per the vow he had made he planned to go to Akkalkot. He told both Haribhau and Khatri about it and they also felt a strong desire to meet Swami Samarth. All three took a vow that unless they met Swami Samarth they would not eat and so they came to Akkalkot.**

**When they reached Akkalkot Swami Samarth was in the royal palace. He just had his meals and was lying down on the bed. Cholappa's son-in-law came out of the palace to see if there were any people desirous of meeting Swami Samarth and seeing these three took them in. On the way they met Cholappa who was returning with the dish from which Swami Samarth had eaten and there was still some uneaten food left in it. Haribhau requested that if the food was left by Swami Samarth he would like to eat it. Seeing his devotion Cholappa gave the food to Haribhau who ate it with joy and they resumed their walk towards where Swami Samarth was resting. When he saw Swami Samarth his inner emotions surged up.**

**As soon as they came to Swami Samarth he said in Hindi, “Business was done and there was a loss. They prayed and there was a profit. \*\* \*\* \*\* \*\*." The three realized the mind reading power of Swami Samarth.**

**During the next visit Swami Samarth looked at Pandit and said, “You tie a turban on your head."   To Khatri he said, “Go to market and tie a dhoti on your head."  But as regards Haribhau he pulled him near and said, "Leave your family and become my son. And bring white-white to me." After asking Swami Samarth what the "white-white" was he understood it to be *Padukas* made of silver. Next day he prepared the dishes of Swami Samarth's liking and made its offering to him. The three then returned to Mumbai.**

**Haribhau suddenly developed a dislike for worldly life. The image of Swami Samarth continuously occupied his mind. He got silver *Padukas* made and came with them to Akkalkot. After keeping his head on Swami Samarth’s feet he gave the *padukas* to him. Swami Samarth wore the *padukas* continuously for fourteen days. Other servers tried a lot to take possession of the padukas but Swami Samarth did not part with them saying they were his personal *linga*. On the fifteenth day he called Haribhau, held his hand and said, "Leave your service, business and become my son and building a fort near the sea raise my banner." He then asked Haribhau to do three push-ups and touching all parts of his body with the *padukas* asked him to install them in the fort (meaning a Math.)**

**A strange incident had occurred a few days earlier. At midnight when everybody was asleep Swami Samarth suddenly got up and taking a stick went to a tree and said loudly, "Get out from here. My Balagovind (Little Krishna or Hari) is sleeping below.” When he repeated it three times, the tree shook and a bright ball of light left the tree. A little later Haribhau woke up, went to Swami Samarth and started massaging his feet. For a long time they were talking confidentially. Later Swami Samarth took some clothes including a gown from near his pillow and gave them to Haribhau saying, "Get your family possessions looted." With a happy mind Haribhau returned next day to Mumbai wearing ochre clothes and clasping the padukas to his bosom.**

**Once in Mumbai he gave away all his possessions. He sold the 84 *tolas* of gold (nearly 900 gms) he possessed and donated the money in charity to Brahmins. He sold even the golden bead in his wife the sacred *Mangalsutra*, the sign of marriage and a living husband worn by Hindu women. His wife cried and cried but Haribhau, now called Swamisut did as he was instructed by his Guru Swami Samarth.**

**Haribhau’s only possessions now were a white sari for his wife and a gown for himself and of course the priceless padukas. He established a Math in Kamathipura in Mumbai and was completely engrossed in singing praises of Swami Samarth. He sang well and with feelings and often forgot himself while doing it. His singing used to attract large crowds. People of all castes came to him and their number increased enormously. In 1871 he started celebrating the birthday (manifestation day) of Swami Samarth on the day after Gudi Padwa. People who visited the Math now were finding that their problems were getting solved. This created and increased a sense of devotion among the people. This was the time when Maths were established in many other locations in Maharashtra, among them Vasai, Thane, Pune, Nagar, Ratnagiri and Chiplun.**

**Three or four years later, during one of the visits to Akkalkot, Swami Samarth mentioned to Swamisut that he was going to take samadhi very soon. This seemed to drain the strength out of Swamisut who could not bear the idea of Swami Samarth leaving this world earlier to himself. He returned to Mumbai in a hopeless state of mind and fell ill. Swami Samarth tried to call him back to Akkalkot and even sent messengers to bring him but he did not come. He left his body on the first day of dark fortnight of Shravan (fifth month). This was a great blow to the devotees who thronged to the Math at Mumbai.**

**Telegram was sent to Akkalkot regarding this sad event but Swami Samarth already knew about it. He fell down from the bed to the ground and sat with the head in his hands. Kakubai, mother of Swamisut was near Swami Samarth at that time. She cried and cried but Swami Samarth somehow managed to console her by telling, “I am your son. Do not cry, he has been sent to a good place."**

**Swami Samarth handed over the workings of the Swamisut Math at Mumbai to Babu, a younger brother of Swamisut. That another son was also going the way of the first was a blow to Kakubai who cried hoarse but Swami Samarth was adamant. He called Babu, made him sit on his lap and told him that he was no longer the son of Kakubai but his own son and named him Sacchitanand Swamikumar. In the course of time the management of the Math went to his paternal aunt in the Nalawade family. The Math was moved to Kandewadi in Girgaon and then to Chembur, a suburb of Mumbai in 1915. It is a quiet place exuding peace.**

**NARASIMHA SARASWATI OF ALANDI**

**There used to be a yogi known as Vithalbua in Pandharpur. He had some doubts regarding yoga techniques and decided to approach Shri Swami Samarth to get them cleared.**

**Swami Samarth who was at that time camping in the royal palace and knew by his powers that Vithalbua was coming, asked the king to spread a deerskin amidst the passage indicating  that a great yogi was coming.  Vithalbua reached the palace in the afternoon. As soon as he came Swami Samarth recited a shloka from the Yogashastra related to the penetration of the Adnyachakra (located in between the eyebrows) by the Kundalini in the yoga technique. Vithalbua at once went into a state of samadhi which lasted for nearly two hours. While he was in this mindless state of bliss Swami Samarth glanced at him and brought him out of that state into the normal world. He then instructed him to go to Alandi. He later became a sanyasi and took the name of Narasimha Saraswati. Having settled in Alandi he was known as Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi.**

**Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi has been a shining light in the spiritual field. He was a learned scholar and an accomplished yogi with *Siddhis* (occult powers) at his command. He used to spend much of his time immersed in the state of bliss of samadhi.**

**When he came to Alandi he found that the local Brahmins were wasting their time in singing erotic *lavani* songs (which are sung during the folk theatre performances) instead of in spiritual matters. He realized that they would not listen to his advice therefore he tried a trick on them. He created sweets using his *Siddhis* and told them that if they sang *abhangs* (verses) of Saint Dnyaneshwar he would give them the sweets. The Brahmins fell for this trick and slowly came out of the habit of singing erotic songs and started singing devotional songs.**

**He had got fabricated a heavy chariot for carrying the idol of Vithoba (Shrikrishna) during the annual festivals. It was so heavy that even the strongest could not pull it. During one of such festivals when the strong men could not pull the chariot they came to Narasimha Saraswati. He was at that time in a state of samadhi. Half-conscious, he said, "Oh Lord, you drove my chariot in the past birth and now you are asking me to do the same for you?" Saying this he quickly came to the chariot and sat on it and now the chariot moved. This proved that Narasimha Saraswati was a reincarnation of Arjuna.**

**Once when he had gone to meet Swami Samarth the latter remarked to him, "You have not yet given up the “Randi”?" Randi colloquially means a prostitute and what Swami Samarth referred to was the *Siddhis* which can make a yogi go astray from his spiritual path. Narasimha Saraswati replied that efforts are going on but it will require his blessings for success.**

**Narasimha Saraswati lived in Alandi for about twelve years. His Math is within walking distance of the Saint Dnyaneshwar Samadhi and a lot of spiritual activities go on there.**

** RAMANAND BIDKAR**

**Ramanand Bidkar was born in a Brahmin family in 1838. His father died when he was a child. He was attracted towards spiritual path from childhood. He had performed pilgrimage of places like Pandharpur and Saptashringi in quite a young age. After marriage he started a business of jewellery and of perfumes and he became an acknowledged expert in both. Somehow he also developed an obsession for alchemy in which he is said to have succeeded. His business was successful and he became rich. But he fell into wrong company and was even involved with women. In the course of time however he started debating to himself about the choice between the temporary pleasures and permanent bliss. One day he met a Sadhu (ascetic) who remarked in presence of others that Bidkar spent his time in pleasure and would never be able to follow the spiritual path. This was a challenge to Bidkar which he accepted. He began praying to his family deity Hanuman and performed fasts and other austerities. Very soon Hanuman instructed him in a vision to go to Akkalkot.**

**When Bidkar reached Akkalkot Swami Samarth was in the royal palace. The servers told him that meeting Swami Samarth was not possible. But Bidkar was determined to see Swami Samarth and vowed that he would not eat unless he saw Swami Samarth. Two nights passed and Swami Samarth sensed the longing of his devotee. He himself came to meet Bidkar by jumping over the palace wall. Bidkar at once kept his head on Swami Samarth's feet. Swami Samarth asked in Hindi why he was bowing. Bidkar replied that the foundation must be strong. Swami Samarth then pointed to the deerskin hanging on the wall. Bidkar did not clearly understand what he meant and said that he (i.e. Bidkar) was ignorant. On this Swami Samarth abused Bidkar left and right. Bidkar then came near Swami Samarth and said that he had come to the feet of Swami Samarth and now it was left to his pleasure to give guidance or not. He also added that even his abuses were like poetry to him. After some time the abuses stopped and Swami Samarth said, "Now get out of here, your work is done."  Bidkar prostrated before Swami Samarth and returned to Pune. He had received initiation by Shaktipat technique in which a Guru awakens his disciple's Kundalini using his own powers. Bidkar continued his *japa* (recitation of the Mantra given by the Guru) for a year after which he again went to Akkalkot where Swami Samarth told him symbolically that matters are coming to a maturity. Next year he went to Swami Samarth with the intention of serving him for a long time.**

**One night Bidkar was massaging the feet of Swami Samarth. That night Swami Samarth would not ask him to stop even after it was past midnight. But Bidkar was happy at this opportunity to serve Swami Samarth. At dawn a terrible cobra came from in between the legs of Swami Samarth and raising its hood started making sounds at Bidkar but Bidkar did not get frightened. He continued massaging Swami Samarth's feet. This was really a test for the depth of sincerity for Bidkar and he passed it.  Swami Samarth suddenly stood up and in mock anger said, "You are a big jinn demon." and slapped Bidkar very hard knocking him down unconscious. A disciple named Sadanand lifted Bidkar and took him to his own room. Bidkar regained consciousness next morning and now he was in a state of bliss.**

**When Bidkar went to meet Swami Samarth in the morning he asked, "What do I owe to you now?"  He then instructed him to feed a thousand people. Bidkar returned to Pune to arrange for money. He returned to Akkalkot and gave meals to a thousand people as instructed.  Swami Samarth laughed and said, "You have given me meals but what Guru-Dakshina are you going to give me? Will you give me plenty?" (Guru-Dakshina is the offering to the Guru given after the learning is over). Bidkar folded his hands and humbly stood before him. Swami Samarth said, "My child, you will not be able to give me Guru-Dakshina I ask. Give me your promise." Bidkar gave the promise by keeping his hand on Swami Samarth's hand. What Swami Samarth then asked was for Bidkar to stop his alchemy practice. And Bidkar did so.**

**Next time Bidkar went to Akkalkot he was instructed not to come to Akkalkot again and to circumambulate River Narmada. Many pilgrims undertake this task but it is an arduous and also dangerous one. Certain rules are to be observed like not to enter into more than knee-deep waters, not to go too far from the river bank and to drink plenty of Narmada water every day. It is dangerous because one has to go through thick forest and often tigers and other wild animals are encountered. Local aborigines also can loot and even kill a pilgrim.**

**The news that Swami Samarth had taken samadhi reached Bidkar during this pilgrimage when he was at a place called Maheshwar. He cried but the same night Swami Samarth came in his dream and told him, "I have not gone. I still live." Bidkar was immensely consoled by this.**

**After returning from this pilgrimage he went to many other centres of pilgrimage and on returning to Pune established his Math known as Bidkar Maharaj Math, near Omkareshwar. He passed away in 1913. He left behind many disciples, a very famous disciple being Raosaheb Sahasrabudhe who also has his samadhi in Pune.**

**MUSLIM JAMADAR OF MAINDARGI**

**There was a Jamadar (a post similar to a sergeant) in the service of the Akkalkot state whose duty**

**was to guard prisoners. This Jamadar was a resident of the village Maindargi near Akkalkot. One day, after all the prisoners were brought back to the prison at the end of the day’s work, the Jamadar found that there was one prisoner missing. The Jamadar was due to retire from service shortly and this calamity would have made him not only to lose his pension but it was also likely he would have been arrested for dereliction of duty. He started praying in his mind to Swami Samarth. Visualizing him in his mind he vowed that if the prisoner were found then he would resign from service and spend the rest of his life in the service of Swami Samarth.**

**Next day a horse rider, going by a trench where the prisoners were working, saw the prisoner. He caught him and handed him over to the Jamadar. During enquiry the prisoner told that he was going to run away from his hiding place in the trench but a sanyasi was threatening him whenever he attempted to do so.**

**When the Jamadar heard this he wept with gratitude and immediately tendered his resignation as per his vow. He was sure that the sanyasi was none other than Swami Samarth.  He now remained only in the service of Swami Samarth. One day Swami Samarth threw his leather shoes at him and asked him to return to his village. The Jamadar returned to Maindargi, installed the shoes as *padukas* and began its worship with deep devotion.**

**Now this performance of worship is against Muslim religious customs and Jamadar was worshipping the shoes of a Hindu saint. His family and relatives opposed him and when he did not listen they threw him out of the house. But he was not deterred. He went to a deserted decrepit house and resumed his worship there. By the grace of Swami Samarth arrangements for his food also were made.**

**In the course of time he became well-known.  People came to him from afar to get cured and to get guidance in their difficulties. He used to give them the earth from below the padukas just as ashes are given as sign of grace. People were cured and they came out of their difficulties when they applied those ashes to their bodies. People now considered him as a *Siddha* (person with occult powers) and addressed him Pirsaheb. Even Brahmins began to come to him and he was not wanting in money any more. His family took him back with honour. Later he built a temple of Swami Samarth in the village where annual festivals were observed regularly. Thus an ordinary person was raised to a high spiritual level through devotion and through the grace of Swami Samarth.**

**GOPALBUVA KELKAR**

**His full name was Gopal Ramchandra Kelkar. He came from Korle village in RajapurTaluka in Ratnagiri District in the coastal Konkan strip of Maharashtra. Born in 1847 he studied up to the third standard in English. It was only about thirty years after the British took over the Western part of Maharashtra and there were not many people educated in English. He easily got a job as station master in the railways. He was already married by that time. While posted in Nagpur region he developed intestinal problems and his intolerable pains would not respond to any medication. On doctor's advice he left his job and returned home but that too did not help and he felt frustrated.**

**Gopalbuva was an atheist as many of those who had had an English education used to be in those days. But the intolerable pains forced him to pray and make a vow that "If this universe has a God and if He makes my affliction go within eight days then I will not serve anyone other than God anymore." And within eight days his affliction really reduced. Probably these are divine ways of making people come to His inner fold.**

**Now that his interest in God was awakened he had to find how to serve God as he had vowed. His enquiries brought out two names, Deo Mamaledar at Nashik and Swami Samarth at Akkalkot. Deo Mamaledar was living near about where Gopalbuva's brother lived and fearing that he would be prevented from his service to God he chose to go to Akkalkot. Bluffing that he was going to visit a friend he bought a ticket not for Akkalkot but for a different station so that his real destination was not traced.**

**He had no money to go beyond the station for which he had purchased the ticket. He went to a *dharmashala* (caravanserai or a rest house for pilgrims) to spend the night. At midnight a rich lady came to the *dharmashala* and offered Gopalbuva a considerable sum of money but he refused saying that he needed money sufficient only to reach Akkalkot.  But the lady insisted and gave him the amount so needed. When he reached Akkalkot (in 1874) only five *paise* were left in his pocket. He used it to buy dry dates as an offering to Swami Samarth and went to the Banyan tree in the royal garden where Swami Samarth was resting. He stayed in Akkalkot living on alms and saw Swami Samarth every day.**

**Four months passed. One night, while Gopalbuva was sleeping in the house of one Deshmukh, Swami Samarth came in his dream and passing his hand over his stomach said, "I shall cure you of your disease."  When Gopalbuva woke up he went and passed a lot of urine and realized that he had now been cured. Gopalbuva wept with joy and gratitude at this demonstration of the powers of Swami Samarth.**

**About a month later Swami Samarth was camping at a village called Hachnal along with his servers which now included Gopalbuva. Early morning, while everybody was asleep, Gopalbuva woke up and had a strong urge to smoke a *bidi* (a cigaraette made by wrapping tobacco in a leaf) . There was nothing to light his *bidi* with so he took a piece of coir rope and held it over the oil lamp near Swami Samarth's bed. As the coir caught fire Swami Samarth sat up and Gopalbuva started shivering with fright. The coir fell from his hand. Swami Samarth stared at Gopalbuva who somehow developed courage and prayed, "Please bless this servant." Thus Gopalbuva was initiated as disciple of Swami Samarth.  He continued to stay in Akkalkot and witnessed the doings of Swami Samarth, how people visited him and received his blessings. He later wrote a collection of these experiences which is one of the authentic first hand records of events at Akkalkot.**

**After some time Gopalbuva’s wife, having learnt that her husband was in Akkalkot came there. She served Swami Samarth for sometime after which Swami Samarth brought the husband and wife together. He then instructed Goplabuva to go to a place called Markandi near Chiplun where one Brahmacharibuva had installed the *padukas* and live there with his wife worshipping them. He also gave him two coconuts and one dry date signifying that he would get two sons and a daughter.**

**Gopalbuva accordingly came to Markandi which used to be on the outskirts of Chiplun in a thick forest. He did as instructed by his Guru, surviving on alms for which he used to go to town every Thursday. Finally he established a Math there. Besides the diary of collection of stories about the events at Akkalkot, Gopalbuva has written many other books. He took samadhi after staying at Markandi for forty-five years.**

**VAMANBUVA BRAHMACHARI**

**Vamanbuva Brahmachari came from a village called Bambori or Vamori in Ahmednagar district. His real name was Vamanbuva Vaidya Vamorikar.  He was the son of Ravji Vamorikar and the youngest brother of Vishwanath Vaidya Vamorikar whom we have met in the previous Part V-A.  Both Swami Samarth and Manik Prabhu had told that Vamanbuva would rise to great spiritual heights. Since childhood itself he was devoted towards Shri Dattatreya. He was in government service for some time and later worked in a newspaper office. He used to visit many *sanyasis*, saints and fakirs for attaining peace of mind which eluded him. At some stage he and his mother moved to Pune.**

**He was once discussing spiritual matters with his friends when a Brahmin with bright aura appeared suddenly and said, "Everything is useless without the blessings of a true Guru." When Vamanbuva asked where he could find such a Guru the Brahmin told him to go to Akkalkot and meet Swami Samarth. He mentioned that Swami Samarth was an avatar of Shri Dattatreya. The Brahmin went away as suddenly as he had come.**

**Vamanbuva then went to Akkalkot via Solapur in 1860. In those days railway line was only up to Solapur and one had to go to Akkalkot by road, on foot or by animal driven transport. When Vamanbuva reached Akkalkot he learnt that Swami Samarth had gone to a neighbouring village called Handre and he immediately proceeded towards Handre. Swami Samarth was returning to Akkalkot at that time so Vamanbuva met him halfway itself. The first sentence Swami Samarth uttered when he saw Vamanbuva was, “You made fun of my Brahmin?" Vamanbuva then realized the powers of Swami Samarth and prostrated before him. Just then Swami Samarth said, "Serve me and you will be devoted to the Brahman. Hand over your bundle to me." Vamanbuva handed over everything he had to Swami Samarth retaining only the loincloth for his dress. Swami Samarth returned a copper vessel to him and asked him to take care of it. Now Vamanbuva became a devoted servant of Swami Samarth. He used to visit Akkalkot twice or thrice every year.**

**Vamanbuva once went to the temple of Saptashringi Devi at Vani near Nashik.  This holy place is a power centre (Shaktipeetha) of Devi. Out of some 150 power centres of Devi in India four are located in Maharashtra. These are: Renukadevi at Mahur, Tuljabhavani at Tuljapur, Mahalakshmi at Kolhapur and Saptashringi at Vani (This latter centre is actually called half-centre).  This place is of great importance to Nath Sect sanyasis whose initiation rituals are supposed to be performed here. After worship Vamanbuva requested the priests to give him the betel-leaf from Devi's mouth but they refused. Vamanbuva then prayed to her and the betel-leaf fell onto his hands which surprised the priests.**

**At Nasik he collected water from river Godavari and went to Pandharpur to bathe with it the Vithoba’s feet. When he was bathing the feet of the idol he saw Swami Samarth in place of Vithoba. Later when he went and met Swami Samarth, the latter said, "You made big noise at Saptashringi and I had to give you the betel leaf. And it was I who accepted the water from you at Pandharpur." He then said, "The pot is not fully baked. Why do you waste energy going here and there? Remain quietly in a state of bliss."  Vamanbuva realized that Swami Samarth is the formless Brahman itself taking different forms.**

**In 1876 Vamanbuva who was in Baroda fell seriously ill with all sorts of afflictions like dysentery, piles, rheumatism, cough, etc. but no cure was in sight. He wrote to Swami Samarth about it praying for relief but there was no reply. In a hopeless state of mind he decided to commit suicide by jumping into the lake (Sursagar lake at Baroda) but as he was about to jump somebody caught him from behind. It was Swami Samarth who slapped him hard and said, "Where are you going without settling the account of your Karmas? And you are getting angry at me? Instead of taking natural samadhi you are committing suicide by drowning?”  He then took Vamanbuva by hand and led him to his house where Vamanbuva's mother and brother had the opportunity to meet Swami Samarth. He then told Vamanbuva that he would be cured and that he should not play tricks else he would receive beating with shoes. So saying Swami Samarth vanished.**

**Vamanbuva has written his experiences with Swami Samarth in the well-known book Guruleelamrit.  Unfortunately, Vamanbuva has preached orthodox behaviour in the book in spite of his Guru being Swami Samarth who was against it and did not care for cast or religion but only to the spirituality.**

**In 1901 Vamanbuva realized that the end was near and adopted *sanyas* taking the name Adwaitanand. Same year, after arranging for the publication of Guruleelamrit he left his body with the name of Swami Samarth constantly in his mind. His samadhi along with the padukas given to him by Swami Samarth is at Baroda. (See remarks on Guruleelamrit in previous part V-A).**

**SHRI KRISHNA SARASWATI**

**In Kolhapur there are three places of importance for Shri Dattatreya devotees. These are: the Bhikshasthan (also called Bhikshalinga), and the two maths of Shri Balamukund Saraswati and Shri Krishna Saraswati respectively. Bhikshasthan is the place where Shri Dattatreya comes for alms at midday. A minibiography of Shri Balamukund Saraswati who was a disciple of another Guru will be given a later chapter. Here we shall read about Shri Krishna Saraswati.**

**Shri Krishna Saraswati was a disciple of Swami Samarth. He used to live in a Videhi state (i.e. being in body he was not aware of it). Such people are liberated even while they live. His Math is located in Kumbhar Galli (Lane) and therefore he was also known as Kumbharswami (Kumbhar means a potter).**

**Shri Krishna Saraswati was the son of Appabhat Joshi and Annapurna, a poor but pious couple of Nandani near Kolhapur. For many years they could not get a child.  After a lot of prayers Shri Dattatreya came in Appabhat's dream and told him that a son will be born to him and that this son will be his (i.e. Shri Dattatreya's) avatar. As per the vision Shri Krishna Saraswati was born in the year 1835.**

**From his horoscope astrologers had predicted that this boy would be a great spiritual person.  The boy was longing for his Guru in childhood itself and one day he came to Swami Samarth. Swami Samarth recognized him at first sight and to avoid interference from those present there he took him by hand and quickly took him to the nearby forest. There Swami Samarth sat on a stone and the boy stood before him singing his praises. But Swami Samarth stopped him saying that he was part of Swami Samarth himself and his avatar was for the spiritual advancement of people. Swami Samarth kept his hand on his head which put Shri Krishna Saraswati into samadhi that lasted for a week.  After seven days Swami Samarth lovingly fondled him and instructed him to go to Kolhapur and live in Balonmatta-Piscachavritti which means a state which is sometimes childlike, sometimes excited and sometimes deranged. So saying Swami Samarth brought Shri Krishna Saraswati back to Akkalkot.  On the day Swami Samarth returned some devotees brought rice mixed with milk as an offering.  Looking at it he asked them why they had brought it and instructed that special *laddoos* be brought.  They did so and Swami Samarth gave it as *prasad* to Shri Krishna Saraswati.**

**Shri Krishna Saraswati stayed in Akkalkot and served Swami Samarth for many days.  One day a Brahmin afflicted with leprosy, whom Swami Samarth was expecting, came.  The Brahmin had come from Ganagapur where he had worshipped the Nirgun Padukas of Shri Narasimha Saraswati for a very long time in the hope of getting cured of his affliction.  One day he was told in a vision that he should go to Akkalkot where his wish would be fulfilled.  When the Brahmin arrived he made obeisance to Swami Samarth with folded hands and prayed for relief.  After listening to him Swami Samarth instructed him to accompany Shri Krishna Saraswati to Kolhapur and serve him for getting cured.**

**In Kolhapur the Brahmin began to serve Shri Krishna Saraswati as instructed. Shri Krishna Saraswati tested his sincerity in various ways and after being fully satisfied cured him.  During his lifetime Shri Krishna Saraswati cured many people of their diseases by his spiritual powers.  Among these were also people possessed by spirits. Through these services as well as through miracles he created faith in the Almighty in the hearts of people.  He survived Swami Samarth by about twenty-two years taking samadhi in the year 1900.  With the expression of a deranged idiotic person on his face he remained in permanent inner bliss and was a “Videhi” person.**

**SITARAM MAHARAJ**

**Like Shri Krishna Saraswati, Sitaram Maharaj was also a liberated *Videhi* person. He used to call himself “mad Sitaram”.  His is a very strange life story. There is no record of his having an education or having worked for a living anywhere nor having touched the family life, but he was a great yogi.**

**He was the son of one Bapurao Subhedar who worked for his living in Satara.  Sitaram’s step-mother used to torture him. Not able to tolerate it he left home at the age of twelve and came to Akkalkot where he served Swami Samarth very sincerely.  Recognizing his sincerity, Swami Samarth kept his blessing hand on his head and from then onwards Sitaram progressed rapidly in yoga, becoming a *Siddha* (attaining occult powers) within six years. Swami Samarth now instructed him to go back to where he came from. Accordingly he went to Mangalwedhe.  Realizing him to be a saint and an accomplished yogi people started calling him Sitaram Maharaj.**

**In Mangalwedhe he lived the life of a *Videhi,* always in the state of divine bliss. He used to go to any house for alms and shout, “Mother, give some bread.”  He used to eat there itself whatever was given to him, drink some water and leave. He would then go and sit at the cremation ground. People who visited him found peace of mind. Sometimes he would give advice, “Always remember the name of Rama.  Do not go after empty scholarship. See God in every living and non-living thing.” He lived in Mangalwedhe for forty years. Two weeks before his samadhi he was telling everybody that “Mad Sitaram will now depart.”  His Samadhi is located at Khardi, about fifteen kilometres from Pandharpur.**

**ANANDA BHARATI**

**Ananda Bharati, whose name before initiation by Swami Samarth was Laxman was a fisherman by profession. He used to visit Swami Samarth often and was completely devoted to him. Once, while he was fishing, his boat was caught in a storm and he was about to get drowned. But he developed courage and prayed loudly to Swami Samarth who at that time was in Akkalkot playing dice at Cholappa’s house. Swami Samarth suddenly stopped playing and shouting repeatedly “Laxman is drowning!”, he gestured as if he was pulling somebody up. To the surprise of those present, salty sea water started dripping from his hands for several minutes.**

**A week later Laxman came and embraced the feet of Swami Samarth.  With tears in his eyes he said, “Maharaj, you saved me or else I would have drowned. I had had enough of the worldly life. Now I am offering myself to be completely in your service alone.”  He gave up all his worldly possessions and remained in the service of Swami Samarth. His samadhi is located at Thane.**

**ANANDANATH MAHARAJ**

**Anandnath Maharaj came from Walawal in south Konkan region of Maharashtra. He was from Walawalkar family that belongs to the Kudal Deshastha Brahmin community.  He was a trader by profession trading in *Hirda,* a seed of medicinal value obtained in forests.  He heard about Swami Samarth in Mumbai and felt so eager to meet him that he immediately went to Akkalkot.  After he reached there, while he was washing his feet in the pond under the famous banyan tree a twig of the tree fell on his head. He looked up and saw the brilliant form of Swami Samarth who kept his blessing hand on his head. That immediately made him completely detached from the worldly affairs.  He stayed in Akkalkot for about six years. One day Swami Samarth took out tiny Padukas from his mouth, gave them to Anandanath and instructed him to establish his Math elsewhere. These Padukas were only about a centimetre in size and were made of metal, but their peculiarity was that in spite of their small size every line on the feet of Swami Samarth was clearly imprinted on it and nobody could tell what metal they were made of.**

**Anandanath Maharaj established three Maths, at Yevale, at Hodavade (in Sawantwadi) and at Dhawade in Vengurla. He composed many poetical compositions on Swami Samarth. He used the *Siddhis* (occult powers) attained by him to mitigate the problems of those who approached him for help. He took samadhi at Vengurla in 1903.**

**SHRI SHANKAR MAHARAJ**

**Of all the disciples of Swami Samarth Shri Shankar Maharaj stands distinctly apart in every respect. In outside appearance he was bent physically and would speak with a lisp. He used to smoke cigarettes (particularly of Honeydew brand) and drink hard liquor, especially brandy, in any amount without any physical effects.  But he was a yogi of very high calibre and had all Siddhis and Tantras at his command. He was an Avaliya belonging to Nath sect and other yogis referred to him as Avadhut.**

**Not much is known about his early life. Different versions about his birth are told. One story says a Shiva devotee Chimnaji of village Antapur near Nashik was instructed by Shiva himself in a dream to look for the child in the nearby jungle. The child who was named Shankar was found in the bushes by a childless couple.  The child showed the signs of a yogi. After the couple had their own child Shankar went away to the Himalayas. That was Shankar Maharaj.**

**Another version told by Maharaj himself to his disciple Dr Dhaneshwar says that he was born in a Brahmin family named Upasani in about 1800 AD at Mangalwedhe (near Pandharpur). He used to be very naughty as a boy. One day, at the age of about seven or eight, armed with bow and arrow, he entered the forest on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga towards a place called Machnur while chasing a deer. There he encountered a large Sanyasi who prevented him from shooting the deer. During this encounter the sanyasi held and fondled him. Thus Maharaj got *sparshadiksha* or initiation as disciple by touch by the sanyasi who was none other than Swami Samarth of Akkalkot. Maharaj stayed with him for about six months during which he gave him all knowledge and instructed him to go on pilgrimage. He went to the Himalayas where he did very hard *tapas*. On returning from there he spent his time with Siddha-yogis in and around Vriddheshwar (near Nagar) which is known as the centre for meditation of several Nath Siddhas in the past. He called himself as a belonging to the Nath panth. After the British took over Pune, he met a British collector who developed a faith in Maharaj and considered him as his Guru. He took Maharaj to England where he stayed for ten years teaching him the yoga path and returned after he reached perfection.**

**Another interesting piece of information has been told to the author (in 1995) by Mr. Madhusudan Kanhere, a 77 year old ascetic from Pune. He is also a disciple of Swami Samarth and also of late Shri Gulawani Maharaj. He is one of the few persons now living who had a close interaction with Shri Shankar Maharaj whom he met in 1946, about a year before his Samadhi. Shri Shankar Maharaj told  Mr. Kanhere, that Swami Samarth had taught him all aspects of yoga and *tantras*  and then only permitted him to travel over India and prepare disciples with due care. By that time Shri Shankar Maharaj was about seventy years old.  Shri Kanhere tells that the original physical stature of Shri Shankar Maharaj was that of a more than six foot tall person with bright aura. But to keep undesirable persons away he took the form of a physically deformed person. This may be true because Maharaj has given vision in that original form to his disciple Dr. Dhaneshwar (see below) and to Mr. Kanhere himself.**

**Maharaj is said to have told that he was known by other names elsewhere. In Gwalior region he was known as Gourishankar and took samadhi there. He once told that he had been at Raver in Khandesh region where he was known as Kunwarswami and that his samadhi temple is at a place called Waghoda where he took samadhi in 1878. (This is the also the year when his Guru Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot also took samadhi). The puzzling thing is that Maharaj left *samadhis* in these places and appeared in body as Shankar Maharaj in Maharashtra. Yet one must also remember that he was a Siddha-yogi and such feats would not have been impossible for him though it will make a common man wonder.   Maharaj himself told that he spent some time with famous singers and *Pakhavaj* (a two sided percussion instrument) players and became himself a talented singer and *Pakhavaj* player, but gave up these activities after Shri Swami Samarth told him not to waste his time in such pursuits. Shri Swami Samarth taught him various aspects of yoga and tantra system and then authorised him to have his own disciples. But chronology of these events is again lacking or confusing.**

**He returned to Maharashtra some time after Swami Samarth’s samadhi in 1878. He went to Shubharaya Math in Solapur and stayed with Janardanbuva who became one of the main disciples of Maharaj. From there he went to Triambakeshwar near Nashik where he stayed with a pleader named Rambhau Akolkar. Rambhau had a cow which was not giving milk. By his powers Maharaj made it give milk just as Shri Narasimha Saraswati and Swami Samarth had done earlier elsewhere. From Nashik he came to Pune. We get more information about Maharaj now from his devotees who have narrated it to others or put it in writing.**

**In Pune he used to live with Mama Dhekane, a poor person. Later he had wealthy disciples like Raosaheb Mehendale but he continued to stay with Dhekane quite a lot.  He instructed Taisaheb Mehendale, wife of Raosaheb to give discourses on Dnyaneshwari which Maharaj himself used to attend.  These discourses continued for 32 years until 1972. Activities of Maharaj in Pune until Samadhi are well documented by Dnyananath or Bapu Ranade (Yogi Dnyananath), only he has recorded the samadhi date wrongly as 24th April instead of 28th.**

**His activities extended as far as Nagar, Akluj and Sangli. At Akluj he had many devotees. Among the well-known devotees were Mr Girme a farmer and Mr Keshavbhai Asher the Managing Director of the Malinagar Sugar Factory and Secretary to the Managing director Mr G.K. Pradhan.  Mr Pradhan was an atheist but after seeing the miracles by Maharaj and receiving his grace that put him into deep trance and gave him divine experiences he became a staunch devotee and disciple. Mr G. K. Pradhan wrote the two famous books: Towards the Silver Crests of Himalayas and Know Thyself in which the teachings of Maharaj are presented through the characters Gurudev and Swamiji respectively. The first book has been translated into many languages.  A fourth disciple was a welder in the Sugar Factory named V. K. Kulkarni who also used to be critical of Maharaj but later became his disciple. The details about these and other disciples may be found in the author’s book “Yogiraj Shri Shankar Maharaj” at** [**www.vvshirvaikar.de/index-main.html**](http://www.vvshirvaikar.de/index-main.html)**.**

**In Nagar he had disciples in two houses. Dhaneshwar family were his devotees and so were the Abhyankar family.  Dr Dhaneshwar is said to be his disciple to whom he taught all he knew. The love between Maharaj and Dr Dhaneshwar was like mother and son. Maharaj had given him darshan in the form of a tall fakir even while he was a boy. In Nagar Dr Dhaneshwar practiced medicine not for profit but service as per Maharaj’s instructions.  Once Maharaj even called Meenanath, one of the Navanaths to visit his home and bless him.  In spite of all the wealth and *siddhis* offered to him Dr Dhaneshwar chose only the devotion to Maharaj. In fact it is for the sake of Dr Dhaneshwar that Maharaj postponed his samadhi by 30 years.  His son Dr D. N. Dhanshwar has written his biography in Marathi which is very interesting and educative to read for a sadhak. (*Siddhayogi Dr Nagesh Ramchandra Dhaneshwar* by Dr D.N.Dhaneshwar, Santkripa Prakashan., 1994.)**

**Major Abhyankar was a devotee of Shankar Maharaj who had saved him from bullets in the war.  Bu his son Datta was dearer to him. Maharaj took him to Girnar and gave him spiritual experiences.  Datta used to give his service at the samadhi in the early days when there used to be only a tin roof over the samadhi.**

**Maharaj used to move frequently between Pune, Nagar, Solapur, Akluj (near Solapur) and Bombay guiding and inspiring people on spiritual path. In this respect he was unlike other disciples who established a Math and remained there at one place most of the time. He is more like Shri Dattatreya who wanders and graces devotees.**

**Maharaj did not give any discourses himself. Due to his unusually long tongue his speech was lisped. But Maharaj loved Dnyaneshwari and asked people to read and study it. Maharaj used to drink liquor with a purpose: to keep unwanted people away. Only those people who saw Maharaj beyond the external looks could come to him. There are incidents when Maharaj drank and another person nearby got drunk.  Some people to whom Maharaj gave a glass of brandy and asked them to drink it told later that it was not liquor but a nice testing sherbet or coconut water.**

**The life of Shri Shankar Maharaj has been full of miracles he performed to help his devotees and to turn them to spiritual path. The miracles are not different from those performed by other great yogis like Shri Narasimha Saraswati and Swami Samarth. Maharaj did these miracles to draw people to spiritual path, teach them basic philosophy of spiritual life and to benefit them even in material aspects. But he always insisted that while Guru’s grace helps, the disciple himself must work hard to get results.**

**Shri Shankar Maharaj took Samadhi at the age of about 150 years, in Pune on April 28, 1947.  But he is known to live in the bodies of certain chosen persons and his work thus continues even after samadhi.  His samadhi, which is now virtually a temple, is situated at Padmavati in Pune beside the Pune-Satara road.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**Dr V.V. Shirvaikar**

**PART VI  - FOURTH AVATAR: MANIK PRABHU**

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**Shri Manik Prabhu (1817-1865)**

**Shri Manik Prabhu is considered as the fourth avatar of Shri Dattatreya. It has been mentioned earlier that devotees of Datta-Tradition are both orthodox and liberal and include many Muslims. Perhaps the largest number of Muslims may be found among the devotees of Shri Manik Prabhu, an obvious reason being the location of his activities was in the Muslim state of Hyderabad ruled then by Nizam. The Muslim rulers gave full support to Manik Prabhu and his religious activities. Another peculiarity of this avatar is that while all other avatars of Shri Dattatreya as well as the saints of Datta-Tradition are known for austerity, Shri Manik Prabhu was a *Rajayogi* (Royal yogi) and his set-up is known for its royal splendour and luxury. However Shri Manik Prabhu himself was never attached to them. He gave away all in charity but always the splendour continued.**

**BIRTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD**

**There is a town called Kalyan in the erstwhile Hyderabad state under Nizam. (It now falls in Karnataka state after the states were reorganised). It was actually the capital of a mini-state under a Nawab (Muslim ruler). There used to live in this town a pious couple named Manoharpant Naik and Baiamma. Their family worshipped Khandoba (a form of Shiva) but there was also the tradition of *japa* (continued repetition) of the name of Shri Rama in his family since the days of Manoharpant’s grandfather. Manoharpant’s mother was a devotee of Hanuman. Manoharpant himself was an ardent devotee of Shri Dattatreya. The family was thus very religious minded.**

**They had three sons, Hanmant (or Dadasaheb), Manik and Narasimha (or Tatyasaheb).  Before Manik was born, Manoharpant was told in a dream that the child would be an avatar of Shri Dattatreya. Manik was born in the house of Manoharpant’s grandparents in the village of Ladwanti on December 22, 1817. Though he was named Manik (meaning ruby) he was fondly called by his parents as Ratnya (meaning jewel). Manik had such a bright aura that people in the village used to come just to see him.**

**Manik was playful as a boy. He used to spend all his time playing with the children in the neighbourhood or going with them to the nearby woods for cattle grazing. But he never went to school. All the efforts of his elders in that direction were in vain.  Because of this his people thought him to be mad and began referring to him as “Veda Bhau” meaning mad brother. Though he never went to school he could speak, read and write several languages like Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit. He also had the inborn knowledge of the Vedas and *Shastras*.  Perhaps his father taught him to write at home but he could not have taught him all these languages. It is said that when the thread ceremony was performed at the age of seven for his formal entry into Brahminhood he started reciting the daily ritualistic mantras as soon as the Gayatri Mantra was whispered in his ear.**

**Sometimes Manik would apply ash on his body and speak on spiritual topics like an elderly person but his playing all sorts of games with children did not stop.  His games included mock worship using stones for idols. He used to teach his companions lessons in spiritual life through the games. He especially did not like that animals be tortured or killed, not even scorpions. Occasionally he would remain in the woods for couple of days without trace.**

**Even when he was a child, he seems to have occult powers. Once the children found a dead parrot while playing. Manik took the body in his hands and fondling it threw it in the air asking the bird to fly away to its nest and it really did fly away. People discovered that what he spoke came out to be true. Because of some supernatural events people from neighbouring villages developed a faith in him and began paying him visits and give gifts and money. They began calling him Manik Prabhu (Prabhu meaning master) and later referred to him only as Prabhu.**

**He had a cowherd friend named Govinda. For three or four days Govinda had not joined the group for playing. Manik went to his home to call him. He found Govinda’s mother crying because Govinda was dead and they were preparing to take his body away for cremation. But Manik asked the mother not to cry and told her that Govinda was not dead but merely sleeping. He also added that if she told him aloud that Bhau has come to meet him he would wake up. She did that and Govinda really got up and went away with Manik. This news spread around like wild fire and Manik had to go in hiding for a few days to avoid the rush of people.**

**In the course of time Manoharpant died. A family friend named Bhalchandra Dikshit, a learned and highly respected Brahmin from a neighbouring village of Hallikheda came to Kalyan to offer condolences. When he saw Manik he realised that the boy was something special. He inquired about him to Baiamma. She complained that Manik was not interested in studies and instead went around playing the whole day and behaved eccentrically. She requested him to take Manik under his care and give him some education. Mr. Dikshit who was already attracted to the boy agreed. Manik went with him without protest. At Hallikhed also his behaviour did not change, but Mr. Dikshit left instructions to let him do what he liked. Manik was very pleased with the faith Mr. Dikshit kept in him and one day told him so.  Later Narayan Dikshit, his son became one of the principal disciples of Shri Manik Prabhu. The two families became connected through matrimony: Hanmant, Manik’s elder brother, married Mr. Dikshit’s daughter. After some days Manik returned to Kalyan.**

**RECOGNITION AS AN AVATAR**

**In Kalyan everybody in the family was unhappy about Manik because his activities did not bring any income. His maternal uncle arranged a job for him at the *octroi* post (post where tax on incoming goods is collected). His job was to collect *octroi* and maintain accounts.  The job went on well for some time but afterwards Manik began giving away the collections to the poor.  Finally he gave up the job.**

**One day, when he was about sixteen years of age, his uncle scolded him for leading an idle life and asked him to leave the house.  Manik left home without telling anybody and went to a village called Manthal fifty miles away. There is a holy lake called Ambilkund near the village and caves in the nearby hills where he spent his time in meditation. Occasionally he would be seen wandering in the woods. When the relatives tracked him down and met him there he told them that as promised he has taken birth unto them and remained with them until the thread ceremony. Now he has to travel and finish his duties as an avatar by gracing the devotees. They should not feel sorry for his departure. But since they were insisting he would soon come and visit them.  He also advised that they should continue their service to Shri Dattatreya and assigned Tatyasaheb for carrying out the family duties. During this period villagers who now knew him to be a great yogi came to meet him in large numbers. The custom of “Butti Jatri” which in Kannada implies collective meals shared from whatever the visitors had brought started from this time onwards. Shri Manik Prabhu remained at Manthal for six months. Occasionally he went to the cave in the Manthal forest. That cave is now known as Manik Prabhu Cave.**

**After about a year Manik Prabhu returned to Kalyan and remained at home for about five years. When people came to know he had returned, they rushed to meet him and take his blessings. They brought lots of gifts which were always distributed among the poor. Programs of *bhajans, kirtans* etc. were regularly held and thus people’s mind was constantly directed towards God. Manik Prabhu left home for some time to visit the holy places nearby, including the temple of his family deity Khandoba where the occasion of Dattajayanti (birth of Shri Dattatreya) used to be celebrated in a big way. After returning he arranged for his younger brother Tatyasaheb’s marriage. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp in which the Nawab of Kalyan also spent ten thousand rupees, (a great sum in those days) in charity and for feeding Brahmins and poor people of all communities from all around.**

**Now the crowd of visitors to Manik Prabhu was on the increase.  Off and on Manik Prabhu would tour the surrounding regions and help people by using his occult powers. Once he went to the state of Mudhol and spent time in meditation in one of the caves in the local hills. While he was travelling in this region he revived a person who had died of snake bite. That spread his fame so much many centres for service to him were established in the region.**

**MANIKNAGAR**

**Once, a Brahmin family was coming to meet Shri Manik Prabhu. They camped in an old Shiva temple situated in the forest between Humanabad and Gadwanti.  Some dacoits attacked them there. They raised their weapons to kill the family who ardently prayed to Shri Manik Prabhu. Shri Manik Prabhu suddenly appeared and froze the dacoits’ hands before they could strike. The dacoits prayed and surrendered to Shri Manik Prabhu who let them go. (This story will remind of a similar story regarding Shripad Shrivallabh in Ch 11 of Gurucharitra)**

**From this time onwards Shri Manik Prabhu decided to make this place his permanent abode. When the government officials (not the *secular* government of today but the Muslim government one and half  centuries ago in the Nizam era) came to know about this they came to meet Shri Manik Prabhu, had the Shiva temple cleaned and renovated, and performed Rudrabhishek ceremony in the service of Shiva. People were fed; Brahmins were given *dakshina* of one rupee each. Money was also given in charity to the poor. The place was now flooded with people coming to see Shri Manik Prabhu. He used to sit under a *bel* tree while the devotees took shelter under the surrounding trees or in makeshift tents. The government officials left a commissary with stock of grains and other provisions. They also provided many servants for the local arrangements. All visitors who came for relief, including the sick, were fed through this arrangement. His mother came to live with him along with the younger brother but he ordered them to return to his elder brother Dadasaheb permitting them only weekly visits either on a Thursday or on a Saturday.**

**Later, at the time of Dattajayanti celebrations, a *gadi* (seat of ruling) of Shri Dattatreya was established at the place. Routines of daily worship, *arati* etc. were also established. The place slowly turned into a village and then a town and was named Maniknagar. Later the devotees established a *gadi* for Shri Manik Prabhu also and he began occupying it for the benefit of his devotees.  The meetings held here were like a royal durbar (court) and was called Maniknagar Durbar.**

**The fame of Shri Manik Prabhu spread among the Muslims also. They too flocked there for offering their respects and receiving his grace. People from both Hindu and Muslim religions, afflicted with incurable diseases, people possessed by spirits, people looking for success in life and those desirous of children all flocked there and their desires were fulfilled. They offered lots of money, jewellery, clothes etc. at Shri Manik Prabhu’s feet.  As a result the custom of celebrating two Muslim festivals including Muharram and two Hindu festivals including Dattajayanti started. These were celebrated on a grand scale. During these festivals Shri Manik Prabhu used to distribute money to the needy. Generally nobody left without receiving something from him. In the course of time government developed the town and established gates and markets and provided security in Maniknagar.**

**Shri Shankaracharya of Shringeri once visited him and was welcomed and treated with honour. Another time Shri Swami Samarth came to visit him and had a private meeting (See Part V-A).**

**Some purist Muslims from Bedar did not like their brethren to go to Manik Prabhu. They brought obstacles but when they saw his occult powers they relented. When Shri Manik Prabhu’s fame reached Nizam Nasiruddoulla he asked his minister Salarjang to bring him to him offering an estate of sixty thousand rupees annual income. Salarjang sent his Brahmin assistant Arab Yashwantrao for the job.  When the latter went to the Maniknagar Durbar with the offerings including the gift deed for the estate, Shri Manik Prabhu told him, “We are a fakir. What have we to do with all these riches and the estate? The whole world is ruled by God.  We see our estate wherever we cast our eyes. Tell your master that if he wants more than what he already has he can come here. Tell him also that, ‘It is better for his kingdom if I continue to be where I am now.’**

**SAMADHI**

**Shri Manik Prabhu then decided to take samadhi but kept this a secret except from three or four reliable confidants instructing them that the news that he had taken samadhi should be revealed only after four days. This was necessary because the devotees, especially the Muslim devotees, would have created obstacles. He instructed that people should be permitted to visit the samadhi only four days later and Manohar (Appasaheb), the son of his younger brother Tatyasaheb be appointed to his *gadi* (seat) as successor on the sixteenth day. His elder brother and mother had already died and had received proper spiritual advice from him before they passed away.**

**Accordingly, in the year 1865, on the *Ekadashi* day of bright fortnight of *Margashirsha* month by Hindu calendar (Shaka year 1787) he took bath early in the morning, had himself worshipped by Appasaheb and wearing flower garlands made Appasaheb perform his *Pancharati* and gave *prasad* to those present. Putting the garland from his own neck to that of Appasaheb and blessing everybody, he sat in the previously constructed enclosure for *samadhi*.  This was a critical moment for all present. They shouted in unison, “Avadhut Chintan Shri Gurudeo Datta” and with tearful eyes put bricks and mortar to close the entrance of the enclosure. One can only imagine the kind of mood these people had in those moments when their Guru and saviour would be seen no more in his material body. As instructed, on the sixteenth day Appasaheb was appointed to the *gadi*.**

**VENKAMMA**

**Manik Prabhu had many disciples from all communities.  One prime disciple was a woman named Venkamma. She was a child widow and used to visit Manik Prabhu daily when he was at a village called Mylar. When asked she told him that she had nowhere to go and she was not going to leave his feet. He told him that he was a wanderer without any possessions and if she wanted to be with him she would have to give up all the ornaments and wear ashes. She immediately removed all ornaments and offered them at his feet. Seeing her devotion he arranged that she will be under the protection of his mother. After testing her rigorously he permitted her to be among his disciples. He never spoke to women. Women were not allowed in the Durbar unless they were accompanied by their husbands and when this was not possible they had to speak through Venkamma. When Venkamma died her Komtee community people came to claim her body but when they lifted it sounds of *Aum* started coming from the mouth. Finally on the instructions of Manik Prabhu, the final rites were performed by Brahmins. Among other disciples were Narayan Dikshit, a famous singer named Tarra Husen Khan, Bappacharya and Vithalrao Kulkarni.**

**SAKALMAT SAMPRADAYA**

**As said earlier Shri Manik Prabhu was a linguist. He was also a good orator and had a beautiful voice. His poems are well-known in the old Hyderabad region both to Hindus and Muslims. He has written a book called Kalpataru.  His day of samadhi is celebrated every year and is coupled with the Dattajayanti celebrations four days later. His sect is called *Sakalmat* *Sampradaya* (loosely translated as the sect of universal thinking).  The basic tenets of this sect are that *if we ignore the differences due to time and geographical location, the basic principle of all religions is the same and all have considered attaining God and liberation to be the main aim. The differences do not affect equality and brotherhood.* The sect was further expanded by Manohar Manik Prabhu. Subsequent successors were Martanda Manik Prabhu, Shri Shankar Manik Prabhu and the current Shri Sidharaj Manik Prabhu.**

***A Commentary***

**We see in Manik Prabhu a saint who was very dispassionate and detached in spite of the royal splendour he was exposed to. Everything he did was for people’s benefit. Like Shripad Shrivallabha, Manik Prabhu did not have any Guru nor did he take *sanyasa*. Whatever happened in his life happened as if ordained by the divine.  It is really amazing that a Hindu saint was so much honoured and worshipped by Muslims and that too in a Muslim ruled state. One other example of such tolerance is that of Janardanswami (see later parts), who served the Muslim king in Daulatabad (former Devgiri). The king even made Thursday an official holiday instead of Friday as it is customary in Muslim states.**

**Dhere (see Bibliography) remarks that, though Muslims flocked to Hindu saints like Manik Prabhu, it was not because of the religion but because of their occult powers and miracles performed by the saints.  Though the Sakalmat sect was founded by Manik Prabhu, it was not a religion and it is doubtful if any Muslims joined it.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**PART VII - FAMOUS DEVOTEES OF DATTATREYA: Part  1**

**By Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

**Contents:   Introduction \* Caste and Religion factor \* Gorakshanath \* Mahanubhava Saints \* Janardanswami, Eknath, Dasopant And Mukteshwar \* Two Devotees from Uttar Pradesh \* Narayanswami \* Chidambar Dikshit \* Raghunathbhatji Nashikakar \* Niranjan Raghunath \* Kavadibuva \* Narayanmaharaj Jalwankar \* Bibliograpy**

**INTRODUCTION**

**The devotees of Shri Dattatreya we read about so far were all disciples of the avatars of Shri Dattatreya. In the historical past many Datta-devotees were initiated directly by Shri Dattatreya or by other Datta-devotees who had reached perfection.**

**The information has been drawn from various sources, principally *Shri Dattatreya Dnyanakosh* by Dr. P. N. Joshi (in Marathi), the various issues of the magazine Santakripa and other publications of Santakripa Pratishthan Pune and the annual magazine Swamikripa published at the time of Dipavali.**

***About Biographies of Saints*   A biography is in essence a history. Two kinds of authors write biographies of saints.  Those who are basically historians who collect written records or reports of life events like birth, education, marriage, spiritual training etc. of the subject and sifting credible and qualify the text material according to its credibility. Then there are the devotees of the subject who wish to present their Guru in the best possible light without bothering about the credibility of reported events.   There is also a third kind who has very little historical material to use and laces his text with numerous quotations from the works of other saint authors like Tukaram, Dnyaneshwar, Namdeo and Samarth Ramdas not to mention the Puranas making a show of his being a learned person.  But we ignore here this latter type and discuss the biographies authored by the first two types of authors.**

**Except for autobiographies and the biography of Sai Baba of Shirdi (Sai Satcharitra), almost all biographies are written much after the death or samadhi of the saint.  If the saint is a householder then some reliable information about his birth, childhood, adult and spiritual life may be collected within a reasonable time otherwise one has to rely on the hearsay information from whoever who might have come in contact with the saint. If the saint happens to be a sanyasi then unless he has become a sanyasi in a very old age, the saint’s past gets erased in the process of the ritual that transforms him into a sanyasi, because the ritual involves a formal death ceremony and a new name and forgetting the past life. The information has to be collected from tidbits the saint might have given away or mentioned by some contemporary writer.  Only when the saint becomes famous then people remember his activities, especially the miracles.**

**A historian writing a biography would have a discriminating matter-of-fact approach in his presentation of biographical information but a devotee author is driven by his deep devotion to present the personality and activities of their Guru in special light and in a superlative style adding all sorts of miracles from pre-birth to the post-death events concerning his Guru.   The biography is most likely to give great details about how the birth was foretold through mother’s dreams, her cravings during pregnancy, auspicious natural phenomena like bright skylights, miracles performed by the child in childhood and so on as if somebody had carefully kept a record.**

**Consider the biography Gautam Buddha for example. His mother is said to have a dream of a white elephant with six tusks ten months before Buddha’s birth in a garden in Lumbini beneath a *Sal* tree but his mother died either during childbirth or a week later.  Thus all the stories of the supernatural can only be myths created by the devotees.  Buddha’s enlightenment came at the advanced age of 35 years and recognition as divinity still later after which stories of his miracles multiplied. (Ref: *Gautama Buddha, Wikipedia article*).  One will notice the same about most biographies of saints.**

**Some common miracles  The devotee author often tend to stress on the miracles done by their Guru and in this process they even ascribe to him sometimes the miracles done by other saints, to boost the Guru’s image. We often note that the many miracles claimed to have been performed are common to a number of saints. For example feeding a large number of people on a small quantity of food seems to have been ascribed to almost every saint. Making a barren cow or buffalo give milk is also common (e.g. Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Swami Samarth, and Shri Shankar Maharaj). Reviving a dead person is also common (Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Swami Samarth, and Dnyaneshwar Maharaj).  The theme of remembering one’s previous lives as he crosses a set of lines drawn on the ground occurs in Gurucharitra as well as in the biography of Samarth Ramdas.  So is the story of Shri Dattatreya appearing as a Muslim *Malang* (fakir) before Janardanswami and Eknath common to Samarth Ramdas also. Thus there is no way of confirming the stories of events in a saint’s life and one has to accept them at their face value.**

**Here I may quote (translated from Marathi) Mr. Vasudeo Savaikar in his forward to the biography of Shri Jairamswami Vadgaonkar by Vaman D. Deshpande Nazrekar, published by Santakripa Pratishthan. He says, “Historically authentic information about the lives of the saints of earlier era, their spiritual, social work and their writings is generally not available. Whatever is available in various compositions and historical records contain only the stories of their miracles. Also, the same stories of the miracles are told by their devotees changing only the saint’s name. In these stories also so much exaggeration is made that the truth is eclipsed.”**

**Reader will notice the truth of this while reading even these brief biographies given here though efforts have been made to avoid this as far as possible.**

**It is a different case when one looks at the information given in the autobiographies of the saints.  I have come across five such autobiographical writings.  These are (1) the autobiography of Purohitswami (An Indian Monk by Purohitswami with a Forward by W.B.Yeats, Marathi translation by his daughter Mrs Mrinalini Chitale); this has been used later; (2) Autobiography of a Yogi by Swami Paramhansa Yogananda; (3) The Path: Autobiography of a Western Yogi by Swami Kriyanand (Donald Walters, Disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda); (4) Living with the Hiamalyan Masters by Swami Rama, and (5) True Experiences by Swami Krishnanand.  The information in these books comes directly from personal experiences and has to be believed. Besides, the modesty of the saints precludes exaggeration. In the present context only the autobiography of Purohitswami is relevant to us since he is the only saint out of the above who was a Dattatreya devotee.**

**There are some parameters common to many Datta-devotees. Most of them seem to have been born with a spiritual base and in religious families, no doubt due to their *sadhana* (spiritual practice) of earlier births. As Shri Krishna tells Arjuna in the sixth chapter of Dnyaneshwari,**

**"Arjuna, can there be anything other than liberation for one who longs for it? He (a yogi who dies prematurely) is merely taking rest for some time. ….. But liberation is reserved for him.  ….. Then he returns to the earth to be born in a religious family and starts gaining spiritual wealth.  People in such family observe morals, speak clearly and truthfully and behave as prescribed in the Scriptures. For them, the Vedas are the living deity, actions are guided by *Swadharma* and discrimination, thoughts are only about God and the family deity is their wealth.  Thus the person happily is born here on the strength of his meritorious deeds. Or he is reborn into the family of a yogi of high level.  The person even as a child is already loaded with knowledge because of his past.  Due to the mature intellect he knows all branches of knowledge easily. His intellect develops further from the point of his death in the earlier lifetime and he is able to grasp mysterious subjects and even difficult things told by a Guru. His sense-organs come under his control, mind becomes one with the *Prana* the vital life-breath and the *Prana* dissolves in the Consciousness.  Somehow, yoga practice also comes easily to him and he can attain the *Samadhi State* effortlessly. He attains *Siddhis* even while he is an acolyte.  He is able to do his spiritual exercises effortlessly because he has reached the shores of the Self-realization after millions of years and after overcoming the impediments of thousands of births. He gets the power of discrimination and putting that also behind in time and going beyond thought he becomes one with the Brahman. (6:437-467)**

**Thus the reader will notice that not only do these men attain high spiritual levels but their trend can be noticed in childhood itself. Many are able to predict the future and able to perform miracles, but that depends upon the person’s spiritual level of earlier birth. The strength of this argument may be confirmed from the autobiographies of saints and yogis presented below.**

**In some biographies the main character is presented as an avatar by the devotee author. This is in keeping with his reverence to his Guru. One notices this trend of assigning title of an avatar to prominent personalities in many Indian religious writings especially the Puranas. For example Kapilmuni, proponent of the Sankhya philosophy is presented as an avatar of Vishnu and Adi Shankaracharya as an avatar of Shiva. This gives a divine backing to their writings and philosophy which the pious dare not contest. The pious do not ask why, if the particular sage was an avatar and his writings were divine, they are not accepted as absolute truth by all and why there are a variety of philosophies and dogmas on spiritual matters?**

**Only thing we can accept probably is that while the Ultimate Principle or Brahman at the root of this material universe is one, it is manifested to the material world through various deities. In some religions the deity may be considered as a messenger or son of God. In Hindu system there are various deities or powers which are manifestation of different combinations in various proportions of the *Sattva-Raja-Tama* attributes and each sect, family or person reveres some particular deity with the help of which persons reach higher spiritual levels.**

**Thus we see that when persons are reborn they are reborn with a background of devotion to Shiva or Vishnu or to the Goddess or to Ganesh or their accredited avatars like Shri Rama, Shri Krishna or in our case Shri Dattatreya. Each deity is like your father and mother whose hand you hold to travel along the spiritual path. The philosophical writings (like Gita and Dnyaneswari or treatises on Adwaita, Dwaita, Vishishtadwaita or other philosophies); devotional writings (like Gurucharitra, Bhagwat Purana, and Devi Saptashati etc.) are devices which help the seeker to ascend the spiritual path by facilitating detachment towards worldly matters and turning his mind towards God.**

**Many seekers who read biographies of such great persons feel dejected when they read of their fast progress, getting a Guru or a vision of some deity in a short time. They compare themselves with these saints and feel they are not achieving anything from their own *sadhana.* But they forget the important thing that *sadhana* is not a matter of a single lifetime but many; and in every birth one rises up a little, depending upon how one has used his opportunities in the current life time offered by the past good karmas and the ultimate balance sheet of his *sadhana*. Comparing oneself with great masters is improper and can only lead to misery. The biographies are examples before a seeker who should note the character, depth of faith and devotion and the arduous efforts of the subject to meet God.**

**Attempt has been made to make the present the biographies in chronological order. Except for Gorakshanath I have not included saints belonging to Nath Sect like Shri Gajananmaharaj Gupte or Swami Swarupanand.**

**CASTE AND RELIGION FACTOR**

**In spite of Dattatreya being a balance of attributes we note in Dattatreya tradition two distinct**

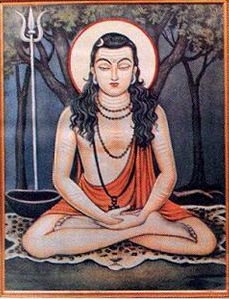
**streams as regards caste and religion. The orthodox claim that Dattatreya’s avatar was to preserve the *varnashramdharma* or the code of behaviour according to caste.  We have noted that while Narasimha Saraswati in accordance with his times did maintain the *varnashramdharma* but his devotes and disciples were in all castes. Though he asked his disciples to stay away from serving Muslims he himself blessed the Muslim king, both policies probably to save the Hindus from the interference from the Muslim rulers.  On the other hand we see Swami Samarth totally against *varnashramdharma.*  He tried to instill this approach in his disciples as would be clear from his biography in Parts III and IV.   But we also saw that the orthodoxy has penetrated so deep into the Hindu that his disciples like Vamanbuva ignored his teachings and preached orthodoxy.  As mentioned in an earlier part Vamanbuva insisted that Guru should not be of another caste and should be learned in the Vedas etc., generally implying that he should be a Brahmin.  But we have the case of saint Tukaram who had a Brahmin disciple and Dnyaneshwar Maharaj who was outside the caste system had also Brahmin disciples.  The Orthodox claim that caste system has sanction of the Vedas on the basis of Purushasukta in which various castes are said to have arisen from various parts of the body of Purusha.  First of all Purushsukta is a very late addition to the Rigveda. In the early Vedic days a person born of a father of one *Varna* could practice another because the system was not birth based.  Many Kshatriya princes became rishis (Shantanu’s brother Devapi for example) and many Brahmins, Parashurama for example in reality were Kshatriyas.  Manu Savarni who was contemporary of rishi Gritsamada and Ushanas Shukracharya was a commoner who became a rishi.**

**Historians are of the opinion that while Brahmins where busy refining the Yajna techniques and make them more elaborate, those who retired to forests for meditation and the *kshatriya* kings like King Pravahana Jaibali of Panchala tribe and King Ashwapati of Kekaya tribe realised and contributed to the concept of the unique principle Brahman. It was King Janak to whom even Rishis went for learning about Brahman. (See “Aspirations from a new world” by Shakuntala Rao Shastri pub. by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan).**

**It is true that among the saints a large number are Brahmins but for ages the education, especially religious education was confined mostly to the Brahmins but there is reason for this. Upper caste children generally have a strict educational upbringing, religious routine and are exposed to pious and ritualistic surroundings right from birth, making them more capable of withstanding the rigours of the spiritual pursuit, but it does not make the spiritual field proprietary to them. However it develops in them an internal strength which makes them to be respected and even feared. We see this strength in the character of saints like Chidambar Dikshit, Vasudevananda Saraswati etc. (see later).**

**At the same time some greatest yogis were non-Brahmins. Jalandharnath the Nath yogi contemporary of Gorakshanath was actually a person of untouchable caste. In fact Nath Sect does not bother about caste and religion and in Datta Tradition which is quite enmeshed with the Nath Tradition it will be seen that caste is not the main factor but spiritual capability is.**

**In the mini-biographies of Datta-saints in the following pages we see both types of devotees and also that Dattatreya himself in conformity with his association with Nath Sect did not practice *varnashramdharma* for he has non-Brahmin disciples and Muslims too.  But probably we have to live with this dichotomy for ages to come.  We shall now start with the biographies.**

** GORAKSHANATH**

**GORAKSHANATH**

**Though Macchindranath (Matsyendranath) is considered as the founder of the Nath Sect, it is his disciple Gorakshanath who is the real star of the sect. Like Shri Dattatreya he was also a wandering yogi and a learned person.**

**The life of Gorakshanath (or Gorakhnath) is astounding. The legend of his birth is mysterious and goes thus: Macchindranath, the first of the Naths, came to the house of a childless woman to beg for alms. He was moved by her prayers for a son and gave her some ashes to be eaten for getting a child. But her neighbour misguided her saying that these mendicants practiced black magic and she should not eat the ash. The unfortunate lady threw the ashes into a heap of cow-dung outside the house and forgot all about it. Ten years passed. Macchindranath returned to that house and enquired about the child. The woman was now frightened and pointed to the heap of cow-dung. Macchindranath shouted, “Come out Gorakshanath.”  And a ten year old bright looking boy came out of the heap. To the chagrin of the woman Macchindranath took away the boy with him as his disciple. Macchindranath named him Gorakshanath (because he was found under the heap of cow-dung), initiated and trained him well as a Nath yogi.**

**Discounting the fantasy, Gorakshanath’s origin is shrouded in mystery. Historians differ as regards his origin or even his times. He was definitely born after Adi Shankaracharya (eighth century). His time is quoted as anywhere between 10th century and 12th century, the most probable time being 11th century. He is variously presented as son of a cultured Brahmin family, son of a Brahmin widow, a *Shudra* and so on. The place of his birth also is disputed, but from the language of his writings he seems to have been born in Punjab, probably north of Peshawar. He travelled to Nepal where he and his Guru Macchindranath are still worshipped as deities. Nepali Gurkhas consider him as their God and the term Gurkha is said to originate from his name. All agree that he was an extremely handsome person.**

**Gorakshanath became learned in the Vedic philosophy as well as yoga and attained Siddhis. He travelled throughout India many times and has composed poems and written in many Indian languages. His stress was on *Hathayoga* and *Pranayama* with the practice of which Kundalini could be activated for accelerating spiritual progress. What he is best known for is his courage and intelligence in freeing his guru from the shackles of the Tantric cult. Tantric cult involves use of five M’s namely Madya (liquor), Mansa (meat), Meena (fish), Mudra (physical posture or mental attitude to avoid contamination), and Mithuna (sex). Gorakshanath’s personality was such that he could extract his Guru from the clutches of these practices. In the legendary folklore, this is described in terms of a fantasy story of Machchindranath being lured by Mainakini (this name differs in different versions of the story) the ruler of an all female kingdom in which no men were allowed. She married him, got a son from him and did not let him go away. Gorakshanath went dressed as a player of *mridanga* (a percussion instrument) and when he was playing during a dance he brought out sounds which told Macchindranath that his disciple Gorakshanath had come.  Gorakshanath succeeded taking his Guru away from the female kingdom, but Macchindranath was still drawn towards his son and wealth.  Gorakshanath showed him that these are all impermanent and they can create several such sons and wealth using the occult powers acquired by them.  Following this incident, Gorakshanath made a strict code of dress and behavior for Nath yogis that included celibacy.**

**There is an interesting story told about Gorakshanath’s meeting with Dattatreya at Girnar (Ref: pp 132-133, Dattatreya Dnyanakosha, P.N.Joshi, See Bibliography).  While going to Somanath in Saurashtra Gorakshanath came to Girnar. After making obeisance to Mother Amba and visiting the Dattatreya *padukas* he came to know that Shri Dattatreya lives in a nearby cave. After some search he reached the cave where he saw an unclothed, ash-smeared *avadhut* with long, tangled hair in an excited, demented mood. He was wondering whether this was Dattatreya (*avadhut* is one who has washed away all his passions).  It was time for afternoon alms (for *Sanyasis*). Gorakshanath removed his wallet (*jholi*) which flew in the sky and returned with excellent food. He then asked that *avadhut* whether he would eat something to which the avadhut replied that he takes only cow milk. Gorakshnath then asked who brings the milk to which avadhut replied that nobody brings milk but his *kamandalu* was always full with it.  To test the avadhut Gorakshnath asked whether he would get milk for the alms to which the avadhut replied that he would be happy if he takes all the milk in the *kamandalu*.  Gorakshnath took the *kamandalu* and started pouring milk in his vessel.  He was astonished to note that while milk was streaming out of the *kamandalu* there was nothing in it.  Seeing that *avadhut’s* siddhis are more powerful than his own Gorakshnath realized he has met Dattatreya and immediately touched his feet.  Dattatreya taught him several aspects of yoga and spiritual philosophy which are included in Gorakshanath’s books.**

**The summary of what Dattatreya told him is:  “Oh avadhut Gorakshanath, I am neither Brahmadeo nor a *brahmachari* (an aspirant for *sanyasa*, it also means a celibate); I am not a learned Brahmin or an ordained *sanyasi* or yogi.  I wander freely and happily like a *jivanmukta* (liberated while living) which I have become by my own grace.”   He further explained that, “I go around sometimes secretly and sometimes openly. There is no desire, no wind and no Maya in the highest state. In this state there is neither form nor formlessness, neither subtleness nor grossness, there is neither water nor water-drop, neither mirror nor a reflection, neither Dattatreya nor Gorakshanath; there is neither object nor its illusion; there is only the only Highest Principle. Oh Gorakshanath, forgiveness is my mother, truth is my father and Knowledge is my Guru.  The unidentifiable Brahman is my abode. It is subtle, infinite and beyond dogma. Supreme Lord is the Guru and the soul is the disciple. In a thought-free condition many occult powers come together. Once the Sahasrar (thousand petal lotus at the top of the head) opens one goes in an *unmani* state (beyond mind). The mature state of meditation is the mindless *unmani* state. In this state mind rests completely.**

**Listen, Oh Gorakshanath, anger is like a thorn for those who tread the spiritual path. To surrender to anger is to drown in this ocean of earthly life. A person who is enmeshed in *karmas* is a bound person. Oh *avadhut*, Brahma is real and Maya is unreal.  Word (Om) is real but the body generated from it unreal. *Dhyana* (meditative state) is the state in which awareness remains in Brahman and becomes Brahman. Shakti is the power that sustains everything Shiva is One who makes Shakti do it.  Individual soul is the earth, nether and the sky and its master is the supreme souls.  The understanding that they are not separate is Knowledge.  Self-realization thus attained is the true form of knowledge. I am ever one with everything and this state is called transcendence. Once one becomes acquainted with this Datta principle, nothing more remains to be told.**

**Shri Dattatreya gave this and similar advice also to Matsyendranath, Jalandharnath and Revananath. (Revananath was initiated into the Nath sect by Shri Dattatreya).**

**Shri Dattatreya then showed his real form and blessed Gorakshanath. The place where this happened in Girnar is known as Kamandalu Tirtha.**

**Gorakshanath has written 28 books in Sanskrit and 40 in Hindi. His well-known books include Hathayogapradeep, Gorakshasamhita, Gorakhdattagushti and Sabadi.**

**Gorakshanath did not bother about the caste system or even about the religion while initiating his disciples. He initiated women also. There are many Muslims in the Raval branch of Gorakshanath branch of Nath sect. In fact the Nath yogis belonged to diverse castes e.g. Jalandharnath belonged to a very low untouchable class.**

**Two other famous Nath yogis are said to have been initiated by Shri Dattatreya. These were Nagnath and Revannath. We noted earlier the similarity in the dresses and general appearance depicted for Shri Dattatreya and the Nath Panthi yogis.  Yogis in both Nath and Dattatreya tradition are called *avadhuts*.**

**MAHANUBHAVA SAINTS**

**Shri Dattatreya is greatly revered in Mahanubhava sect founded by Chakradhar Swami (1194-1274 AD). This sect has a large following in the Vidarbha-Khandesh region of Maharashtra. The root of this high place for Shri Dattatreya seems to be Chakrapani, the Guru of Chakradhar Swami, further strengthened by Govindaprabhu another disciple of Chakrapani.  The relation between Chakrapani and Chakradhar involves use of yogic Siddhis as will be clear later. It must be noted that while in other Datta tradition sects Shri Dattatreya is considered as an avatar of a deity (Vishnu), in Mahanubhava sect he is considered as an avatar of Parameshwar the Supreme deity. Also he is depicted as one-head-two-hands deity.**

***Chakrapani*: Chakrapani was son of Janakanayak and Janakaisa, a family belonging to Karhade Brahmin sect, from Phaltan near Satara in southern Maharashtra. They earned their living by commercial trade.  Janakanayak longed for a son and even married a second time (a common thing in those days) but in vain. Janakaisa’s parents who were from Chakan near Pune also prayed and made vows to the deity Chakrapani of Chakan, while Janakanayak himself had made another vow to another deity called Changdeo.  Ultimately a son was born and was named Chakrapani by the maternal grandparents and Changdeo by Janakanayak. From childhood itself Changdeo was detached from worldly affairs including the family business. He was married to Kamalaisa but he was not much interested in marital bliss either. This led to tiffs and made him sick of family life.  Following another tiff he left home for pilgrimage.**

**Once he joined a group of pilgrims and went to Mahur. Mahur (old Matapur) is located in Kinwat Taluka, Nanded District about six hours road journey from Nagpur. It is one of the holy places in relation to Shri Dattatreya. It is believed that Shri Dattatreya comes to sleep there at night. (See the experience of Purohitswami later). There are many holy lakes at Mahur. There is a lake near the base of the Mahur fort, called Merumala. Changdeo, along with his co-pilgrims took bath in the lake and was going through the forest path to visit the temple where Shri Dattatreya comes to sleep, when suddenly a tiger roared and came in his path.  Everybody else ran away but Changdeo stood there quietly with the strong conviction that it was Shri Dattatreya who had come in the form of the tiger.  The tiger kept his front paw on Changdeo’s head and gave him what is known as Shaktipat initiation (See Part VII-3 later).**

**Changdeo remained in Mahur for many years. He used to roam in the jungles and live on alms.  From there he went to Dwarawati and lived in a cave on the banks of Gomati River. He used to take a broom and a dust-pan and clean the streets of Dwarawati. He initiated fifty-two persons by hitting them on head with the broom or the dust-pan.  Changdeo never differentiated between persons and did not bother about the strongly prevalent caste system. He used to eat in the homes of *Shudras* as well as of untouchables. He was known for his yogic Siddhis. One day he left his body by the yogic process and entered the body of one Harpaldeo who was brought to the cremation ground after death for cremation. This Harpaldeo about whom we shall read later came to be known as Chakradhar, the founder of Mahanubhava sect mentioned earlier. Changdeo or Chakrapani’s period must have been the second half of twelfth century.**

***Govindaprabhu*    Govindaprabhu was born in a village near Riddhipur in a Brahmin family. His original name was Gundo. His parents died when he was about two years old and he was fostered by his maternal uncle. Gundo was extremely intelligent and had a detached nature. He was initiated by Chakrapani while on a pilgrimage to Dwarawati. He was a strict celibate and was like his Guru in behaviour as well as yogic prowess. He has a high place of honour in the Mahanubhava sect and is considered an avatar.  Technically it was he who initiated Chakradhar Swami which is another reason why he is so revered in the sect.**

***Chakradhar Swami*    The kingdom of Bharuch in Gujarat had a minister by name Vishaldeo.  His wife’s name was Malhaisa. Both were devotees of Shri Dattatreya by whose grace a son was born to them.  The son was named Harpaldeo who married Kamalaisa. Harpaldeo was fond of gambling. One day he suddenly fell ill and died.  When the body was taken to the cremation ground Changdeo or Chakrapani entered his body by yogic powers as mentioned earlier. Harpaldeo became alive but naturally as a new personality. He became more detached. But his liking for gambling still lingered. One day he lost heavily and his wife Kamalaisa refused to give him her ornaments to bail him out. This made him become disenchanted with the world and still more detached. One day he left home and went to Ramtek near Nagpur. During this pilgrimage he met Govindaprabhu at Riddhipur and received Shaktipat initiation from him. Govindaprabhu named him Chakradhar.  Thus we have an unusual case of a disciple initiating his own guru but in a new body.**

**After his initiation Chakradhar spent twelve years in *tapas* on a hill called Salbardi. He came to conclusion that salvation of people lay in three principles namely truth, non-violence and equality and he set upon teaching them. In the course of his travels he came across a Siddhayogi by name Udhalinath from whom he learnt the yogic technique of maintaining youth. He then travelled to Warangal in Andhra Pradesh where he married Hansamba, the beautiful daughter of a horse dealer. After spending some time in marital life his original detached nature raised its head. He left the marital life and went to Bhandara in Vidarbha where he had his first disciple by name Nilkanth Bhandarkar. His second disciple was one Ramdarna from Aljapur with whose daughter he had his third marriage. He had many more disciples both male and female.**

**In the course of time Chakradhar reached Paithan where he chose to renounce the world to become a sanyasi. Now he ardently started educating public in his principles and taught people the power of love. He saved the ignorant people who used to worship ordinary deities. Thus the sect began. There is no place for caste distinction or male-female distinction in his sect. He practised equality and used to eat and sit with people of any caste including the untouchables.  He adopted the local language Marathi for his writings in preference to Sanskrit preferred by the learned. He could thus reach common people. Of course he had to face a lot of opposition from the orthodox people but he and his disciples faced it with courage.**

**This was the period when Muslim rule had spread and the religious practices of the Hindus were being suppressed.  To prevent their writings from being discovered and interpreted as religious writings and be destroyed by Muslims Mahanubhava literature began to use coded language in their books.**

**Chakradhar’s philosophy is a dualistic (Dwaita) philosophy.  Shi Dattatreya is considered as Guru of Chakrapani and founder of the sect. They believe that Shri Dattatreya lives in all the four yugas (aeons) and that his words are like nectar showering happiness.**

**At Mahur there is a place called Devatirtha which has the samadhi of Chakradhar.  There, in one hall there are two beds, one small and another quite large. It is the large bed which is said to be where Shri Dattatreya sleeps at night. The small bed is that of Shri Chakradhar.  It is believed that because of his unorthodox philosophy and behaviour he was caught by the Devgiri Chief minister Hemadpant and was beheaded; however, some say that he went to Himalayas and did not return. But it is a fact that after the Nath Panthi yogis the Dattatreya tradition was kept alive by the Mahanubhava sect of Chakradhar.**

**JANARDANSWAMI, EKNATH, DASOPANT, MUKTESHWAR**

**Keeping the spiritual flame alive during the Muslim rule has been quite a formidable task for Hindu saints.  Shri Narasimha Saraswati kept himself and his disciples clear of the Muslim kings by insisting that they should not serve Muslim rulers.  There is another class of saints who kept the flame alive by staying with the rulers who, it must be acknowledged, did respect the high spiritual status of these saints. Janardanswami, Eknath and Dasopant belong to this class.  Eknath was disciple of Janardanswami.**

***Janardanswami* (1504-1575 AD)     Janardanswami was born in 1504 AD in a Brahmin family named Deshpande from Chalisgaon in the Khandesh region of Maharashtra. The family was quite religious and used to observe all the traditional rituals prescribed for Brahmins. From childhood Janardanswami showed interest in religious aspects of life.  At the age of 21 he started his family life by marrying two girls at the same time (polygamy was not uncommon in those days). Reader may not know that the Surname “Deshpande” comes from the assignment from the government to collect taxes on its behalf, keep a proper account of the same and assist in the administration. This assignment usually was passed on from father to son. This was thus the family occupation of Janardanswami who balanced his time well between the family and the official duties.  As part of the religious duties he used to visit the places of importance to Datta tradition viz. Kuravpur, Narsobawadi, Oudumber and Ankalkhop. It was at Ankalkhop that he received the grace from Shri Dattatreya.**

**Janardanswami had accepted the service of the Muslim rulers at Daulatabad, (formerly Devgiri the capital of Yadava dynasty). However his spiritual pursuits continued and he used to regularly read Gurucharitra, Dnyaneshwari etc. (remember that books were not easily available in those days and had to be copied laboriously from somebody else’s copy.)  He also spent time in meditation for which he found Gorakshaguha, a cave named after Gorakshanath and a temple called Durgatirtha nearby as very suitable.  After performing his daily religious rituals he used to go to court and take part in Government business with total sincerity. His moral character and spiritual status had impressed even the rulers and it is said that in the area under his control they had made Thursday (the day related to Datta tradition) as weekly holiday instead of the usual Friday under a Muslim rule. There is a place called Sulabhanjan hill, 5-8 Km away from Daulatabad where there are many Shiva temples. There is a lake named Suryakunda and a place called Sahasralinga (literally thousand lingas) nearby. Janardanswami found this place suitable for meditating on Shri Dattatreya and used to visit it regularly. It was here that Shri Dattatreya appeared before him, kept his benevolent hand on his head and initiated him. Thus Janardanswami, according to his disciple Saint Eknath, becomes the first disciple of Shri Dattatreya in this Kaliyuga.  Though devotion to Shri Dattatreya forms the main stream of his spiritual path, there is also an important place for devotion to Shri Krishna (Vithal) too in his spiritual life.**

**As said earlier, Janardanswami used to go on pilgrimage often. During his visit to Nashik-Tryambakeshwar (one of the Jyotirlingas) he met a Brahmin named Chandrabodha. Apparently they had some spiritual discussions between them and as a result of this some think, though others dispute, that Chandrabodha was Guru of Janardanswami. Incidentally, this Chandrabodha became a (Muslim) Sufi later and was Guru to the Muslim Sufi saint Sheikh Mahamad, author of a Marathi composition called *Siddhantbodha*.**

**Shri Janardanswami took samadhi on 6th day of dark fortnight of Falgun in 1575 AD. It is said that he took *jalasamadhi* (i.e. leaving the body by entering water or drowning in common parlance) in the lake inside the Daulatabad fort. His body was never found even though the lake is not very deep. It is a coincidence that his birth, appearance of Shri Dattatreya to him and samadhi as well as the day on which he initiated his famous disciple Eknath and samadhi of the latter, all fall on the 6th day of dark fortnight of Falgun. He has written a few small compositions but they are not so well known. There are many Maths established in his name by his disciples. Noted among them are at Varanasi, Daulatabad, Beed, Charathana (in Parabhani district) and Tapovan in Nashik.**

***Saint Eknath* (1533-1599 AD)    Once in a while a person of remarkable character and ability is born whose imprint on public life remains for centuries. Saint Eknath was such a person. Eknath is known for strengthening the path of devotion. He translated part of Bhagwat Purana, one of the prominent compositions to followers of the Bhakti (devotion) path, into Marathi the language of the common people in Maharashtra and made it available to them in the language they understood. But his greatest contribution was his producing a corrected copy of Dnyaneshwari, the commentary in Marathi by Saint Dnyaneshwar on Bhagvad-Gita. The original version of Dnyaneshwari had become corrupted during the two and a half centuries that had elapsed after the samadhi of Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, through the process of hand copying (Remember that there were no printing presses those days) and because some poets added their own compositions to the original. We owe the present version of Dnyaneshwari to Saint Eknath.**

**Saint Eknath was born in a family which worshipped Vithal, the name by which Shri Krishna is known in Maharashtra. Vithal is the presiding deity of Pandharpur one of the holiest places for the Vaishnava *varkari* sect in Maharashtra.  Members of the Varkari sect make annual visits to Pandharpur to see Vithal on the Ekadashi (11th day) in the month of Ashadha, singly or in groups defying the heavy rains and risking cholera. Though Eknath also finally followed the Varkari path his earlier devotion was to Shri Dattatreya.**

**Eknath’s parents died when he was a child and he was brought up by his grandfather Chakrapani (not the Mahanubhava one). From childhood itself Eknath was interested in religious aspects of life. He ran away from home in search of a Guru and came in contact with Janardanswami who became his Guru.  Eknath was a meticulous person. Once Janardanswami found him working late in the night the reason being that there was a mistake of a small amount in the accounts which he used to keep for his guru. Janardanswami was pleased with him.**

**Eknath served his Guru well and was favoured by an appearance of Shri Dattatreya in the lonely forests of Devgiri. Shri Dattatreya appeared before him in the form of a Malang (i.e. a Muslim fakir) accompanied by a female dog. The Malang milked the dog, mixed some old bread from his bag with the milk and shared the strange food with Eknath. In those days it would have been unthinkable for a Brahmin boy to eat sitting by the side of a Muslim, leave alone eating the food touched by him, but Eknath had realised that he was dealing with Shri Dattatreya himself and did not hesitate. In fact after he was handed over the empty dish for cleaning Eknath drank the remains of the food with water which pleased the Malang as an indication of deep faith. The Malang then showed Eknath his real form as Shri Dattatreya, further proving the closeness of his Guru with Shri Dattatreya. Now Eknath was deeply involved with Dattatreya and even when he wrote Bhagwat in Marathi he makes obeisance to Shri Dattatreya in the beginning. Later also Shri Dattatreya appeared before him many times. He used to go to the Sulabhonjan hill for meditation and was granted favours by Shri Dattatreya.**

**It was mentioned earlier that saints belonging to Datta-tradition can be extremely orthodox or extremely liberal as regards the caste system. Saint Eknath seems to have belonged to the latter class for he never bothered about the castes and is reputed to have taken meals in a house of (in those days) an untouchable family in spite of the opposition from the local Brahmins. Eknath’s compassion even for animals and forgiveness to his worst torturers is legendary and the reader should make it a point to read his biography to understand the true nature of a saint. (There is one biography in English written by an American Missionary Mr. Justin E. Abbott. Mr. Abbott, in spite of belonging to the Christian faith was so much impressed by the works of the Indian saints, notably Tukaram and Eknath in Maharashtra that he has written their biographies as well as translated many of their works in English. One of the books translated by him is Mahipati’s Bhaktavijaya which gives the biographies of many Indian saints. These books are available with the publishers M/S Motilal Banarasidas. Mr. Abbott passed away in 1932 at his home in Summit, New Jersey USA).**

**Another legend about Saint Eknath (though not related to Datta-tradition) is that in order to help him Shri Krishna worked in his home as a domestic servant under the name Shrikhandya for several years. When this was discovered and Eknath reproached him for serving him, Shri Krishna asked, “I had to come in disguise. Had I come the way you see me now, would you have let me stay with you and serve you?” Saint Eknath took samadhi in 1599 AD at Paithan.**

***Dasopant* (1551-1615 AD)    Dasopant was born in the wealthy Deshpande family from Narayanpeth under the rulership of Bahamani Kingdom of Bidar.  One year when the region was reeling under severe draught, his father Digambarpant who was a Government official, distributed the grains in government granary to the hungry public on his own authority.  He could not however deposit the price of the grains in the government treasury in time. The king was angry and took Dasopant, then a boy, away for ransom until the money was paid, further threatening that if the money was not paid within a month the boy would be converted to Muslim religion. Both Digambarpant and Dasopant intently prayed to Shri Dattatreya for relief and surprisingly an unknown person who gave his name as Datta Padewar deposited the required amount in the treasury and Dasopant was released.**

**Everybody was happy but Dasopant was overcome with detachment after this demonstration of Divine power. He left home in search of Shri Dattatreya who had answered his prayers. He reached Matapur or Mahur via Dakulgi and Nanded and remained in its peaceful environment for twelve years serving Shri Dattatreya through meditation and other daily spiritual procedures. After twelve years he again resumed his wandering and reached Rakshasbhuvan on the banks of Godavari. Here, he received the gift of *padukas* (sandals) of Shri Dattatreya and was blessed by his appearance in Avadhut form. In the course of time he reached the place of confluence of Vani river where perchance he met his family members.  As per the custom prescribed in the *Shastras*, his wife had waited twelve years for his return and was to be now declared a widow after performing the prescribed rites. The dramatic reunion was an occasion of joy for everybody.  After meeting his parents and wife Dasopant gifted away his titular rights of the position of Deshpande and came to stay in Ambejogai near Parli Vaijanath. One Sitopant Deshpande became his disciple and arranged for his stay in Ambejogai.  Dasopant wrote prolifically on Shri Dattatreya and on spiritual matters. He also set up a particular ritualistic method of daily Dattatreya worship.**

***Mukteshwar*   Mukteshwar belongs to the seventeenth century. He was the grandson of Eknath i.e. daughter Godavari’s son. His father’s name was Chintamani. His mother’s name was changed to Gangubai after marriage.**

**Like his grandfather he also was a devotee of Shri Dattatreya. But while his grandfather came from a family with tradition of devotion to Vithoba, Mukteshwar’s family was devoted to Bhairava, a form of Shiva.  His family worshipped Shri Dattatreya in the form of Lila Vishwambhar (Vishwambhar is a name of Shiva).  Thus his worship of Shri Dattatreya had a Shaivaite inclination.**

**Mukteshwar is known for his poetry, beautiful language and descriptions of nature. His compositions are in Marathi verse. His main work includes Ramayana and many chapters from Mahabharata.  Other compositions include the biography of his grandfather Eknath. The inspiration for writing Ramayana came to him while he was at Narsobawadi, the well known place of pilgrimage for Shri Dattatreya devotees.  He established a Dattatreya temple at Terwad.**

**TWO DEVOTEES FROM UTTAR PRADESH**

**While most of the devotees of Shri Dattatreya are from Maharashtra-Karnataka- Andhra region, there are two devotees of note came from Uttar Pradesh. These are Kinaram Aghori (1620-1772 AD) and Nipat Niranjan (1623-1728 AD).**

***Kinaram Aghori*   He was born around 1620, or may be a little earlier, in a pious Kshatriya family in Ramgarh which falls in the Chandoli tehsil of Varanasi District in U.P.  From early age itself he showed spiritual tendencies e.g. he developed the habit of sitting under a banyan tree meditating when he was a child. He had no desire to get married but it was forced upon him. Fortunately for him the bride died before the marriage took place. He then left his home quietly in search of a Guru and in the course of his search met one Shivaramji, a Ramanuja sect saint, at Karo in Gazipur district in U.P.  Shivramji had predicted that Kinaram would reach great heights in the spiritual field.  He left Shivramji after sometime because Kinaram did not like that Shivramji had remarried after the death of his wife. Kinaram then came to a place called Naigarhi where he performed a miracle. An old lady’s son owed the local landlord some money which he was unable to pay back. As the dispute about payment was going on Kinaram asked the landlord to dig the ground on which the son was standing. To everybody’s surprise a pot of gold coins was found which settled the dues. The boy was so affected by this event that he became Kinaram’s disciple, left home and accompanied Kinaram in his wanderings. Kinaram renamed the boy as Bijaram. Both now set for Girnar the place well known for the presence of Shri Dattatreya.**

**When they reached Junagarh, then ruled by a Muslim *nawab*, Kinaram left Bijaram in the city and went up the Girnar Mountain alone. After visiting the temple of Goddess Amba and the Dhuni (fire) of Gorakshanath he went to the Shri Dattatreya peak (where *Padukas* of Shri Dattatreya have been installed) and fasted for seven days. Gorakshanath appeared before him there and gave him spiritual advice. But Kinaram was anxious to meet Shri Dattatreya himself. He decided to circumambulate (*pradakshina*) the mountain peak through the thick forest. But he lost his way and when night came he could not see anything in the dark. Kinaram prayed to the mountain itself and suddenly saw the light of a fire burning some distance away. Going ahead he saw a yogi with brown coloured *jata* (long tangled hair worn by ascetics), clad in a deerskin sitting near the fire. Kinaram made his obeisance and was offered some roots which were being roasted in the fire. Eating them Kinaram was not only free of his hunger and thirst but a strange new energy pervaded him. When the ascetic asked him why he had entered the jungle at night Kinaram replied that “Puri, Dwarka, the banks of Gomati and Ganges cause one’s liberation from this material world, so says Shri Dattatreya.”  On hearing this, the ascetic who was Shri Dattatreya himself appeared before him in his real form and initiated him by telling him a mantra called Aghori mantra in his ear. Then keeping his hand on Kinaram’s head Shri Dattatreya imparted his energy into him for activating the Kundalini (Shaktipat method of initiation). Kinaram spent that night discussing many spiritual matters with his Guru. For Kinaram it was a very memorable night of bliss. In the morning Shri Dattatreya instructed him to complete the circumambulation of Girnar, make a pilgrimage to the Himalayas and then settle in Varanasi. Shri Dattatreya then vanished.**

**From Girnar Kinaram returned to Junagarh to meet his disciple Bijaram and found that the Nabab i.e. the Muslim ruler had arrested all the holy men in the capital and put them in prison. Kinaram went there and to teach the Nawab a lesson and show him the power of holy men, performed the miracle of making the grinding stones in the prison turn automatically. As a result Nawab not only released all the holy men but welcomed them and established a centre for providing free meals to the pilgrims visiting Girnar.**

**As instructed Kinaram made a pilgrimage of the holy places in the Himalayas and then settled in Varanasi under a tamarind tree near Krimikund.  The naturally sour leaves of the tamarind tree began to taste sweet by his touch. A sweet fragrance used to waft around his body.  He was fond of smoking *hookah* and of music. While in Varanasi, Kinaram performed many miracles but Dattaguru appeared to him many times in the form of an Aghori ascetic named Kaluram, tested him and proved the uselessness of the occult powers.**

**One day in 1772 AD on the day he had announced he would take samadhi he sat in Siddhasana pose, pronounced *Aum* thrice and left his body by yogic powers. He was about 150 years old at that time. He was buried there itself (Yogis are not cremated but buried in sitting pose). It is said that fragrance is emitted from the samadhi on certain days and music can be heard.**

**Kinaram was a contemporary of Saint Tulsidas, the author of Ramcharitmanas. There is an interesting story about him and Kinaram. In Varanasi there was a rich merchant who had no son.  He served Tulsidas for many years and prayed that he should be blessed with a son. Tulsidas promised to speak to Shri Rama about it. When Tulsidas spoke to Shri Rama at night about the merchant’s request, Shri Rama saw what was written in the merchant’s destiny and found that no son would be born to him in ten births.  He told this to Tulsidas who in turn informed the merchant that he was not destined to get a son. But the traders do not give up hope easily. He stopped going to Tulsidas and went to Kinaram Aghori instead. One day he took a dish of tasty meals to Kinaram.  Kinaram partook of three *puris* and vegetables and feeling pleased asked the merchant what was behind this service. The merchant expressed his desire for a son and Kinaram promised him three sons, one for each *puri he ate.* When the firstson was born the merchant celebrated the occasion with ceremonial worship and gifts. When Tulsidas came to know about this he felt hurt and complained to Shri Rama. Then Shri Rama explained that when Tulsidas requested for a son for the merchant it was merely a request but Kinaram sacrificed his own liberation gained from his *sadhana*, even though it meant consequent rebirths for him, in return for the birth of a son to the merchant and that it was that sacrifice made for the sake of others that made the big difference.**

***Nipatniranjan*   The period of this second Datta devotee from north is 1623-1738 AD. He was a Goud Brahmin from Chanderi in Bundelkhand in U.P. He had religious inclination from childhood itself and liked to sing *bhajans*. At the age of forty he came along with his aged mother to settle in Aurangabad.  For survival he used to fabricate armour for the warriors. But the business failed and he became so poor that there was no money even for the final rites of his mother when she died. Disgusted, he applied the ashes from his mother’s funeral pyre on his body and became a renunciate.  He now spent his time in meditation and yoga practice. After some time he was blessed with the appearance of Shri Dattatreya. His Guru was one Charpatinat. He had attained the powers of the Siddhis. It is said that even Aurangzeb the Mughal emperor was impressed by his powers. He has left many poems behind him.**

**NARAYANSWAMI**

**The course of life of Narayanswami is strange and interesting. It shows the extent to which God interacts with a devotee and guides him even in the absence of a spiritual Guru. He was born in a Deshastha Brahmin family of name Joshi from Visapur. He was very learned in *Shastra’s* and a man of excellent character. He remarried after his wife died and had a son by the second marriage. He was leading a happy life but once he was defeated in a debate on *Shastras* in a meeting of pundits held in Pune. This was a shock to him and he left home for further studies under some able master at Varanasi. There he became an expert in the *Shastras* under the tutelage of an able Guru. Understanding the real reason for his desire for learning and in order that his learning should not be wasted in debates, his master took a promise from him as Gurudakshina (present to one’s Guru on completion of learning) that he would never defeat anybody in any debate. Narayanswami returned home and again resumed family life. He had two more children, both daughters, before his second wife also died. Leaving his son in Pune for studies, he came to Kolhapur with his two daughters and served Goddess Mahalkshmi ardently. She instructed him to go to Narsobawadi and pray to Shri Dattatreya. Accordingly he came to Narsobawadi with his two daughters and began his worship of Shri Dattatreya.**

**After constant meditation on Shri Dattatreya he received his blessings and was able to reach the state of *samadhi*. He used to be in this state in predawn hours. After coming out of that state he used to spend time looking after his two small daughters who had to be taken out for the morning ablutions and toilet.  One day a strange thing occurred. The girls woke up earlier than usual while their father was still in the state of samadhi and began calling him for taking them out for toilet.  Shri Dattatreya came in the form of their father and did the needful. He washed their feet and put them back to bed.  When Narayanswami came out of samadhi he awakened his daughters for taking them for their morning ablutions. But the daughters told him that he had just taken them and why he was asking them to go again. This puzzled him but when the girls even showed him the place where they had gone (in those days and even today it is customary in villages to go and sit in open fields for toilet), he was convinced that Shri Dattatreya himself had come in his form so that he would not be disturbed in the state of samadhi.  He was sad for causing Shri Dattatreya to serve him and he arranged for the marriages of the two girls. Now that he was rid of encumbrances he was free to pursue his spiritual routines and was longing to be initiated as a *sanyasi* in proper way. The story of his initiation is really fantastic and it occurred at the place mentioned in Gurucharitra where the sixty-four *yoginis* used go and worship Shri Narasimha Saraswati.**

**He had been praying for his initiation as a *sanyasi* when he received the divine message that it would occur at proper time. Narayanswami used to go daily at dawn to the nearby confluence of Krishna with Panchganga for his bath. One day he slipped and fell into the river. Inside the water he saw Shri Narasimha Saraswati present and ready with all the preparations to initiate him as a sanyasi.  Shri Narasimha Saraswati performed all the rituals of the initiation and gave him the ochre clothes of a sanyasi and the staff, and named him Shri Narayan Saraswati. When he came out of water he was dressed as a regular *sanyasi* but nobody knew that he had undergone the initiation and that too by Shri Narasimha Saraswati himself. Thinking that he has taken on the dress himself without the rituals he was outcast by the local Brahmins.**

**Narayanswami used to sit in a closed room and if some devotee came and made obeisance to him from outside, he could hear the sound “Narayan” from inside the room. The local people were puzzled and one night the chief of the Math peeped through a hole in the door and to his amazement found Narayanswami praying to Narsimha (fourth avatar of Vishnu in the form of a man with lion head) with a large lion sitting in front of him. This was a shock to the chief who realized that Narayanswami was a great yogi. He asked to be forgiven and then was told the story of his initiation as a *sanyasi*. Narayanswami continued to live in Narsobawadi and took samadhi in the year 1805. This day is still celebrated annually there.**

**Thus we see how a person by sheer perseverance and devotion can attain the highest and how the Divine helps the seeker in his efforts in the smallest matters.**

**CHIDAMBAR DIKSHIT**

**It has been mentioned earlier that Datta-devotees fall into two types, the orthodox and liberal. Chidambar Dikshit belongs to the orthodox class. It has been stated that his task was to uphold the orthodox four-caste system which was deteriorating in his time. In fact the same is stated about Shri Dattatreya himself, a point that was discussed in the beginning of this section.**

**Chidambar Dikshit, born in Murgod in Karnataka, was the son of Martand Joshi, a Yajurvedi Brahmin from Gothe in Bijapur District. Martand Joshi had performed a yajna called Somayag and was therefore designated as Dikshit (initiated) which then became the surname or the family. Chidambar Dikshit had two wives, six sons and a daughter. He established a Vedic school at Murgod to teach Sanskrit, Shastras, and Vedas, but moved away from the village when a Brahmin was killed there. (Killing a Brahmin was supposed to be a very serious sin in the days of orthodoxy.)  He travelled to many places in north Karnataka and in the year 1807 performed a yajna at Navalgund. He wrote many compositions in *abhanga* verse style the total *abhangas* numbering to more than one and a half lakhs. Though orthodox in personal behaviour he had disciples from all castes and many sanyasis as well. One Rajaram Maharaj (who incidentally belonged to the Kshatriya caste) was his prime disciple. He has written his biography in more than one lakh *abhangs*. He was a principled person and stated that “We Brahmins should be charitable enough to give away their entire worldly wealth; one should not think that our *Dharma* lies in spreading our hand before others for begging.”  His own son once collected funds of more than one lakh rupees in his name. He felt very unhappy and distributed the entire amount to the poor.  Chidambar Dikshit was considered as an avatar of Shri Dattatreya and it has been mentioned by his disciples that they were told in vision that he was an avatar and there was no difference between Shri Narasimha Saraswati and Chidambar Dikshit. His Samadhi is at Gurlhosur in Karnataka.**

**RAGHUNATHBHATJI NASHIKAKAR**

**There is a village called Ashoka on the banks of river Malaprabha now in Karnataka State. Raghunath was the son of Ganeshbhat Alawnikar from this village. He had an elder brother and a sister. From childhood he had the habit of sitting in meditation. His father arranged for the marriages of the two elder children and fixed the date for Raghunath’s marriage too but when Raghunath learnt about it he ran away from home and reached Nashik. He was about twelve years of age at that time.**

**The parents were terribly grieved. Not having any clue as to where Raghunath might have gone, they decided to search for him in Varanasi where many seekers drift. Unfortunately, not finding him in Varanasi both ended their lives by drowning themselves into the Ganges.**

**In Nashik, Raghunath stayed on the banks of Godavari, doing the daily rituals like s*andhya* etc. prescribed for Brahmins.  But he did not go out for alms and remained without food for seven days, drinking only Godavari water during this period. One day, one Bajirao Balwant Phadke, a Brahmin of excellent character noticed him and felt attracted towards him. Phadke enquired about him and took him home.  He was assigned the daily worship in his house and was sent to one Joglekarshastri for studying Sanskrit and Shastras.  Joglekarshastri was known as a highly learned person in Nashik. Raghunath learnt, to the surprise of all, the ten books (four Vedas and six Shastras) in no time by heart.  One day Raghunath performed the worship and while he sat for meditation he disappeared from view all of a sudden. This surprised Phadke who searched for him everywhere and when he could not be found closed the door of the worship room. He peeped into the room some time later and was shocked to see Raghunath sitting in deep meditation but levitated couple of feet above the floor. Phadke then realized that Raghunath was no ordinary person but a great yogi.  From that day Phadke addressed him as “Maharaj”, the term used to address great yogis and behaved respectfully with him.**

**The daily routine of Raghunath Maharaj was to go at dawn to the Godavari bank, take bath and perform *Sandhya*, *Japa* etc. until sunrise. Then he would return to Phadke’s home for performing worship and meditation, take food in the afternoon and later meet people to solve their doubts. At sunset time he would again go to the river for the evening *Sandhya*.  Sometimes he would spend the night meditating in a dilapidated house or in the forest.  During one such sojourn in the forest he saw Shri Dattatreya and prostrated before him. They spent the night talking and decided to meet in the dilapidated house every night. These meetings were witnessed by only one person, that fortunate person being Niranjanswami the disciple of Raghunath Maharaj who was instructed to undertake writing.  Niranjanswami or Niranjan Raghunath realised that his Guru and Shri Dattatreya are one and the same.  Raghunath Maharaj who was also known as Adwaiteshwar took Samadhi live i.e. he sat in yogic posture and let his consciousness leave the body deliberately by yogic means as Dnyaneshwar Maharaj had done. His Samadhi is in Nashik itself.  There is a Shivalinga installed at the location which is known as Adwaiteshwar. The devotees of Raghunath Maharaj celebrate Mahashivaratri there elaborately. His biography is written by Niranjan Raghunath. The period of Raghunathbhatji Nashikakar is eighteenth century.  His disciples consider him to be a reincarnation of Rishi Bhrigu.**

**NIRANJAN RAGHUNATH  (1782-1855)**

**Niranjan Raghunath was born in the year 1782 at Kalamb in Dharur Tehsil in South Hyderabad. His father’s name was Shridharpant Shrotri. He was named Avadhut at birth and renamed later as Niranjan by his Guru Raghunathbhatji Nashikakar. He was emotional by nature. He was poor and did not study much.  He earned his living by doing some private service but was soon fed up with the world realizing it to be impermanent. He was longing for a vision of Shri Dattatreya in person. One day he left his home and came to Dehu, the place where saint Tukaram lived. Later (in 1811) he vowed that if he does not get the vision of Shri Dattatreya within one year and seven days he would kill himself. Then he left Dehu and came to Nashik where he met his Guru who was very happy to notice in him the detachment of a seeker and desire for spiritual goal.  Within three months his Guru saw to it that he had the experience of the Brahman. Strangely, that did quench his desire for the vision of Shri Dattatreya. He then told his Guru about his vow and was advised to go to mount Girnar where he would have the desired vision.**

**He set upon his travel but arranged it such that he reached the Padukas on the mountain just three days before the period of vow was to end. After making his obeisance to the Padukas he told there that only three days were left and if he did not get the vision by then he would smash his own head with the nearby stone. So saying, he sat there repeating the name of Shri Dattatreya continuously. On the first night there was a storm with cold winds and rain. Niranjan was stiff with cold and became unconscious. In that state a married lady came there and gave him some *Khichadi* (cooked rice and pulses). When he came to senses there was nobody there. Next night he dreamt he received a yellow cloth and a handkerchief. When he woke up he found the items were really there. Third night a Brahmin came in his dream, gave him wooden sandals and asked him to leave the place.  When he woke up he really found the sandals but there was no vision. Now in desperation he took the nearby stone and hit own head with it. On the second hit he fell unconscious. He gained consciousness to find somebody pouring water in his mouth. That was Shri Dattatreya in person. He passed his hand on Niranjan’s head and it became as before. Shri Dattatreya told him that he was not different from his Guru and to listen to the advice given by him.  Thus ended his travails. He returned to Nashik and spent rest of his years with his Guru.**

**KAVADIBUVA (1776-1863)**

**Kavadibuva is known for his book Dattaprabodh which he wrote on the instructions of Shri Dattatreya. This is an instance where the higher powers arrange for spiritual guidance to people in different ways.**

**Kavadibuva’s real name was Vithal Anant Pimpalgaonkar but he is also known as Anantsut Kavadibuva, Anantsut meaning son of Anant. He came from Pise Pimpalgaon in the Parner tehsil of Nagar district. His family held the hereditary post of “Kulkarni” (a sort of village clerk). The name Kavadibuva is derived from *kavad* (pronounced *kaavad*) which is a long staff generally made from thick bamboo strips with two large baskets hanging from each end. It is used for carrying material by supporting the staff on shoulders. (The system is used even today in India and far eastern countries like China, Vietnam etc.).  Kavadibuva’s father in his old age, had asked him to take him and Kavadibuva’s mother on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. Kavadibuva was very pious and also revered his parents. He agreed and as many people did in those days he seated his parents in either basket of the *kavad* and accompanied by a servant and a horse to carry provisions, set on the pilgrimage. Unfortunately his mother died en route and later, when reached Brahmavarta (in U.P.), his father became a sanyasi and he too died. After performing the death rituals Kavadibuva installed the idols of Vithoba and Rakhumai (the presiding deities of Pandharpur) in the *kavad* and continued the pilgrimage.**

**On the Dattajayanti (birthday of Shri Dattatreya which falls in December) he had camped in a village called Galav where, as part of the Dattajayanti celebrations, the local people were looking for a Kirtankar (a person who gives religious discourses).  When saw Kavadibuva they requested him to undertake the task. He was hesitating when Shri Dattatreya came there in the form of a Brahmin and commanded him to undertake the task and also to take up writing, assuring that he would always be with him in his tasks. (One may ask how one would know the Brahmin was Shri Dattatreya, but it must be the inner intuition of Kavadibua that made the identification.) The Kirtan was a success and Kavadibuva resumed his travels. Now the task of writing remained. Again Shri Dattatreya came as a Brahmin and instructed him to start writing assuring again that he would get all the help.  During his travels he reached Ujjain where he stayed for some time and wrote the first forty chapters of Dattaprabodh and then proceeded towards Dwarka. En route he reached Baroda in about 1856 where he met many other saints. By now he had many disciples. One of them built a temple of Shri Rama for him and requested him to stay there permanently. He agreed and installed there the idols of Vithoba and Rakhumai brought by him in the *kavad*. During the next year i.e. by about March 1860 (on the Hindu new year day) he completed the remaining twenty chapters of Dattaprabodh. He passed away three and half years later. His book was published by Mr, Damodar Savalaram Yande in the year 1900. The book contains the spiritual advice given by Shri Dattatreya to his mother Anasuya.**

**NARAYANMAHARAJ JALWANKAR (1807-1867)**

**He was the son of Tatya Puranik, a Rigvedi Deshastha Brahmin from Jalwan near Jhansi, now in Madhya Pradesh. Tatya Puranik had conducted readings of Bhagwat Purana one hundred times with the intention of begetting a son.  Narayanmaharaj was born subsequently. His mother died when he was one year old and he was cared for by his grandmother. His father performed his thread ceremony when he was eight and got him married when he was ten.**

**Since childhood he was attracted to spiritual path and when he was just five years old, used to sit inside the wall cupboard for meditation for hours with closed eyes. When asked what he was doing there he used to reply that he was seeing God. After his marriage he was overcome by the feeling of detachment and left home. He came to Mathura and practised Hathayoga under a well-known yogi called Gordhanbaba who also guided him into the meditation technique. After four years spent in yoga and meditation he felt dissatisfied and boldly told so to Gordhanbaba who told him that he would be satisfied only when he meets Shri Dattatreya.**

**He returned home at the request of his father and stayed there for two years. He had a son but both his son and wife died within eight days of birth. Now he was without encumbrances and he went to mount Girnar where he spent his time in strict austerity and *tapas* with an intense desire to see Shri Dattatreya. He fasted for fourteen days vowing that if he did not see Shri Dattatreya then he would give up his body. On the fourteenth day, when there was no appearance of Shri Dattatreya he prepared himself to jump from the hill. As he was about to jump Shri Dattatreya appeared (not in his own form) and asked him what he was doing.  When told that he was killing himself because he was not meeting Shri Dattatreya he asked him whether he thought killing himself would lead to his meeting Shri Dattatreya.  Narayanmaharaj told him that he did not know that but he found life meaningless without meeting Shri Dattatreya. Shri Dattatreya then held his hand and took him to a cave where he showed him his form and satisfied him. His highest goal was achieved when he received spiritual advice from Shri Dattatreya himself. He remained at Girnar for four years during which period he benefited from the association with Niranjanswami, another Datta devotee mentioned earlier.**

**Returning from Girnar he travelled throughout India and helped whoever came to him for getting solace from worldly problems. *Sanyasis* also came to him for advice. His disciples are mostly around the Jhansi-Indore region and at Varanasi. The king of Dhar state was one of his ardent devotees. He has written several books and some of his compositions are recited daily by Datta devotees.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj**

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# DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)

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# PART VII-2   FAMOUS DEVOTEES: Part  2

# Dr V.V.Shirvaikar

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**PANTMAHARAJ BALEKUNDRIKAR**

**There is a village called Balekundri about twelve kilometres east of Belgaum now in north Karnataka. There is an ancient temple of Rameshwar and some lakes here. Pantmaharaj was born in the family of the village Kulkarni (village clerk), a pious and duty conscious family for generations. His real name was Dattatreya and was the eldest of the six sons of Ramchandrapant Kulkarni. He also had six sisters.**

** Pantmaharaj Balekundrikar**

**Pantmaharaj was born in September 1855 at his maternal grandfather’s home in Daddi, a village in the same district on the banks of the Ghatprabha River. Daddi is located among hills in beautiful surroundings and thus Pantmaharaj grew up in an atmosphere of natural beauty. His early years were spent at Daddi with his maternal uncle Shripadpant. His uncle taught him to respect truth, honour all that is good and holy, maintain good moral and courteous behaviour towards others and shun evil through the medium of stories from Puranas and other religious literature. Piety and devotion were in his blood from both sides of his family therefore he grew up in an atmosphere of high moral standards.**

**His uncle saw to his early education which was in Marathi. At the age of fourteen he came to Belgaum for studying in the English high school. His family at that time was poor.  But being a person of determination, in spite of the many difficulties caused by the poverty Pantmaharaj passed the matriculation examination as well as the public service examination. While he was studying in Belgaum his father, himself a devotee of Shri Dattatreya, made him read books like Gurucharitra, Dattamahatmya etc. related to Dattatreya tradition and impressed upon him the importance of devotion in life. That was how his devotion to Shri Dattatreya became well founded at a very young age and he became a seeker.**

**After he passed his matriculation examination, he worked as a teacher in an English school. He called his younger brothers one by one to Belgaum and arranged for their school education.  In 1882 he was married to his maternal uncle’s daughter. Three years later when his father Ramchandrapant died the burden of maintaining the family fell entirely on him but in whatever little income he had he not only managed to maintain his family but helped in the education of the children of his friends and relatives as well as children of poor people. He not only looked after the education of these children but oversaw their moral character and behaviour also. His wife was co-operative and so were his brothers. In 1890 his younger brother started earning and that eased the financial situation considerably. While he was in service he used to spend the evening hours in discussions on Vedanta with people who visited him and in *Bhajan* at night. He resigned his job in 1903 and spent the subsequent two years in quiet meditation. In 1904 his wife died. His detachment was such as to make him remark that Guru asked him to marry and Guru had relieved him of the burden. Pantmaharaj himself passed away a year and a half later in October 1905 at the age of fifty-one at Belgaum. His disciples and devotees took his body in a giant procession to Balekundri and cremated in the mango orchard there. An Oudumber tree was planted there as a memorial.**

**Pantmaharaj’s Guru was a great yogi named Balappa or Balavadhut who had renounced the world and was living in the hills of Kardiguddi near Balekundri. He met his Guru through his cousin and uncle who were disciples of Balavadhut.  In the course of time Balavadhut realised the worth of Pantmaharaj, passed on to him the secret knowledge he himself had received from his own Guru Ramavadhut.  After making Pantmaharaj his successor in the matters of management of his sect he went to Shri Shailam never to return.  According to Pantmaharaj, Shri Dattatreya, Shripad Shrivallabha, Shri Narasimha Saraswati and his own Guru Balavdhuta are the same.  Shri Dattatreya seat is in the heart of his devotees. The experience of oneness with him can be achieved only through the path of love.  His path is known as Avadhut path. The beliefs held by followers of this path are:**

**“*Sadguru* accepts us with all our sins and merits. Once he accepts us all are equal and we are no longer affected by our actions i.e. we do not have to enjoy or suffer their consequences.  We see our *sadguru* everywhere, in Hindu, as well in other religions. We are "Raj yogis", i.e. we don't torture our bodies by strenuous fasts, complicated *pujas* or long penance but we stick to our custom and do all the rites as prevalent in our society, remembering our Sadguru every time. Sadguru has emphasized His teachings by showing the God in us, which is same in everyone, in spite of his deeds. Sadguru is like a "*Kalpataru*" (the mythical wish tree, which grants all the wishes). He always looks after his true disciple.”**

**One has to abandon pride and ego, observe brotherhood and equality beyond gender, caste and creed and avoid ritualism.  One should enjoy peace in the heart with belief in *Adwaita*.  Pantmaharaj insists that good health should be maintained through proper diet, control of mind, behaviour and speech. One should desire for good. Avadhut path is superior to Vedanta path because nothing binds you and liberation has no value because both are unreal. It is a path of pure devotion and love, unqualified love for peace, instead of dogmatic knowledge and is open to all whether irrespective of caste and gender. Guru takes care of everything.**

**His Ashram at Balekundri near Belgaum exudes peace. A visit to this Ashram is very refreshing and the treatment a visitor gets there proves the power of the teachings of Pantmaharaj.**

**Pantmaharaj knew many languages: English, Marathi, Kannada, Hindi and Sanskrit and was well read in the spiritual literature in these languages. Many *Shastris*, pundits used to come to him to get their difficulties explained.  Because of his wide reading as well as his own spiritual standing he could easily satisfy them. He has composed more than three thousand poems in the praise of Shri Dattatreya incorporating the Adwaita (monism) philosophy. For him Shri Pantmaharaj did not see any difference between Guru and God or Guru and Dattatreya.  He wrote in Marathi as well as Kannada. The collection of his poems is published as Shri Datta Prem Lahari (Waves of love for Shri Dattatreya). An audio-tape of his songs is also available and is worth listening. His various other writings have also been published.**

**SHRI VASUDEVANANDA SARASWATI**

**Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati or Tembeswami has made a deep mark in Datta-parampara. The**

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**Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami)**

**credit for locating the birthplaces of Shripad Shrivallabha and Narasimha Saraswati and developing them and carrying the Datta-parampara to Gujarat goes to him. He travelled a lot spending the**

**four month *Chaturmas* period during the monsoon season at various holy places.  Wherever he went aspirants gathered around him and many became his disciples. Thus he has disciples over a wide geographical area. Some well-known devotees were Rangavdhut Maharaj, Ganda Maharaj and Gulawani Maharaj.  We shall read about these saints later.  He was a very learned person.**

**Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati belongs to the orthodox class of Datta devotees and probably the most orthodox of them all.  One may notice that most of the Datta devotees mentioned so far come from the Deccan plateau part of Maharashtra and Karnataka states. Tembeswami comes from Konkan, the coastal part of Maharashtra.**

**He was the son of Ganeshbhat Tembe and Ramabai, both ardent Datta devotees.  They lived in Mangaon, a village near Sawantwadi (a princely state in the pre-independence era) north of and adjoining Goa. Ganeshbhat had spent many years in Ganagapur for worship of Shri Dattatreya and became very detached towards the worldly affairs.  He sought to become a sanyasi but was instructed in a dream by Shri Dattatreya to complete his family duties first. He returned home, resumed his family life. The son Vasudev was born to him on August 13, 1854.  The family subsisted on income from priestly duties which did not suffice to make the ends meet. Vasudev’s grandfather Haribhat had to resort to farming for additional income. Grandfather Haribhat was his main support because his father Ganeshbhat had left home to live in Ganagapur leaving the domestic affairs to his brother who unfortunately looked after his own interests better.**

**Vasudev was a very intelligent child with a sharp memory. He could remember anything that he heard just once. His grandfather started Vasudev’s education at the age of five. By the age of twelve Vasudev had already finished learning and *Shastras* under the guidance of Shri Tatya Bhataji Ukidave.  He studied astrology under a well known master called Shambhushastri Sadhale. His grasp of the subject was so good that once when a person came to Shambhushastri for finding an auspicious time for rituals connected with entering a new house, Vasudev disagreed with his teacher’s recommendation because he found that what his teacher had calculated was actually a very inauspicious moment. He was bold enough to tell this to his teacher who was enraged to see himself proved wrong and immediately terminated his relations with Vasudev.  The details of this encounter became well-known in the village and people started consulting Vasudev now realising his capability, sincerity and love for truth**

**Vasudev was a well-behaved person. From childhood he had a detached nature and used to be quite austere in his behaviour e.g. he used to bathe and perform *Sandhya* thrice daily as prescribed for Brahmins, recite Gayatri mantra 1000 times, read Gurucharitra and followed the religious disciplines prescribed in it for Brahmins.  He only took fresh, *sattvik* (pure) vegetarian food prepared by himself or by his mother after the usual offerings to sacrificial fire ((*Vaishvadev*), the cow (*Gogras*) and the crow (*Kakabali*).  If during the meal any impurity in the occurred (according to *smritis*) like hearing the voice of a woman under menstrual cycle he would leave his food and fast for the day. Observance of fast on Ekadashi (11th day of lunar calendar) was very strict, without even taking a drop of water. He never used to wear shoes, not even wear sandals or use umbrella.**

**As a result of his austerities and religious practices he soon acquired *mantrasiddhi* i.e. occult power through mantras. To give an interesting example of this power, once he was travelling on foot to the nearby village with a fellow priest when they saw a snake going ahead of them. The companion asked Vasudev whether his mantra would work on it. Vasudev took a little dust and reciting a mantra sprinkled it in a circle around the snake. The snake could not cross the boundary of the circle however much it tried.  The duo went ahead to the village, finished their work and returned home forgetting all about the snake.  Next afternoon Vasudev suddenly remembered and returned to the spot with his friend.  The snake was lying exhausted within the circle. Vasudev released the snake with an antidote mantra but felt so much repentance for troubling an innocent creature that he never used it again.  Another time he tamed a wild cow at his sister’s place by a mantra.  Once he helped local police by providing an accurate description and modus operandi of a particularly evasive gang of robbers. He used to helped people in distress by relieving them of their chronic ailments.  But he never used his powers for monetary gains. He was by now so much respected that people called him respectfully as Shri Vasudev Shastri.**

**Vasudev was married much against his wish. He married at the age of twenty-one to Annapurna, daughter of Babasaheb Gode from neighbouring Sawantwadi. She was rather plain looking with defective foot, but of a good-natured person and devoted to her husband. She herself had a detached nature and her spiritual status was also high for she used to easily go into trance. Annapurna never got along well with her mother-in-law. Vasudev’s mother used to inflict a lot of verbal and at times corporal abuse on her. Vasudev Shastri though he sympathised with his wife never uttered a word in his wife’s defence out of devotion for his mother whom he did not wish to offend. Annapurna felt neglected and sometimes would rebel by not cooperating in the various religious rituals, which formed an integral part of such a major portion of her husband’s life.  He even tried to become a sanyasi but was advised that it was not the right time.**

**The basic detachment in his nature increased due to a domestic incident. Once on the day after Ganesh Chaturthi he found that the preparations for the daily worship were not properly done. He remarked about this to his wife.  But this enraged his mother who had an irritable nature and did not get along well with her daughter-in-law. Her angry talk saddened Vasudev who immediately concluded the Ganesh Chaturthi celebration that day itself instead of the usual five days. Noting that treating his mother like God as told in the Shastras is futile he came to the conclusion that worldly life is difficult. Contemplating on God only can lead to happiness.  One day a Brahmin came in his dream and instructed him to go to Narsobawadi. He had no money for undertaking the journey but fortunately he received a fee of two and half rupees as fees from a client for a horoscope which enabled him to go to Narsobawadi. Vasudevashastri was about twenty-six years of age now.**

***Initiation by Shri Dattatreya*   At Narasobawadi he met a great spiritual person named Govindaswami who arranged for his stay. Eventually he requested Govindaswami to initiate him as his disciple by giving *mantra* but Govindaswami refused saying that he was not the right person for him and a proper person would give him the *mantra* at proper time. That night around midnight, with the intention of sitting for *japa* (rosary or continuous repetition of a deity name or *mantra*) he washed his feet in the nearby River Krishna and came to the temple of Shri Narasimha Saraswati Padukas. But seeing the door closed he decided to leave after a *pradakshina* (circumambulation). Just then he saw a tall effulgent person in ochre clothes and made his obeisance to him. The person asked Vasudevashastri who he was and what he was doing there when there was a rule that after the last *Arati* nobody should visit the temple. Vasudevashastri replied that he was new there and did not know the rules and that he would not do so again. Once more he made a *namaskar* with folded hands and suddenly the person vanished. Vasudevashastri realised a little late that this must have been Shri Dattatreya himself. That night at dawn Shri Dattatreya came in his dream and gave him the *mantra*. Next day onwards he set for himself the routine of worship of Shri Dattatreya and meditating on him followed by the study of the Upanishads. Later he was instructed, again in a vision, to practice yoga as an aid in Self-realisation and to obtain a particular book on yoga from a certain Brahmin in Sawantwadi also informing where he would be found.**

**He was later instructed to return to Mangaon with an assurance that Shri Dattatreya would always be with him.  On the way back to Mangaon he was presented an idol of Shri Dattatreya by a goldsmith. He built a small temple in Mangaon to install it. Now he set on a new routine of worship and meditation, living on alms of uncooked food. He used to cook whatever grains he received without adding spices or salt and eat it after making its offering to God first. Slowly local people also started coming to the temple for worship.  Vasudevashastri remained in Mangaon for seven years.  During this period he was inspired to translate the famous Marathi book Gurucharitra in Sanskrit so that it can be read all over India.**

**Annapurna became pregnant but his mother did not like it was nasty to her. Vasudev Shastri was pained at this and was wondering what to do when one day he was instructed by Shri Dattatreya to leave Mangaon that day itself with his wife taking along the idol also. He packed up and asked his wife to leave behind everything except her *mangalsutra*.  They left carrying only the idols and one change of clothes and reached Sawantwadi an hour later. Vasudev Shastri did not eat food cooked by others so he cooked his own meal after begging and his wife took her lunch at the house of Ukidaveshastri. Then they proceeded to Narsobawadi. This was in 1889. Vasudev Shastri was now known as Buwa.**

**At Narsobawadi Buwa met Shri Govind Swami and Shri Mouni Swami and settled in the *Dharmashala*.  In due course Annapurna gave birth to a stillborn child.**

***Sanyasa*    On receiving instructions from Shri Dattatreya he left Narasobawadi with his wife and went north from. In 1891 his wife died while they were at Gangakhed. On the thirteenth day after her death Vasudevashastri opted for *sanyasa* and was initiated by a *sanyasi* on the banks of Godavari. Next he was ordered to proceed to Ujjani and receive the monastic *danda* (sceptre) from Shri Narayananand Saraswati. Now we shall now call him Swamiji. Swamiji was ordered by Shri Dattatreya to go on foot as he had always done, to Ujjani *via* Washim, Umarkhed, Mahur, Khandwa, Badhawai, Onkareshwar, Mandaleshwar and Balwada. Staying in a Datta temple in Ujjaini, he went to Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swami Maharaj and solicited the sceptre. Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swami Maharaj ritually presented the sceptre to Shri Swamiji and bestowed upon him the Yogpatta (monastic name) of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati. That day, on repeated entreaties of his Guru Swamiji partook of the food at the monastery, thus violating the Shri Dattatreya’s Lord’s orders. As a result, he started continuous vomiting which ceased only after Shri Narayananand Swami prayed Shri Dattatreya and asked for His forgiveness. Throughout Swamiji’s life, he had to strictly obey the Divine orders and any deviation invited punishment from the Lord. Swamiji spent his first Chaturmaas with his monastic guru at Ujjani that year. Thus began the itinerancy of Swamiji. The purpose of his life was revealed to him by Lord Dattatreya when he ordered him to travel all over India and preach the Sanatan Vedic path and bring back the people gone astray from it. He traversed the country for the next 23 years following strictly the harsh discipline of the Sanyas Ashram. Throughout this phase he used to receive instructions from Shri Dattatreya about doing certain things and was punished if he did not obey them, something like father and son.  He always avoided cities.**

**He hardly had any possessions. He only carried  His possessions included 4 loincloths, 2 robes, the sceptre, a Kamandalu (wooden or bamboo water vessel), occasionally a woollen cloth, a book of Upanishads, a case of worship utensils, two idols of Datta and a cord to draw water and again occasionally some paper and writing materials. He had no other belongings. He washed his clothes and utensils himself and never accepted anyone’s service or anyone’s touch. If anybody touched him, he used to take a bath. Similarly, he used to take a bath every time he passed stools.**

***Samadhi*     Swamiji spent his final days at Garudeshwarin Gujarat.  He took samadhi sitting before the idol of Shri Dattatreya, in 1914 at Garudeshwar, where he had stayed for a longer time towards the end. His body was then left in the river Narmada.  He was ill during his final days but he refused to take any medicine because he never gave any importance to the body.**

**Even though he himself was orthodox this never came in the way of helping people from other communities including Muslims. He had many disciples, prominent among them were Gandamaharaj, Rangavadhut, both from Gujarat and Gulawani Maharaj from Pune. The latter has collected and published Swamiji’s writings.**

**RANGAVADHUT MAHARAJ**

**Rangavadhut was a disciple of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami).  He is one of the main forces behind the strengthening of Datta-parampara in Gujarat. He was born in 1898 and was named Pandurang. His father Vithalpant Valame had migrated from a village in Ratnagiri district in Konkan to serve as a priest in the Vithal temple belonging to one Sakharampant Sarpotdar at Godhra in Gujarat. His mother’s name was Rukmini. He had a brother named Narayan younger than him by two and a half years.**

**Pandurang was of enquiring mind from childhood. Once he saw a funeral procession and pestered his father with questions about life and death and how to get rid of the problem of life and death. To the last question his father answered him that the name Shri Rama gets rid of the problem. This answer made a deep mark on him.**

**Unfortunately, Vithalpant died of plague when Pandurang was only five years old, leaving the burden of the two children on Rukminibai. She returned to her mother’s place at Devale in Ratnagiri district. After his thread ceremony at the age of eight his mother took him to Narsobawadi where he met Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) who, as soon as he saw the boy said, “Oh, this boy belongs to me.” When Pandurang heard this he prostrated at the feet of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati. That started his spiritual path and back home he started regularly reading Gurucharitra, a copy of which was available with his maternal uncle. On material plane he had the responsibility of his mother and younger brother.**

**Pandurang was intelligent and knew Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Sanskrit and English well. He studied up to B.A., but before he could appear for exam he came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi and joined his Gujarat Vidyapith and later Navajeevan Prakashan, a publishing institute founded by Gandhiji. He wrote on nationalist topics in the journal “Navajeevan”, but his heart was in the spiritual field. He waited until his younger brother Narayan was old enough to take care of himself and their mother. Then with mother’s permission he left home for spiritual pursuits. His original intention was to go to the Himalayas. Before going there he met many saints. A saint named Dhuniwale Dada suggested, implying it as a divine wish that he should to go to the jungles of Narmada. He came to Baroda where Mouni Maharaj, a disciple of Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot gave him more exact instructions to go to Nareshwar on the banks of Narmada in Gujarat.  He found the place with the help of his friend Daskaka. It is a holy place with a historical Shivalinga supposed to have been installed by Shri Ganesha himself. That was the year 1924 in the bitter December cold when Pandurang alighted from the train at Nareshwar Road station (known then as Malod). Walking in the dark night he reached the Nareshwar temple which was in a thick jungle in those days, full of poisonous snakes, scorpions and wild animals. The place was used for cremation and people were afraid to go there even in daytime. Today the place is totally changed with modern amenities for the pilgrims.**

**He settled under the *neem* (*margosa*) tree in front of the temple. Later, Daskaka visited him and built a small room for him and named it Dattakutir. Surviving on whatever alms came to him he started a course of one hundred and eight readings of Dattapurana written by his Guru Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati. He did not have money for the concluding rituals (*Udyapan*) but was instructed by his Guru the equivalent task to finish the circumambulation (*pradakshina*) of Narmada in one hundred and eight days. Before setting upon the task he got the intuitive message that he should go to south. He did so and met Gandamaharaj, another disciple of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati, who had also received a message that a young acolyte will come to him. Gandamaharaj, himself a Gujarati, had written “Gurumurti Charitra Grantha”, a biography of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati in Marathi. The two disciples met and the task of correcting and polishing the biography was assigned to Pandurang. Pandurang then started his task of circumambulation of Narmada from Omkar walking 25-50 miles daily through the difficult jungles and hilly territory. As desired by his Guru he completed the circumambulation in 108 days.**

**After return, he finished editing the “Gurumurti Charitra Grantha” and had it printed at Bharuch where he himself wrote a short biography of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati consisting of 108 *shlokas*.  He then returned to Nareshwar.**

**By now he was well known by the name Rangavadhut and many devotees came to him. Slowly Nareshwar developed from a forest place to a town. His mother came to live with him in 1935.  She was accompanied by Narayan who was ill and passed away soon after. Slowly, Dattamandir and Dharmashala (rest house) were built. Regular routines of rituals of worship were established with special rituals related to Shri Dattatreya e.g. Dattajayanti, Gurupurnima, Gurudwadashi etc., and the birthday of Shri Rangavadhut on particular days. The devotees poured lot of money for developing Nareshwar but the mode of living for Rangavadhut himself was a strictly detached austerity. His only possession was his loincloth and he disliked handling money.  Rangavadhut Maharaj liked to travel to neighbouring villages so that others also could meet him and thus he could keep the devotional spirit alive in the people there. But because his mother did not keep good health he used to go only with her consent. In 1950, accompanied by many disciples, he went to Ganagapur, Narsobawadi, Akkalkot, Oudumber etc. and also to Mangaon, the place of birth of his Guru, where he celebrated Dattajayanti on a grand scale.  In 1967 he went to Nairobi, Campala etc. in Africa on the invitation of the devotees there. He was in Africa for about six months. That was just before his mother died and after returning from Africa he observed the first annual *Shraddha* ceremony when thousands of people were served meals on the occasion. At Nareshwar his activities went beyond spiritual. He arranged medical camps for the residents of the neighbourhood. In 1968 he left Nareshwar to visit Hardwar and never returned.**

**During his Hardwar pilgrimage he took only four or five people with him. After visiting many holy places, he gave meals to many Sadhus at Hardwar. On 19th November 1968 he complained of some pain in the throat and left his body.  The trustees of Nareshwar establishment brought the body to Ahmedabad by plane and then by a decorated truck to Nareshwar where the body was cremated after appropriate ceremonies.**

**Rangavadhut Maharaj wrote many books. He is known for his Dattabavani, a brief poem of fifty-two *shlokas* in Gujarathi in the praise of Shri Dattatreya.**

**GANDAMAHARAJ**

**Real name of Gandamaharaj was Keshavaram Desai, a Gujarathi Brahmin from Talangpur in Surat District in Gujarat. He had studied only up to fourth standard. He was strongly bent towards spiritual path. His behaviour from childhood was incoherent like a mad person and was therefore known as Ganda meaning an idiot. His father got him married in the hope that responsibility would cure him but it was of no avail. He left home and wandered all over India in search of a Guru and finally met him near Surat, at Shinor situated on the banks of Naramda, in Bharuch district of Gujarat. The Guru was Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati who, recognising the spiritual flame in him, said, “Ao Ganda” meaning “Come Idiot”.  Being called by his pet name by a total stranger surprised him. When Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati heard his story he told him, “Ganda, your parents are old and your wife is without support. You go back to your home, take care of your wife and parents and that is your present duty.” He permitted Ganda to meet him anytime whenever he was in Gujarat. Ganda reluctantly returned home but after a few days he was free of the responsibilities and he returned to his Guru who gave him shelter and guidance. After some time he was worthy enough to be initiated as a *sanyasi* and was renamed Yogananda Saraswati, but people called him Gandamaharaj. Though a Gujarati, he wrote the biography of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati in Marathi, which was later edited by Rangavadhut as told earlier. On instructions of his Guru, Gandamaharaj left Gujarat and set up his *ashram* at Gunj on the banks of river Godavari in Maharashtra. He spent his time in spiritual pursuit and finally took samadhi at Gunj. Anniversary of his samadhi is celebrated regularly at Gunj.**

**DATTAMAHARAJ ASHTEKAR**

**His birth name was Narahari Vasudeo Diwan.  He was a Deshastha Brahmin from the town of Buvache Wathar near Kolhapur. The Samadhi of Saint Eknath’s  grandson Uddhavaswami is situated in this village. His mother Muktabai also was a descendant of Saint Eknath. He was born in 1894 and was the third child of Mr. Vasudeo Diwan who passed away when Narahari was eleven years old. He studied up to fifth standard of Marathi in a place called Shirale.  At the age of thirteen he left  home to go to Narsobawadi but telling his family that he was going in search of a job to Sangli. In Narsobawadi he met Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) and felt a spiritual inspiration rising within him.  After a few days he felt an impulse to go to Ganagapur.  At Ganagapur, Narahari lived on alms and served Shri Dattatreya through daily worship etc. During his stay at Ganagapur he had an attack of cholera and was on the verge of death when Shri Dattatreya appeared before him, told him not to be afraid and himself poured into Narahari’s mouth some *tirtha* (holy water).  Instructing him to return home after he recovered Shri Dattatreya disappeared. This encounter with Shri Dattatreya caused his mind to turn inwards. As per the instructions Narahari returned to Buvache Wathar and served at the samadhi of Uddhavaswami for some years. Later he went to Pandharpur where he met a great saint called Shri Harihar Maharaj. The latter initiated him as his disciple and both went on a pilgrimage of the Jyotirlingas and then to Girnar.  At Girnar they met Shri Dattatreya. Shri Harihar Maharaj then dispatched Narahari to study yoga under Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami). Here he achieved Self-realisation.**

**In 1918 he received instructions to circumambulate Krishna River on foot. The river originates in a temple at Mahabaleshwar (now a holiday resort) in Western Ghats and meets the Bay of Bengal at Macchalipatnam in Andhra Pradesh. Certain restrictions are required to be observed in this task like not going farther than eight kilometres from the river and taking bath in the river daily. In many places no trodden path exists and one has to traverse thick jungles infested with wild animals. The total journey from source to the mouth and back is more than 2500 kilometres but when the instructions come from Almighty He also sees them through.  Narahari finished his task successfully and felt completely satisfied. He returned to Ganagapur where Shri Dattatreya appeared to him in person and he was in the state of samadhi for seven days.  In the course of time Narahari began to be called Dattamaharaj.**

**He then went on a pilgrimage to southern part of India and after visiting many holy places reached Tanjore in 1920 where he camped in a *math*. He read a lot of spiritual books like Upanishads and Tantra. He used to experience Self-realisation while reading a particular book and realised that there was no knowledge beyond Self-realisation. In Tanjore he gave spiritual guidance to many people. He also met a Videhi person, (i.e. an advanced Self-realised person who is oblivious of the bodily affairs) in whose company Dattamaharaj enjoyed the bliss of the Self and his concentration was sharpened to such an extent that he had no awareness of the surrounding world or of time. Dattamaharaj returned to Buwache Wathar in 1923, emaciated, with long hair and beard, dressed only in a loincloth, carrying only a cloth, bed sheet and Kamandalu (the wooden tumbler) as his only material possessions but with peace and love evident in the eyes. After morning bath and *sandhya*, he would sit in deep meditation for three hours. It is said that while in this state he would often float a few centimetres above his seat. As prescribed for *sanyasis*, he would go for alms at mid-day. He also read the book Dattamahatmya daily. Later he went to Ashte near Sangli where he gave spiritual advice to many seekers. He did not initiate any disciples, but he could know by intuition the spiritual worth of a person and shower his grace on him without initiation. In 1926, on the sixth day of bright fortnight in the lunar month of Falgun, after the evening worship, Dattamaharaj sat in samadhi keeping people away and by yogic process left his body.  Leaving the body through samadhi is not legal in modern times and it took some time before people could get post-facto permission and take further action about post-death rituals customary for a yogi. His body was buried along with his *kamandalu* and copy of Dattamahatmya.**

**NARAYAN MAHARAJ KEDGAONKAR**

**Narayan Maharaj was born in 1885 at Bagalkot (Bijapur District in Karnataka state) in a family of Datta devotees. His father Bhimrao and mother Lakshmi died when he was a child.  He was brought up by his grandmother at Nargund. From childhood itself Narayan liked to meditate and attend *Bhajans* and *Kirtans*. He even used to go to a cave at Nargund in order to meditate without disturbance. He was fortunate to get spiritual guidance from one Shridharbhat Ghate at Nargund. This included *Suryanamaskar* (Obeisance to Sun with physical exercise similar to push-ups), *japa* of Gayatri Mantra, reading Gurucharitra etc., besides the daily rituals prescribed for a Brahmin. Unfortunately he had to leave his grandmother’s house due to domestic problems and live the life of a wanderer at a tender age of ten. During his travels he received blessings from Siddharudha Swami in Hubli. He then came to Belgaum where he received initiation from Shri Vidyananda Swami of Belapur. Narayanmaharaj then came to Arvi near Pune. Wherever he went he used his occult powers to help people. Now he received divine instructions to go to Ganagapur. By now people had experienced his occult powers and he had many devotees. A rich landlord helped him to go to Ganagapur where he remained engrossed in the service of Shri Dattatreya.  Later he returned to Arvi and from there to Supe where he built a small hut on an island and lived there. On this island he found Shri Dattatreya Padukas under an *Oudumber* tree. He had many more devotees by now and was now called Narayan Maharaj. Since for reaching the island one had to get down at Kedgaon station people started calling him Narayan Maharaj Kedgaonkar.**

**One day, Mr. Wodehouse, principal of the Deccan College Pune had gone on the island for hunting. He met there Narayan Maharaj who produced water at the spot indicated by him. This impressed Mr. Wodehouse so much that he published the account of this miracle in newspapers. Because of this his fame spread far and wide. People began visiting Kedgaon in numbers.  By now an establishment devoted to Datta worship was established and became well developed on the island. In 1913 an idol of Shri Dattatreya was installed. Narayan Maharaj went on pilgrimage to northern holy places including Nepal where he received large gifts and donations. His occult powers impressed wherever he went. On return he started a new era of performing worship rituals which attracted many towards Datta worship. In 1942-43 he became anaemic and weak. After his sixty-first birthday in 1945 he decided to go to Ootacamund for recuperation and he came down to Bangalore where he performed the *Atirudra* ceremony at the Mallikarjuna temple. When the Brahmins had sat for their meals at the end of the ceremony, Narayan Maharaj decided that the ceremony was over and he left his body. He was cremated there itself and his ashes were brought and installed at Kedgaon. Thus ended the sojourn of a great Datta devotee who left many devotees behind.**

**Narayan Maharaj used to speak little and was very humble and polite. Even the British used to**

**revere him.  Purohitswami (see later) tells of his experience when he met him in Mumbai as follows. Narayan Maharaj had camped in the house of a danseuse. People began to criticize but he never bothered. That house later became an ashram due to the holy presence of the great saint. When Purohitwami went to meet him there was another visitor, a high court pleader who was completely drunk. He vomited and spoilt the saint’s clothes but while everybody else present there was annoyed Narayan Maharaj did not get angry and instead continued blessing him. The pleader later became an ardent devotee of Narayan Maharaj.**

**BALAMUKUNDA SARASWATI**

**The story of Balmukunda Saraswati (Kolhapur) is an interesting example how the higher powers operate.  In Kolhapur there was a pious and learned Brahmin named Naraharishastri Pathak. He was well read in the Vedas and other Shastras like astrology. He was an ardent devotee of Shri Dattatreya. With the intention of having a vision of Shri Dattatreya he set upon the task of reading Gurucharitra 151 times. His faith and dedication bore fruits because after 108 readings itself he had the vision of Shri Dattatreya who offered a boon. The boon Naraharshastri asked was that the service to Shri Dattatreya should continue in his family. Shri Dattatreya was pleased and told him that he would take birth in his family and that he need not continue with the remaining 43 readings which would be completed by his grandson.  His son Vamanrao continued the pious tradition and to Vamanrao was born Ganesh the father of Balamukunda Saraswati.  Ganesh’s mother died when he was five months old and soon after his grandfather also died.  Ganesh studied the Vedas and Shastras and continued the family tradition. He married but his wife died soon after marriage. This made Ganesh detached towards the world. He left home with the intention of taking *sanyasa*. He wandered to Belgaum where he met Pantmaharaj Balekundrikar to whom he requested to be taken as a disciple telling him about his intention to take *sanyasa*.  You have read about Pantmaharaj earlier and how his Guru Shri Balappa or Balavadhut went to Shri Shailam and never returned. Shri Balappa came in Pantmaharaj’s dream and instructed him not to initiate Ganeshshastri and to send him back to his home. He also told that he himself (i.e. Balappa) had been instructed by Shri Dattatreya to be reborn as Ganeshshastri’s son. Accordingly Pantmaharaj asked him to return to Kolhapur advising him to do his worldly duties first. Ganeshshastri returned and married again, his second wife’s name being Saraswati.**

**Ganeshshastri had ten sons but none survived. Ganeshshastri became sad at this bad luck and was thinking of leaving everything to go on a pilgrimage when Shri Pantmaharaj came in his dream and asked him to complete the remaining 43 readings of Gurucharitra assuring him that his bad days were over and Shri Dattatreya would take birth in his family.  Accordingly a son was born to him in 1907 and was named Anant but was later called Mukund. The boy could not sit, walk or speak until he was four. Doctors also did not give any hopes. The parents were worried. Then one day Shri Dattatreya came in Ganeshshastri’s dream and asked him to perform seven more readings of Gurucharitra. After that the boy not only became normal but he also became the leader of the children while at play.**

**One day Mukund told his father how he had taken birth in his family. Next day he left his home to live with his devotee to whom he had promised (in earlier life) he would live with her.  Her name was Akkubai. She lived in a part of Kolhapur known as Shahupuri. Mukund came to Akkubai’s door shouting, “Here I come, mother!” and when she opened the door she found this handsome boy on her doorstep. Ganeshshastri had followed the boy to Akkubai’s house and tried to take him back but the boy did not budge saying that this was his home and he was going to live there. His father had to return without him.**

**The story of Akkubai is quite strange.  She used to live with her husband and two daughters in**

**Panhala, a fort once governed by Shivaji the Great, about 15 Km from Kolhapur.  Her husband was a Gurav (a nonbrahmin priest who looks after the daily worship in a temple) who fell into bad habits and began torturing her. Not able to tolerate it she attempted suicide by drowning in the nearby lake. As she was about to jump, Shi Swami Samarth appeared there asking her not to do so and to meet Shri Krishna Saraswati at Kolhapur. But how to reach Kolhapur? There were no buses in those days. Just then a bullock cart came and gave her lift to Kolhapur. It was being driven by Sadhubaba, a Muslim fakir who lived in about 700 AD and has his *darga* (samadhi of a Muslim saint) nearby.  On the way she stopped for food at the bridge on the river Panchaganga. Just then a mendicant approached her and asked for food. She was hesitating to give him her food because she was not a Brahmin but he accepted it.  When she asked his name he turned out to be Shri Krishna Saraswati, the very person she was going to meet. Shri Krishna Saraswati took her under her protection and that is how she came to live in Kolhapur with her daughters. She lived first by selling vegetables and later milk. A saint named Dhondibuva had told her one day that Avadhut (Shri Dattatreya) would come and live with her but at that time she did not understand its meaning.  He had also told her not to go after money but she did not listen to him and later suffered losses.**

**She came to her mentor Shri Krishna Saraswati for explanation but he laughed and said that what had happened was good and she should not forget Shri Dattatreya. One day Shri Krishna Saraswati came to her home and threw out all her possessions leaving her only two dresses and a blanket and telling her to remember Shri Dattatreya constantly, for he was going to come and live with her.  She began waiting for that day and when Balmukund came she realised it had come. She prayed to Ganeshshastri to let the child stay promising to take complete care of him adding that these are the connections of earlier lives.  Ganeshshatri was nonplussed but let the boy stay. Perhaps there is no other situation like this in the lives of parents anywhere.**

**Ganeshshastri’s wife would sometimes insist to bring Mukund home and when he saw Mukund eating from the hands of a non-Brahmin he used feel pained. Such a thing was unheard of and taboo in those days. One day the boy insisted that Ganeshshastri also should eat that food.  Ganeshshastri became angry and refused as it was against the rules. But Mukund made him sit down by the side of Akkubai and kept one hand on her head and the other on the father’s head. And then the father saw light and waves of bliss and began seeing Mukund everywhere and in everything. There were no caste differences anywhere. Everything was only light.  Ganeshshastri confessed he was ignorant and had experienced what the Vedas have described. Then the three had meals together.  Sometime later, Mukund did visit his mother at her insistence for a short while. She passed away soon after.**

**Ganeshshastri left for Varanasi against the advice of Mukund and being fed up with the world tried to commit suicide by jumping into the Ganges. But some unseen hands brought him to the shore. It was Mukund who took him to the Vishveshwara temple in Varanasi where he saw that there was no duality between Mukund and Shiva. Mukund suddenly vanished and Ganeshshastri returned to Kolhapur.**

**Akkubai made improvements in her house spending whatever money she had and turned it into a Math. By now Mukund was known as Balmukund Saraswati and was recognized as an avatar of Shri Dattatreya though there were people who did not believe so. He brought many to his fold and guided them, helped to remove material problems of his devotees and performed many miracles in the process. Balmukund Saraswati left his body in 1957.  His samadhi which exudes is at the Walawalkar Estate, Udyamnagar in Kolhapur. Members of the Walawalkar family were ardent devotees of Shri Balmukund Saraswati. A free dispensary is being run at the place where his samadhi is situated.**

**GULWANI MAHARAJ**

**Gulwani Maharaj is known for the *Shaktipat* system of initiation.  First let us review briefly some information about the various systems of initiation in order to understand the importance and implication of the *Shaktipat* system. There are many ways by which a Guru may initiate his disciple: through *Mantradiksha* (prescribing a mantra secretly in the disciple’s ear), by *Sparshadiksha* (by touch), by *Swapnadiksha*  in which Guru appears in the disciple’s dream and initiates him.**

**With *Mantradiksha* the disciple is expected to repeat the mantra for a given minimum number of times at prescribed times of the day. With *Sparshadiksha*, practised in the Siddhayoga system, the Guru transfers his energy into the disciple by touching him and awakens his *Kundalini*. This is called *Shaktipat*. (In Maharashtra this is practised at the Ganeshpuri Ashram of Swami Nityananda in Vajreshwari about 150 Km from Mumbai). But the peculiarity of the *Shaktipat* technique used by Gulwani Maharaj is that it can be done without touch, from a distance of even several thousand kilometres and even through a letter.**

***About Kundalini*   Awakening of the *Kundalini* force which lies dormant in every individual is considered as an important milestone in the spiritual progress of a seeker. *Kundalini* may be awakened through certain practices of Hathayoga or by receiving energy from one’s Guru as mentioned above. This latter practice is naturally associated with worship of one’s Guru and is an advantage of the system of Guru-worship. There are instances where *Kundalini* has been awakened accidentally but that is rare and sometimes dangerous.**

**                      **

**Shri Gulwani Maharaj                       Swami Loknath Tirth Maharaj**

**Chakras  Once *Kundalini* is awakened, certain nerves in the spine get activated. (Sixth chapter of Dnyaneshwari gives a detailed account of what happens when Kundalini is awakened.(See V.V. Shirvaikar in Bibliography). A life force progressively rises upwards from the base of the spine towards the top of the head activating certain centres which are traditionally called Chakras. *Muladhar* *Chakra* is the lowermost *Chakra* residing at a location near the base of one's spine near about the sexual organs and at which the dormant *Kundalini* is located in all persons. This is what is activated first. There are six more *Chakras* above the *Muladhar*. These are: the *Swadhishtan* *Chakra* located a little above the *Muladhar* *Chakra* and below the navel, the *Manipur Chakra* near the navel, *Anahat Chakra* near the heart, the *Vishuddha Chakra* at the throat, the *Adnya Chakra* in between the eyebrows and the seventh and last is the *Sahasrara Chakra or Chakra of thousand lotuses* on the vertex crown of the head. When the *Kundalini* is awakened and the Muladhar Chakra is activated the seeker experiences strange vibrations and a feeling of happiness which lasts long after he has come out of the meditative state. As the seeker continues to practice meditation the *Kundalini* force progressively rises upwards activating the successive *Chakras*. Each *Chakra* gives unique experiences to the seeker but the actual experiences may vary with the individual. The *Kundalini* force enters all parts of the body and purifies it of the impurities accumulated since childhood. Activation of the *Chakras* accelerates the spiritual progress. Consciousness expands. In time, when the *Kundalini* force reaches the *Sahasrara*, the seeker gets the experience of the Divine and is liberated from the influence of mundane subjects. Depending upon the efforts of the seeker and Guru's benevolence the time taken from the awakening and the ultimate realisation may vary between immediate to several years and *sometimes lifetimes* too.**

**Hathayoga system  Some people try the Hathayoga technique to activate their *Kundalini*. But Hathayoga practice is primarily a physical exercise which disciplines and tones the body.  It requires the discipline of mind too. It is possible to activate *Kundalini* by this technique, but is considered dangerous unless conducted under an able guide. It is important that the activated force must calm down after some time so that the seeker can go about his worldly duties. It is said that with Hathayoga technique it is difficult to calm down the force without Guru’s help and if the force does not calm down it can be dangerous for the person mentally and physically. Old Nath Panthi yogis used this technique. But its main use of Hathayoga today seems to be to discipline the body so that one is able to sit in a steady posture for a long time.**

**Rajayoga system  In the Raja Yoga system of Pantanjali things are simpler. In this system it is not considered as a physical exercise but an exercise to control the mind. The seeker sits in a “*sukhasana*” or posture of comfort, (usually *sahajasana* posture sitting with crossed legs) on a comfortable seat in order that the bodily discomforts do not distract the mind. He then has to silence his mind through meditation, closing his eyes and concentrating in between the eyebrows. Thoughts are *not to be suppressed but allowed*; they slowly go away and the mind is silenced. If they do not go then it is recommended to observe them like an outsider, which makes them go away. In another technique it is recommended to concentrate on breathing which again makes the thoughts stop. Imagining vast expanse of a calm ocean or infinite space also helps. There are many such ways but the goal is to silence the mind by stopping the internal dialogue one generally has with oneself.  Constant meditation together with Guru’s blessings activates the *Kundalini* someday. Required control of breath occurs automatically as silence is achieved. *Kundalini* thus activated calms down automatically after a certain time and is reactivated whenever one sits for meditation. It may take years of meditation before *Kundalini* is activated and many more years and even lifetimes before the force reaches the *Sahasrara*. It is of course necessary for the seeker whose *Kundalini* is activated to have simple diet and not to do work involving heavy physical strains or situations of excitement. In general good habits and control of mind must be cultivated.**

**Shaktipat system  In the *Shaktipat* system (also called Siddhayoga system), once the energy is transferred by the Guru the disciple feels internal changes, his thigh muscles tighten and the sitting posture becomes firm, his spine becomes erect and breath is controlled. All this occurs automatically and involuntarily. The *Kundalini* is awakened and the disciple sits in that position for some time until he is able to open his eyes to experience joy in his surroundings. The disciple may experience many more things e.g. sounds, light, vision, *pranayama* actions, certain Hathayoga actions related to Kundalini or he may even laugh or cry.  Later, he is *automatically timed* to sit for meditation, generally in the predawn hours.  During this sitting the yogic processes and the necessary *pranayama* or breathing processes continue automatically during his lifetime. The *Kundalini* force slowly rises to reach the successive *Chakras*. His spiritual progress continues even while he follows a family life. Another advantage with this system is that the intense physical pains and mental disturbances which often accompany the Kundalini awakening and may last for several months are absent in the *Shaktipat* system.**

**Gulwani Maharaj and Shaktipat  Swami Lokanath Tirtha used this process to initiate Gulwani Maharaj into this system and later empowered him to continue the system by which hundreds of people have benefited so far. A brief history of the events that brought this important system basically associated with Goddess Kali to the Datta-Parampara in Maharashtra is given later after the brief biography of Gulwani Maharaj which follows.**

**Vamanrao was the son of a pious couple Dattatreya Gulwani and Umabai from Kaulavagaon near Kolhapur. He was born at Kudutri on December 23, 1886. After his thread ceremony at the age of seven Vaman went through the traditional education of religious texts and religious rituals. Vaman had a natural talent for drawing and after passing his grade exams in drawing in 1907 he joined the well-known J. J. School of Art in Mumbai.**

**In the same year, while Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) was camping at Narsobawadi, Vaman who was at that time in Kolhapur received a message from his brother that he should immediately come to Narasobawadi with a picture of Shri Dattatreya and a garland of flowers. These items were offered to Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati who liked the photo and rewarded Vaman with a talisman which Vaman subsequently always tied round his arm.**

**Sometime later, Vaman suffered an attack of plague and was unconscious for ten days. However he recovered and was grateful to Shri Dattatreya for the grace thus shown. As a mark of gratitude he did seven readings of Gurucharitra at Narsobawadi living only on alms. He now became an ardent devotee of Shri Dattatreya.  Around this time Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati had camped at a place called Pavani in Vidarbha for *Chaturmas*, the four monsoon months during which the *sanyasis* do not travel. Vaman’s brother called him there with his mother. In this visit Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati initiated Vaman as his disciple.**

**Vamanrao unsuccessfully tried for a job in Mumbai and in disgust left home for Ganagapur with just two dresses and a pot, to serve at the feet of Shri Dattatreya. Here also he performed seven readings of Gurucharitra. He was anxious to meet his Guru and having heard that he was in Havanur region in Karnataka, he rushed there on feet, for he had no money. On the way he learnt that his Guru was at Dharwad and to reach quickly there he sold his blanket to raise money for the railway fare. Unfortunately he reached Dharwad only to learn that his Guru had already left. After trailing him for many days he finally caught up with him at Havanur. Once with his Guru he insisted upon staying with him. The discourses given by Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati were spiritually very beneficial to him. After a few days Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati gave him instructions personally on Gita and Vishnu Sahasranama (Thousand names of Vishnu). He also taught him some yoga postures. Vamanrao continued to accompany his Guru except for short spells which he spent at religious places like Ganagapur.  Vamanrao was a good painter. He painted two pictures, one of Tungabhadra and another of one-headed Dattatreya which he offered to his Guru.**

**From 1917 onwards, three years after his Guru’s samadhi, Vamanrao took up a job of a drawing teacher, first at a municipal school in Barshi up to 1926 and then in NMV high school in Pune until 1942. He travelled on pilgrimage all over India. He also continued practice of yoga and wanted to work towards awakening of *Kundalini* through the Hathayoga practice. While engaged in these efforts he learnt that his brother disciple Govindaswami, an expert in Hathayoga, was at Hoshangabad. It was arranged through correspondence that Vamanrao would go to Hoshangabad to get guidance from Govindaswami in the matter of awakening *Kundalini*. This visit to Hoshangabad opened a new chapter in the life of Vamanrao through certain events which had its origins in Bengal. He came in contact with Swami Chinmayananda who, after he took Dandi Sanyas was known later as Swami Lokanath Tirtha.  We shall refer to him as Swamiji.**

**Swamiji was visiting Hoshangabad on divine instructions. Swamiji used the technique of *Shaktipat* to awaken the *Kundalini* of the disciple he wished to initiate. In this system the would-be disciple simply sits with eyes closed in front of or near the Guru and the Guru transfers his own energy into the disciple to awaken his *Kundalini*. No physical touch is necessary. Instantly the disciple’s body starts performing *pranayama* and other yogic processes like *Bhasrika* automatically without his control. The process of *Shaktipat* lasts for about an hour during which the disciple is filled with vigour and bliss. After that the process automatically starts whenever the disciple sits in the meditation posture.  This of course is only the beginning and it may take several years before he reaches the stage of self-realisation.**

**Hathayoga practice did not help Vamanrao in awakening his *Kundalini*.  On the other hand he noticed that many of his acquaintances had their *Kundalini* awakened by Swamiji by the *Shaktipat* process. Situation arose when Vamanrao invited Swamiji to live in his house. (See later in the next section). One day Vamanrao requested Swamiji for the favour of *Shaktipat* and one evening in 1922 Swamiji made him sit in front of him with closed eyes and awakened his *Kundalini*.  A week later Vamanrao left for Barshi. In 1926 he came to Pune in NMV high School as a drawing teacher and took a house in Narayanpeth. His *sadhana* continued. Vamanrao’s character, his regularity in his spiritual practice etc. had impressed Swamiji very much.  Swamiji, by a letter, gave him authorisation to initiate others by the *Shaktipat* system.  Swamiji liked this disciple very much and used to visit him often and stay with him for months.**

**In 1961 when Panshet dam broke the resultant floods in Pune washed away the Narayanpeth residence. Gulawani Maharaj had to leave the place literally with the clothes he was wearing. His disciples included doctors, architects and engineers. They decided to build a building for him which would be his Ashram and where his Padukas could be installed. They built this large building just off Karve road and named it Vasudevashram after his Guru Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati. It was inaugurated on 27th January 1965. It became a centre for his spiritual activities. Gulawani Maharaj took samadhi on 15th January 1974.  With hundreds of disciples living in Pune Vasudevashram continues to be very active in spiritual activities today. Gulawani Maharaj authorised his disciple Kavishwar Maharaj to continue the work. After the death of Kavishwar Maharaj the centre is headed by Shri Narayankaka Dhekne.**

**THE STORY OF *SHAKTIPAT* YOGA**

**When one reads about *Shaktipat* Yoga one cannot help appreciating how the Divine hand has given to a worthy seeker an easy tool for attaining Self-realisation. How the *Shaktipat* system reached Maharashtra from the Himalayas via Bengal is briefly described in the following. Reader should note that this system came from the devotees of Goddess Kali and not of Shri Dattatreya. But now, through Swami Lokanath Tirtha and Shri Gulawani Maharaj this system has entered the mainstream of Datta-tradition. In contrast with other systems like Hathayoga which the Nath Sect yogis used to activate the Kundalini, the *Shaktipat* system does not require Guru’s physical touch and there are cases where the *Kundalini* has been awakened through a letter.**

***Shri Gangadhartirtha Maharaj*   The technique of *Shaktipat* was started by Shri Gangadhartirtha Maharaj. His original name is not known but he lived approximately between 1840 and 1908 AD. He was simplicity himself never making any show of his powers. Nothing is known about him or his family except that he was a Bajapeyi Brahmin from Ayodhya. He had a detached nature and he left his home to travel in Himalayas in spiritual pursuit. While in Himalayas he encountered a sanyasi who initiated him through the *Shaktipat* technique. After giving him adequate guidance the two parted never to meet again on material plane. His goal achieved, Gangadhartirtha Maharaj returned to the plains and came to Jagannathpuri in Orissa. He stayed for some time in Govardhanpitha and adopted *sanyasa*. He then returned to Jagannathpuri and being averse to company he built a small hut on the border of the Chandan lake far away from the city. He had a couple of disciples who used to beg alms for him for he never liked to go in a crowd. Because of this nobody knew about his powers and he was left alone. The technique of *Shaktipat* would have gone and forgotten with him but fortunately he gained a worthy disciple who was taught the technique. The name of this disciple was Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj.**

**Narayantirtha Maharaj   His original name was Kalikishore Gangopadhyaya, belonging to a Brahmin family from Eastern Bengal, now in Bangla Desh. His father Tarinicharan and mother Navadurgadevi were very pious persons. The family was very poor but generous to mendicants (*Sadhus*) coming for alms. Kalikishore was born to them on the Kojagiri Pournima day (five days after Dassera) in 1870. Because of poverty he could study only up to sixth standard. Like his parents Kalikishore was also pious and besides had a detached nature. After his thread ceremony at the age of seven he gained the right to Gayatri Mantra. He did *Japa* of Gayatri Mantra with great dedication. This increased his inner strength which was reflected in his bright aura.  When he was about twelve his parents decided to get him married but when Kalikishore learnt about it he ran away from home in search of a Guru. He did not succeed however and had to return home three years later. At the age of eighteen he was married to Sarojinidevi against his wish.  He tried many jobs but did not last long anywhere. He finally came to Calcutta where he found a job in a printing press. His visits to spiritual places and people and search for a Guru continued. One day he again left the job and went in search of a Guru. He met many including many frauds and finally reached Jagannathpuri.**

**In Jagannathpuri he met an acolyte named Karali Brahmachari who led him to Gangadhartirtha Maharaj. The quiet atmosphere and the serene tranquil personality of Gangadhartirtha Maharaj impressed Kalikishore.  He realised he had found his Guru. He made his obeisance and sat in peace. Sometime later Gangadhartirtha Maharaj asked him briefly whether he intended to stay. Kalikishore answered in the affirmative. After keenly observing Kalkishore for about a month Gangadhartirtha Maharaj agreed to his request for initiation. On the Akshaya Tritiya day (This falls in April/May) in 1889 he initiated Kalikishore (now in his nineteenth year) as his disciple. First he asked Kalkishore to bring some flowers as Gurudakshina and to shave his head and take bath. After accepting the flowers as Gurudakshina he made Kalikishore sit on the seat before him with eyes closed.  Kalikishore first prostrated before his Guru and filled with emotions grasped his feet. After calming Kalikishore Gangadhartirtha Maharaj told him, “I am going to initiate you with *mantra* and yogic power. You are only to witness. When the feelings which are awakened now mature fully, understand that you have reached the limit of Knowledge. That is the sign of Knowledge.” Gangadhartirtha Maharaj then transmitted his energy to Kalikishore in whose mind the *japa* of the Guru’s mantra began to repeat automatically and he began experiencing waves of bliss. Gangadhartirtha Maharaj asked him to open the eyes and asked him to continue the *japa* with understanding its meaning and promised all his wishes would be fulfilled.**

**After a few days Kalikishore requested his Guru to initiate him as a sanyasi. When asked about his family Kalikishore replied that he had no family. Gangadhartirtha Maharaj kept quiet but next day he called Kalikishore and reprimanded him for speaking untruth and told him the details about his family. Telling that he had initiated him because of his earnest request he advised him to go home and  gain knowledge through yoga and *sadhana* while performing the family duties to his parents, to his brother, sister & wife. He gave him a sound advice which being very useful is summarised here.**

**He said, “You must enjoy or suffer your Karmas of which you are not aware of but which I am able to see. As long as the Karmas and desires remain there cannot be any *sanyasa*. The ochre dress of a sanyasi, his string of *rudraksha* beads are all external decorations which if they generate an ego will only cause your downfall. A person remains worldly as long as he carries desires in his mind. The right stage for taking *sanyasa* is after one attains perfection through Knowledge by *sadhana* with the blessings of his Guru and with the grace of God. Though you are faithful and dedicated it would be a mistake to let you continue with me considering what is written in your destiny and the desire you carry. It is the responsibility of a Guru to act in the best interests of his disciple and because of things which you cannot see but I can, I have to harden my heart and ask you to go back to your family. The care you feel for your family which is hidden in your mind will bring impediments in your *sadhana* if you do not complete your duties. Though today you have no feelings of lust time may come when they will raise their head and you can fall prey to that lust which has ruined greatest yogis. If you ignore your wife today you will fall in the clutches of some other woman and that will ruin you. It is not that you should abandon your Karmas but that the Karmas should abandon you. There is also another purpose in sending you back home. *You also have some responsibility of advancing the Dharma. The initiation towards acquiring knowledge of the Brahman which I have given you is a powerful spark which will cause the light to spread all over India at the proper time. For that you must be a leader and a Guru.* For that you must be engaged in your *sadhana* and remember that you are a mere instrument in this. *Sadhana* done with the desire of becoming a Guru leads to ego and downfall. You will gain greatly if you do it with a sense of duty, with desire for knowledge, bowing to the Guru principle. Also remember that without inner capability mere outer looks and decorations are useless. I can actually see that by the divine means that I have given you and by my blessings you will definitely be a king in the spiritual field and that splendour will be infinitely greater than that of the worldly kingdom. Your fame will spread far and wide. Do not worry and may you prosper.”  He gave him his personal copy of Gita saying that the book contains extreme synthesis of the four paths:  knowledge, devotion, action and yoga, and the *sadhana* assigned to him would lead to the development of all the four paths in him. Asking him to read the book daily he then bade him farewell.**

**Kalikishore left but instead of immediately going home spent some time in a village called Kanthelu attracted by the natural beauty of the surroundings with a river and a cave near a Shiva temple suitable for his *sadhana*. However his mother came to know his whereabouts in a dream and arranged through the postmaster of Kanthelu to bring him home. He realised it was his Guru’s doing. Everybody, and most of all, his wife (though she very well knew he was not interested in family life) were happy at his homecoming.  He managed a small job of eight rupees per month which barely augmented the family income but which permitted him to continue his *sadhana*. In 1897 his father died and the responsibility of the family fell entirely on Kalikishore.**

**Kalikishore moved with his family to a quiet village called Vinitia in Dhaka district in search of livelihood and found a job with the local landlord.  His *sadhana* of course continued. One day he brought a beautiful picture of Goddess Kali and added it to the group of the deities he used to worship daily. He had brought it because he did not have his Guru’s picture and he considered that the power of his Guru was contained in the Goddess Kali. His reading of books on religious and spiritual philosophy like Upanishads continued. He had complete support of his wife in his spiritual endeavours.**

**It was the Kojagiri Pournima day of 1908, Kalikishore’s thirty-ninth birthday. Kalikishore sat for his evening worship and after the *arati* and while the final Mantra-pushpanjali was being recited, energy started entering Kalikishore’s body. He began to shiver vigorously, lost consciousness and fell down. The bright aura and the blissful appearance of his face indicated that there was no illness but his lying still with no noticeable breathing frightened his sister. He recovered in a short time but was somewhat tired. He was still sobbing and calling for “mother” (implying Goddess Kali). The entire day and night were spent in this emotional state. Next day he started crying and calling for “mother” again and again.  Suddenly he went into trance and had the vision of Goddess Kali who assured him that everything was all right. He remembered his Guru and realised that exactly 19 years 6 months and 13 days had passed since his initiation. He also remembered being told that this active power will lead him to the right place. He wrote to his Guru but he had already passed away.**

**His occult experiences continued and one day his Guru instructed him in a vision to go towards north-east. Now his fears vanished. One night, around midnight a strong desire to worship the Kali idol overtook him and when he was bathing the idol it started becoming brighter. Others also noted this incident. They realised that his touch caused the idol to shine. He had now developed the power to transfer energy to others and awaken the *Kundalini* just as his Guru had done to him. It had taken about twenty years to develop this power through an intense *sadhana*. He remembered his Guru’s words that “*You also have some responsibility of advancing the Dharma. The initiation towards acquiring knowledge of the Brahman which I have given you is a powerful spark which will cause the light to spread all over India at the proper time*.” A new phase started in his life.**

**Then, on an auspicious day in 1910 he initiated his wife, sister and younger brother in the same manner he himself had been initiated, by making them sit after bath on individual seats in front of him with closed eyes and transferring his energy to all the three at the same time. His disciples grew in numbers. He decided to build a temple to Goddess Kali, a task in which they all helped. He himself began to live in the temple. One day he got a strong desire for adopting *sanyasa*. He did that formally from the Chief of the Jagannathpuri Math adopting Narayantirtha Saraswati as the new name.**

**He came to be well known in the surrounding region and received many spiritually minded visitors from all strata of society and religions. For their sake he established in the temple a spiritual centre and named it Jnyana Sadhan Math or a Math (spiritual centre) for seeking knowledge which in spiritual parlance is same as liberation. The stress in this Math was not on discussions and lectures but on personal experience which Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj was now capable of imparting through awakening of *kundalini*.**

**Atmananda Prakash and Yogeshchandra  In 1910 an eighteen year old youth named Rohinikumar from Chitalkot in Vikrampur Paragana of Dhaka district came to Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj. Before accepting him as an acolyte (Brahmachari) Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj took a vow of celibacy from him.  He was initiated by *Shaktipat* system and renamed as Atmananda Prakash Brahmachari (*see later*). But before letting him adopt *sanyasa*, Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj wanted him to return home and spend time with his family. He was to come back to him after satisfying his family and taking their permission. Atmananda Prakash therefore returned to his home in Chitalkot. Even though only a Brahmachari (pre-*sanyasa*) Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj had authorised him to initiate his own disciples if found suitable.**

**Next divine coincidence in the chain of events occurred when Atmananda Prakash returned to Chitalkot. A young man by name Yogeshchandra Chakravarty from Dhaka had left home in search of a Guru and was inexplicably inspired to go to Chitalkot. While wandering in the village he noticed a young man dressed in white in the typical Bengali style walking in the courtyard of a house. He had applied ash on his body. Wishing to make some enquiries from the young man he entered the courtyard and in the first meeting itself the two became friends. Yogeshchandra became disciple of Atmananda Prakash. After taking the vow of celibacy he was renamed Yogeshchandra Prakash Brahmachari. The difference in age between this Guru-disciple pair was only two years. (See later about details of Yogeshchandra). After some days the two went to Vinitia where Atmananda Prakash gave *Shaktipat* initiation to Yogeshchandra in the presence of Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj.  The two remained in Jnyana Sadhan Math for six to seven years in the service of Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj. By 1920 the number of disciples increased so much that the present place became insufficient. After careful considerations it was shifted to a bigger place at Madaripur on the banks of river Medha amidst picturesque woods.  There was a very big *banyan* tree here under which several hundred people could sit for discourses. Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj built a Shiva temple under the tree and created a beautiful garden.**

**Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj was very careful in choosing or accepting a person for initiation but this was done without regard for his caste or religion.  He looked for the sincerity of desire for spiritual pursuit and whether the person has the tenacity to follow the routines regularly. He had the power of detecting falsehood and insincerity. Once a Brahmin who could impress everyone with his learning came to him with a request for initiation but was sent away saying that he would consider it at some other time. Couple of days later a pious Muslim dressed in soiled clothes and who could hardly speak pure language came with the same request and was initiated immediately after fixing a suitable day. he explained this using analogy of a light bulb. He said that an electric bulb will light up when switched on only if wired properly. If the electric fitting is not proper how can the bulb light?**

**Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj used to be particular about the behaviour of his disciples and insisted that every moment spent in the Math should be spent usefully. He was strict but a kind person. When the *Shaktipat* initiation is given, if the person to be initiated suffers from any illness it can get transferred to the Guru. But Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj never bothered about it and accepted the illnesses of his disciples. In one such initiation he received an incurable intestinal disease of the disciple but he gladly accepted it and finally passed away due to it in 1935. Before leaving the body he sat in yogic posture, repeated the Upanishadic phrase, “Sarvam Khalvidam Brahmam”, *everything here is Brahman*, four times and finally uttering *Aum*, left his body. His wife Sarojinidevi passed away a month later. The disciples constructed Samadhi structures and began their worship. Their daughter and son-in-law continued to look after the Math. The giant banyan tree was uprooted in a cyclonic storm in 1960 and the Shiva temple cracked but was later repaired. The place is now in Bangla Desh and not easily accessible.**

***Shankar Purushottamtirtha*  Shri Atmananda Prakash mentioned above was born in 1890 as Rohinikumar the son of Prasannakumar Chattopadhyaya and his wife Durgasundari. His mother died when he was only five years old.   He however began to consider Goddess Kali as his mother and used to say that her idol talked to him. Since childhood he used to sit for meditation along with his father and used to go into deep trance. He left school when he was in tenth standard and started spending his time in meditation and meeting holy persons. He had a strong desire to have a Guru and one day the Guru appeared in his dream. He searched for his whereabouts without success. Then somebody advised him to meditate on Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa with the desire of finding his Guru’s whereabouts in mind.**

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**Shri Shankar Purushottamtirtha**

**He meditated with a photo of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa before him and one day he came in a vision and told him his Guru’s name showing him what he looked like. Now Rohinikumar began his search again and located Shri Narayantirtha Saraswati at Vinitia. As mentioned earlier he was initiated in  1910.  After his return to his Guru in 1926 he was allowed to adopt *sanyasa* formally through the hands of the Shankaracharya of Puri and was renamed Shri Shankar Purushottamtirtha. On his Guru’s instructions he travelled to Varanasi, Uttarkashi and other places in the Himalayas. In 1932 he established the Shankar Math in Uttarkashi. In 1934 he established another Math called Siddhayogashram in Varanasi. In 1926 he wrote a book titled Yogavani to explain *Shaktipat*yoga to seekers. He took samadhi in 1958.**

***Swami Loknath Tirth*    Now we shall go into the details of the last link in the chain of events which brought *Shaktipat* yoga to Maharashtra. The story of Yogeshchandra Chakravarty who was initiated by Shri Atmananda Prakash described earlier is again shows guidance by the divine hand. Yogeshchandra was the son of the chief priest of Dhakeshwari temple situated in north-east of Dhaka city. It was a temple with fair income and the Chakravarty family was quite well-to-do. Yogeshchandra was born in 1892. He was an intelligent boy with sharp memory. He picked up the techniques of worship with the relevant chants very quickly from his father. He had the habit of sitting for meditation in some obscure corner or room of the temple. He liked to look after the feeding and watering of the cows in the stable. He used to take part in the singing of *bhajans* in the temple and become quite entranced. After his thread ceremony in his eighth year he could take part in the worship rituals of the temple. It is customary in Bengal to offer animal sacrifice to the Goddess and goats used to be regularly sacrificed on a platform in front of the temple.  The actual killing was done by the chief priest with the help of others.  When Yogeshchandra became older he also had to do it. Being part of the tradition nobody feels much about this sacrifice and everybody including Yogeshchandra took it as a matter of course just as it used to be done in the yajnas in Vedic times. Bengali Brahmins are basically fish eaters and so was Yogeshchandra until he was initiated as sanyasi.**

**His father died at the age of about thirty-two and the responsibility of the family which included mother, younger brother and sister fell on Yogeshachandra when he was only about twelve years old. He began to face many difficulties. There was a draught. The farm-tenants would not give his share of the crop and the income from temple became insufficient for maintaining the family.  Somehow he managed his studies up to fifth standard and then found a clerk’s job in a jute factory. During all these hard times he always prayed to Mother Kali for guidance. During the anti-British movement against partition of Bengal he left his job and joined the revolutionaries but found after some time that he did not fit in and left. All the time he continued praying to Mother Kali for guidance and for guiding him towards a Guru. And one night She showed him his Guru in a vision and also the name of the village where he would be found and the signs by which he can identify the house. This was in about 1912 when he was just twenty years old.**

**Yogeshchandra quietly left his home and family and reached Chitalkot where, as mentioned earlier, he found his Guru Shri Atmananda Prakash. After the Guru disciple pair came to Vinitia Yogeshchandra was initiated in the presence of Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj. Thus started Yogeshchandra’s spiritual *sadhana* in earnest at Jnyana Sadhan Math.  In this Math all tasks were shared by the residents as service to their Guru as in the Ashrams of the Vedic times. The routine included pre-dawn meditation, management of the Math after sunrise, reading of religious and spiritual books after a little post lunch rest, discourse on Upanishads by the Guru followed by discussions and finally collective *sadhana*. Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj was particular about keeping everything simple and was strict about regularity.**

**Though spiritually exalting, the life on material plane was very hard, for it was the custom that noontime meals to all residents and visitors would be provided free by the Math and there were insufficient funds. The food came from the grains and other material received as alms for which all regular acolytes and *sanyasis* went daily in the neighbouring villages. This was augmented when necessary by “*arabi*” tuber roots which when boiled offered nutritive supplement. Firewood also had to be collected. The responsibility of arranging meals was assigned to Shri Atmananda Prakash who with the help of Yogeshchandra carried it well though it meant a lot of physical labour especially for chopping and bringing in the firewood.  They had to walk long distances for alms and during the heavy monsoon rains they even had to often swim across the rivers.**

**The young Guru-disciple pair spent two years at the Math except for the short time during which Shri Atmananda Prakash was sent by his Guru home to meet his family and obtain their permission for adopting *sanyasa*. The actual ritual of *sanyasa* was however arranged much later, in 1926. He was renamed as Shri Shankar Purushottamtirtha. Shri Narayantirtha Maharaj noticed that Yogeshchandra’s spiritual progress was very fast and he needed some independence and solitude for proper development. Soon after, Shri Atmananda Prakash went on a tour of the holy places in Bengal taking Yogeshchandra with him. In the course of time they reached Dhaka where Yogeshchandra was asked to go and live at his home while Shri Atmananda Prakash himself stayed in the Math of Tripurlinga Saraswati.  The Math was large and rich and Tripurlinga Saraswati was highly respected even by learned pundits and had many disciples.**

**Yogeshchandra’s family were surprised and happy to see him back. He set upon a daily program of early morning *sadhana*, serving the cattle and milking them. He took some milk to for his Guru who was in the Tripurlinga Saraswati Math remaining in his company doing small jobs for him like cleaning the room, washing clothes and utensils, going to post office etc. He would return home in the afternoon and again go back to his Guru in the evening.  His mother was impressed by his behaviour and came to accept his new life of a *sanyasi*. He arranged for his younger brother to look after the family and arrange for the sister’s marriage. One day he brought Shri Atmananda Prakash home and obtained her permission for adopting *sanyasa*. Shri Atmananda Prakash requested Tripurlinga Saraswati to conduct the Sanyasa ritual for Yogeshchandra and towards the end of 1914, when he was only twenty-one years old Yogeshchandra became a sanyasi and was renamed Chinmayananda Saraswati.**

**Tripurlinga Saraswati was highly impressed by this young pair of Guru and disciple. He was getting old and wanted a capable person to head the Math. First he requested Shri Atmananda Prakash to accept the position but to his surprise he declined this lucrative offer. The same offer was also made to Yogeshchandra who also declined saying that it would come in the way of his quest.  After staying there for about eight months the pair left Dhaka for further travels and returned to Jnyana Sadhan Math for further guidance from their Guru. Again Swami Narayantirtha noted that Chinmayananda’s progress was occurring fast and he needed both independence and solitude. He was therefore asked to search for a place by himself. He found a Shiva temple in a nearby village but returned after couple of months because of the disturbance from the local bad elements.**

**Shri Atmananda Prakash had gone in the meantime to Varanasi and with the permission of Swami Narayantirtha the *Shaktipat* technique had now reached Varanasi. Chinmayananda followed him there. Before he left, Swami told him that future of the path depended upon persons like him and God would see that all would go well. Also that he should always feel gratitude for the Guru tradition and pass what he has received from the tradition and Guru to others adding his own contribution.**

**After reaching Varanasi he sought Shri Atmananda Prakash. The latter took Chinmayananda and a few other disciples to various places in the Himalayas.  Both were greatly attracted to Uttarkashi in particular. They returned to Varanasi in 1919 and arranged for Swami Narayantirtha to visit them. He did so and returned to Bengal in 1920 with Shri Atmananda Prakash.**

**Chinmayananda, now separated from his Guru went first to Rishikesh and a few months later entered the jungles of Tehri Gadhwal for his *sadhana*. Where all he went and how he survived is not known. But one day he heard in his ears a message instructing him that he should go south. First he ignored the message but when it was repeated twice more, the third time very forcefully, he left the jungles and returned via Uttarkashi, Devaprayag, Hardwar etc. to Hathras situated midway between Aligarh and Agra in U.P.  He still had no idea as to where exactly he was supposed to go so he spent his time in an isolated temple.  One day while in meditation he got a clear message from the Goddess that he should go further south, that his place of action was towards south and he was destined to spread the *Shaktipat* technique in that region; that She had blessed his grand-Guru Shri Narayantirtha and the spark which had been handed over to him would spread everywhere and that task was his; that he should not stop there but continue further towards south.**

**Now that he had received a clear message Swami Chinmayananda picked up his meagre belongings and came to the railway station. He had no money and he did not know where exactly to go. However a wealthy person approached him and asked him where he was going. He replied. “To south”.  The man purchased a ticket for Hoshangabad, how and why nobody knows, and gave it to him along with some fruits informing him that the train left at night. Next morning he reached Hoshangabad (about 30 Km north of Itarasi on Central railway in Madhya Pradesh) and walked along the banks of Narmada which is known there as Rewa.  He walked to the Mangalwar Ghat, did his ablutions, bathed in the waters. He then walked up the steps of the Ghat to look for a place for rest and shelter. There are many Dharmashalas (Charitable rest houses) for pilgrims there. He enquired of the mendicants and sanyasis sitting around for a suitable place for shelter.**

**Now, it should be remembered that everybody dressed as a *sanyasi* may not be so in mind. Many are misguided persons who have missed their spiritual goal for want of the depth of desire for it and fallen in bad company of so-called *sadhus* or *sanyasis* who use narcotics and spend their time sitting in groups engaged in idle chit-chat. Many belong to a particular “*Akhada* ” which a group headed by a chief who, instead of utilising his time in spiritual exercise, spends it in power politics and even fights with other Akhadas. Many young aspirants who have left their home for spiritual pursuit get impressed by their talk and fall into their trap becoming a misguided disciple of an unworthy Guru.**

**When these mendicants saw this boyish sanyasi they thought he was one of their type and decided to play a joke on him by directing him to a Dharmashala which was believed to be haunted and hence abandoned. They waited until the next day to watch the fun.  At night many spirits did try to trouble Chinmayananda but he controlled them by his yogic powers and saw to it that they were liberated from that state by morning. After that none of the Sadhus bothered him.  He could live in that Dharmashala undisturbed. Now the stage was set for further acts in the divine play to propagate the *Shaktipat* system to sincere seekers.  In this act one Raobahadur Sadashivarao Parande, a sub-judge recently transferred from Nagpur to Hoshangabad played a key role.**

**Dadasaheb, as Raobahadur Parande was generally addressed by his family and friends, was a western educated learned person of good nature and moral behaviour, well read in Shastras and also practising Yoga. He had read many books on Tantra system of spiritual pursuit and found that in an ancient book titled *Kularnava* it was mentioned that *Kundalini* could be awakened by what was called Vedha Diksha, (which can be roughly translated as initiation by concentrating on the person to be initiated from a distance). He thoroughly studied the book and was looking for a worthy person capable of using this technique. The Tantra system is more popular in Bengal region and he was particularly looking for some yogi or *sanyasi* from that region who might know the technique. He mentioned this to a Bengali lawyer named Chatterjee who consented to be on the lookout. As fate would have it Swami Chinmayananda one day visited his house for alms and as soon as the call for alms “Aum Bhavati Bhikshandehi” was heard he came out to meet him and realised this sanyasi with a bright aura was a Bengali. He enquired and learnt that he was camping at Mangalwar Ghat.  That afternoon he met the sub-judge and told him about Swamiji. In the evening Dadasaheb took a walk to the Ghat, met and bowed to him. After some talks he invited Swamiji to his home for alms.**

**Next morning, Swamiji came to Dadasaheb’s home. After alms were given Dadasaheb drew him into discussions and asked him if he knew of anybody who could give Vedha Diksha. Swamiji replied in the affirmative and when Dadasaheb requested for his address said, to his utter surprise that being a sanyasi he could not tell a lie and he himself could do it. Now, Dadasaheb had read a lot about the experiences of persons when *Kundalini* is awakened. How to verify whether Swamiji’s claim was true? He did not want to try it on himself therefore he thought of a stratagem.  There was one lawyer by name Narayanprasad Dube who was afflicted by a skin disease which was not responding to medication. Dadasaheb suggested to him that if he met Swamiji then his divine powers could cure him. Accordingly Dube met Swamiji the next day, gave reference of the sub-judge and told him about his problem praying for his grace. Swamiji immediately asked him to come next morning after taking bath if he wanted the experience of awakening of *Kundalini*.**

**Next morning Dube went to Swamiji who merely asked him to remove his shirt and cap, wash hands and feet and sit in a normal posture on a seat spread on the ground (This is the *sahajasan posture* with crossed legs.) He asked him to close his eyes and to let happen whatever happens inside him. He also told him not to get frightened and to open his eyes after it happening stops.  Couple of minutes after Dube took his position he started feeling something happening inside by itself. His legs tightened steadying his posture and his spine became erect. His initial nervousness stopped and a pleasant sensation began to flow through the spine. His eyes became tightly closed and he started swaying. After about forty-five minutes he opened his eyes. Swamiji asked him whether he had an experience to which he replied in the affirmative adding that he could not describe it. Swamiji reassured him that the results were excellent and that it would profit him if he came and sat with him for a week. Dube prostrated before Swamiji with great faith and left. He reported his experience to Dadasaheb that day in court.**

***Initiation of Vamanrao or Gulawani* *Maharaj*   Now, Dadasaheb used to be a regular visitor of Govindaswami who was camping in a Dattatreya temple situated on Kharra Ghat in Hoshangabad.  Govindaswami was a disciple of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati like Mr. Vamanrao Gulwani. He was an expert in Hathayoga and therefore Vamanrao had requested him for help in awakening his *Kundalini*.  Actually that was the reason why Vamanrao had been camping in Hoshangabad. When Vamanrao came to Hoshangabad he had brought his mother Umabai with him and also called his three friends Shankarkaka Ajegaonkar, Kashinath Mahajan and Vaidya who were also ardent practitioners of Hathayoga. They heard from Dadasaheb about the recently arrived sanyasi who gave Shaktipat or Vedha Diksha in which the recipient does not have to do anything.  They did not believe such a technique existed until Dadasaheb showed its mention in Kularnava book. He also told them about how Dube was initiated that very morning.**

**Next evening they all went and met Swamiji and were introduced by Dadasaheb.  Nobody spoke but all were enjoying the blissful vibrations.  In the corner was sitting Dube in a steady position with eyes closed but moving his neck in a circular fashion. He used to visit Swamiji both in the morning and in the evening. After some time he opened his eyes. Dadasaheb found from him that his skin problem was improving rapidly. Swamiji informed Dadasaheb in reply to his question about the nature of experiences that there are thousands of types of experiences which include postures, hand postures (*Mudra*), sounds, visions,  breath control (Pranayama), laughing, crying and so on. Dube also informed them that within a matter of four or five days he was feeling happy and invigorated and his body felt light. They had a doubt about how this could be considered as a sign of *Kundalini* awakening. Swamiji explained in brief that as per the *Kundalini* *Shastra* its location is fixed and it is a form of energy. It is very powerful and induces bliss. Its qualities may be experienced after the initiation. Initially its activity starts in the Muladhar centre at the base of spine near the genitals. Slowly the posture becomes steady and one experiences energy, inspiration and bliss. After the meeting, on the way to home Dadasaheb expressed his wish that such a powerful technique should be spread in Maharashtra.**

**During the next fortnight many more people came to Swamiji and were initiated. The prospective disciples used to bring coconut, fruits and money as offering but Swamiji did not touch them and gave them back as *prasad.***

**One day a calamity arose, caused by the intrinsic nature of *Kundalini* power. Purnanand, a resident of Hoshangabad belonging to the Aryasamaj sect (who believe in the Vedas but not in the caste system), was given initiation. Being interested in yoga, he had written to Pandit Satavalekar the well known expert on Vedas who had directed him to Govindaswami.  While he was practising yoga under his guidance he had learnt about Swamiji’s presence in Hoshangabad. He met Swamiji with a request for initiation and was asked to come the next morning. As soon as initiation was imparted Swamiji had acute stomach pain and had to rush to the latrine. When he returned he found Purnanand had profusely vomited. After cleanup they sat again but Swamiji again had loose motion and had to go to latrine three to four times. Curious, he asked Purnanand whether he had been poisoned anytime. Surprised, Purnanand confessed that he had been poisoned thrice in the past but had survived. He begged Swamiji’s forgiveness for what had happened. Swamiji replied that in this Diksha nothing remained hidden and Guru suffered as much as the disciple, but the power of *Kundalini* took care of everything and purified the system. Purnanand was relieved. He bowed and returned. Swamiji did suffer for some time due to this incident. Purnanand became a close associate of Swamiji and began spending more and more time in meditation.  This made his wife very angry with Swamiji and whenever she saw him used to sing a song which said, “Man becomes sanyasi shaving head while the home is ruined and his wife becomes as good as dead.”**

**Now let us return to Vamanrao. He, his three friends and Dadasaheb Parande continued visiting Swamiji and discuss the progress of the initiated persons. But either out of their conservative nature or because they had not yet developed faith in the new system, in spite of the more than dozen examples before them, none of them requested Swamiji for his own initiation. They were critically observing this new process which to them was totally unfamiliar.  So far their efforts and their knowledge of *Kundalini* awakening were limited to Hathayoga techniques which require a strict observation of postures and *pranayama*. However as they continued their association with Swamiji they developed confidence and Kashinath Mahajan was the first to request for initiation as he had to leave for his hometown. Swamiji promised to initiate him some time later when he visited his hometown since he was still not quite well after the Purnanand’s initiation.  However when next morning Mahajan had gone to Swamiji to bid farewell he initiated him through touch. Mahajan was passing through the yogic processes automatically for an hour after the initiation. Swamiji instructed him to continue this *sadhana* and not to tell his experiences to anyone.  But when he met his friends to tell them the good news, Vamanrao insisted that he tell them what exactly transpired. His Guru had told him not to tell anyone and on the other hand he could not displease his close friends therefore he sat again in the posture and automatically passed through the yogic processes again, his whole body gyrating accompanied by a certain fast breathing process called *Bhasrika*.  This resulted in the removal of all doubts from their minds about the new system.**

**A week later, noticing that Swamiji’s health was still not improving and going out for alms became difficult, Vamanrao, with his mother’s permission, invited Swamiji to live in his home. Swamiji, who had noted the goodness in Vamanrao agreed and thus a new phase started.  Swamiji’s health improved fast under his mother’s care and nourishment. He noticed the strict daily routine of Vamanrao including his practice of Hathayoga and *pranayama* for awakening *Kundalini*. One day he saw his Guru Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati in his dream who told him that he was not different from Swamiji, his technique of *Kundalini* awakening belongs to Datta-tradition and also that a lot of work lies ahead for him.  One day he requested Swamiji for initiation but Swamiji told him that since he was trying the *pranayama* system for awakening *Kundalini* he should continue to do so, it being not proper to interfere in the work of others. He also promised to do the initiation at proper time. Now Vamanrao had only to wait for the proper time. Since 1907 Vamanrao had always visited Narsobawadi on Gurudwadashi day. But this year in 1922 he did not go and remained with Swamiji. On the *dwadashi* (twelfth) day of the dark fortnight of Kartik month Swamiji had gone for an evening walk with Vamanrao and others. He decided to return home early.**

**At home Swamiji asked Vamanrao what he had gained by *pranayama* practice and whether his *Kundalini* was awakened by it. Vamanrao answered that it leads to feeling of lightness in the body but as yet it had not led to the *Kundalini* awakening. Swamiji asked him how long he was going to toil like this, to which Vamanrao replied that it depended on Swamiji. Swamiji was seated on a cot and Vamanrao on a carpet on the ground.  Swamiji asked Vamanrao to close his eyes and immediately energy entered Vamanrao’s body. His body began gyrating, jumping up nearly half a metre high like a frog. Breathing became very fast but regular. The state lasted for about one hour.  Vamanrao was experiencing something he was longing for and had not experienced before. He had achieved his goal.**

**After about a week Vamanrao left with Swamiji for Barshi making a detour to visit many hilly places in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. They visited the Jyotirlinga Ghrishneshwar, Ajanta Frescoes etc, Janardanswami’s *samadhi* at Daulatabad and so on. They also stopped at Hingoli, the native village of Shankarrao Ajegaonkar where he initiated Shankarrao’s brother Dattatreya. Swamiji then returned to Hoshangabad accompanied by Dattatreya who wanted to serve his new Guru.  Back in Hoshangabad more people were initiated including Dadasaheb Parande. In between he went to Amaravati where Parande was transferred. Later in 1924 Vamanrao invited him to Barshi where a useful and happy time was spent by the local seekers in the company of Swamiji. He was also taken to Pandharpur. Swamiji initiated many people including Vamanrao’s mother Umabai and sister Godavari. On return to Hoshangabad Swamiji wrote to Vamanrao authorising him to initiate new disciples starting with Gopikabai, wife of Vedmurthy Pralhadshastri Joshi. This initiation was done on Ananatachaturdashi day on 12 September 1924.**

**In 1926 Vamanrao left Barshi and joined NMV high School in Pune. On his invitation Swamiji came to Pune for the first time in 1928. Vamanrao used to live in a rented house at 20 Narayan Peth from 1926 to 1964. Swamiji often came to Pune and live with his disciple at this place months at a time from 1928 to 1951. It is in this place that Vamanrao reached his spiritual heights. He was now called Gulawani Maharaj or Guru Maharaj by his numerous disciples.**

**Swamiji travelled a lot in Maharashtra. In 1927 he went to Varanasi where he met his Guru Atmananda Prakash, now Shankar Purushottam Tirtha after Dandi sanyasa.  On Swamiji’s request he initiated him as Dandi sanyasi on 30th January and was renamed as Shri Loknath Tirtha.  He came to Pune many times and lived with his disciples, especially Gulawani Maharaj. His last visit to Pune was in 1952. He travelled all over India and during final years settled in Varanasi where finally on 9th February 1955 took samadhi after suffering from deteriorated health for some months. Jambuvantsingh, one of his close disciples was with him serving him throughout his illness. He had wished to see Gulawani Maharaj in his last moments but out of his love for his Guru he was engaged in performing readings of Gurucharitra to ameliorate the illness but it did not bear fruit.**

**Swami Loknath Tirtha was a very learned person expert in Shastras as well as Tantras and had attained Siddhis which he rarely used. He believed in the behaviour prescribed in the Smritis and was frankly critical if any seeker behaved improperly. He faced life dispassionately as it came, never accepting anything from anyone more than what was required for bodily survival.  Even good people have enemies and once he suffered ill health for months because of some black magic done on him. But he survived all calamities by the grace of his family deity Mother Kali to whom he was extremely devoted and as told by people She also was always present with him up to the last moment. Swamiji initiated hundreds of disciples and the spark was kept alive by Gulawani Maharaj and his successors.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj**

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# DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)

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# PART VII-3  FAMOUS DEVOTEES: Part  3

**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

**CONTENTS: Shri Saibaba Of Shirdi \*  Bibliography**

**Shri Saibaba of Shirdi falls in a class by himself. He is not known to have initiated any disciples but he has given spiritual guidance to aspirants.  But most people approached and are still approaching him even nine decades after his *mahasamadhi* for their worldly problems like desire for a child, especially a son, incurable illnesses and financial gains and he satisfies them all. That is why Baba probably has the highest number of devotees throughout India and abroad. His temples have been established in many countries east and west.**

** Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi**

**Actually, though his name is closely associated with Datta-parampara he himself was a devotee of Shri Rama. There is no outward connection between Baba and Shri Dattatreya but in many incidents it was indicated that he was no different from Shri Dattatreya. But then he also showed that he was no different from other deities too as will be seen later. The modes of the rituals at Shirdi, like the eternal fire, use of ashes, equal treatment to Hindus and Muslims etc. correspond to those of Nath Sect.**

**Mr. Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, one of Baba’s close devotees, has written Baba's biography "Shri Sai Satcharit" in Marathi verse form having fifty-two chapters.  This is the holy book of Sai-devotees as much as Gurucharitra is for Datta-devotees.  It was written with Baba's permission and in that respect it is unique. Baba used to lovingly call Mr. Dabholkar as Hemadpant. It is the name of a minister of Yadava dynasty famous for temple architecture in south India.**

***Baba’s appearance*   Mr. Dabholkar has described Baba as follows: Baba was about five feet and six or nine inches tall, with unusually long hands which reached below his knees. He always used to wear a gown reaching up to ankles and his head used to be covered by a white cloth. Sometimes he used to wrap an orange cloth round his waist under the gown. He used to have a black stick, about the thickness of a thumb, which he used to call "satka". He also carried a tumbler, tobacco and a pipe. He was always barefoot. He used to sit on an old piece of gunny cloth and apply ash or "*udi*" on everybody who came to see him and also give away a little *udi* as *Prasad* for taking away. He could very often be seen sitting in Dwarkamai gazing in the continuously burning fire. The way he slept was very odd. There was a plank about six feet long and only about eight inches wide which hung from the ceiling supported by rags. He used to sleep mostly on this plank but nobody ever saw him climbing onto it or getting down from it.**

**Though Sai Satcharitra gives a number of anecdotes concerning Baba, the time factor is missing as in most of our religious literature. Some of Baba’s devotees have done extensive research on Baba’s origin, early life and chronology of events.  For devotees the feeling of devotion is more important than chronology; however chronology makes the chart of Baba’s life clearer. The account of his life and activities given in the following is partly based upon the chronology given by M.V. Kamath and V. B. Kher in their book “Sai Baba of Shirdi” (See Bibliography) as well as upon Sai Satcharitra.**

** Paduka of Sai Baba**

**Birth: Sai Baba was born sometime between 1838 and 1842 AD at Pathri in Marathwada. It is located about 16 Km from Manwat railway station on the Manmad-Secunderabad line.  It was then in the Nizam ruled region.  Most likely, he was born in the Bhusari family who were Yajurvedi Deshastha Brahmins. Their family deity was Hanuman which explains Baba’s love for Shri Rama.  At the age of eight he left home with a Sufi Muslim fakir who was his guru.  Name of this *fakir* is not known definitely. Dasganu, one of Baba’s devotees mentions that Baba’s guru was Mr Gopalrao Deshmukh alias Babasaheb Subhedar of Sailu a town about 23 Km from Pathri. However Gopalrao’s *samadhi* situated behind the Venkatesha temple dates 30 years before Baba’s birth hence Mr Gopalrao cannot be Baba’s guru.  Apparently Dasganu has given his name without much inquiry. Baba had once told the story of his birth to Mhalsapati, according to which Baba was born in the family of a Deshastha Yajurvedi Brahmin in a village called Pathri and he was handed over to a Muslim fakir when he was a child.**

**Swami Sai Sharan Ananda (formerly Vaman Prangovind Patel) has said that Sai Baba told him that he was a   Brahmin and his guru’s name as Roshan Shah Mia. But he also opines that the name means Lord of Knowledge and could have been used figuratively by Baba.  Whatever the name may be Baba did serve him for more than twelve years and when he passed away Baba buried him under or near the neem (*margosa*) tree in or near Navalkarwada in Shirdi.**

**Baba talked lovingly about his guru whom he served for twelve years. He was a great *auliya* and was a personification of love and kindness always in the highest state of samadhi. He became Baba’s all-in-all, home, father and mother. He wanted nothing from Baba except faith and patience (*Shraddha* and *Saburi*) which Baba gave. These have become key words for all Sai-devotees. His guru taught him everything.**

***First appearance in Shirdi*  Sai Baba first appeared at Shirdi in 1851 (aged about 16 or 19 Years) and stayed in the village for two months. He resided day and night under a *Neem* tree which he claimed was growing over the tomb of his old Guru. After two months Baba disappeared from Shirdi.**

**Up to the age of 25 or 30 Baba wandered in the Paithan-Aurangabad region and probably elsewhere too.  Then he stayed in Aurangabad for twelve years during which period he instructed a fakir named Bade Baba or Fakir Baba or *Fakir* Pir Mohanmmad Yasinmia.  From here Sai Baba travelled widely in the Marathwada region and wandered to Dhoopkheda (or Dhoop) in Aurangabad District.  It is this visit to Dhoop village that triggered the events that took him again to Shirdi sometime between 1868 and 1872.**

***Baba settles in Shirdi*  Chandbhai, a Muslim trader and *patil* of Dhoopkheda had lost his mare and was searching for it in the jungles near Dhoop village. Standing under a tree all tired, he noticed a young fakir with pink complexion and bright eyes, wearing a gown and cap rolling tobacco for his pipe. The fakir also saw him and asked him where he was going. When Chandbhai told about his lost mare he smiled and said that the mare was not lost but was grazing among the bushes nearby. Chandbhai went there and recovered his mare. He came back to the fakir and bowed before him, sure that he was an *Avaliya* with supernatural powers. The fakir signalled Chandbhai to sit down and asked him to light the pipe which he had just filled. Chandbhai was nervous because he did not have anything with him for lighting a fire. The fakir smiled, took tongs from under his arms and hit it against the rock and suddenly red-hot embers were burning on that rock. The fakir picked up one and lighted his pipe. Now the fakir wanted to moisten the cloth for the pipe and there was no water. Again the fakir generated water the same way and offered the pipe to Chandbhai. Greatly impressed, Chandbhai invited him to his home. The fakir promised to come three days later and did so as promised. Baba was treated as an honoured guest. Chandbhai requested Baba to join the marriage party which was going to Shirdi for his sister’s marriage with Hamid the son of Aminbhai of Shirdi. Sai Baba gladly accepted. He stayed in Shirdi as guest of Aminbhai.**

**At Shirdi the party camped in the premises of the Khandoba temple under a banyan tree. The fakir was sitting under the tree smoking his pipe when Mhalsapati Sonar the owner and the priest of the temple who always welcomed and treated all holy visitors, felt attracted towards the fakir and addressed him, "Ya Sai (Welcome Sai)" in Marathi. Sai means Lord, God or fakir. The name stuck to the fakir who decided to stay in Shirdi. After marriage Chandbhai left Shirdi with Baba and returned to his village. However Baba returned to Shirdi alone two months later. He was then between 25 to 30 years of age.**

**After coming to Shirdi Baba first thought of staying in the nearby village Rahata and consulted Chandrabhan Seth who had business connections in Marathwada from where Baba had come. Seth offered him a place called Pawarwada belonging to Sand family but Baba decided to live in Shirdi.**

***Shirdi in Baba’s time*     At that time population of Shirdi was 2568, living in about 400 houses.  Besides Brahmins there were people of various professional castes like goldsmith, carpenter, ironsmith, tailor, potters as well as those belonging to scheduled caste engaged in trades like making leather and footwear.  It was a small but self sufficient village with two wells, two schools, two orchards, nine temples, two mosques, one *dharmashala (pilgrim rest house)*, a sugar mill and a flour mill. According to a statement by Mrs Tarabai Tarkhad, wife of the manager of the Rajabahadur Textile mills Pune, there was no street lighting or any arrangement for sweeping roads.**

***Early days in Shirdi*    In Shirdi he stayed for about two and a half years in the *babul* forest and then under a neem (*margosa*) tree for another four to five years. He finally shifted to the dilapidated mosque.   People cleaned the mosque which was later known as Dwarkamai. During this period Bayajabai mother of Tatya Kote Patil and wife of Narayan Teli, used to feed him as they could.  Bayajabai had felt an intrinsic love for Baba and had vowed she would not eat unless Baba ate first. She would go with the food basket in search of Baba in the woods and feed him. Baba considered her as his mother. Later, Baba saved her son Tatya Patil from many difficulties and raised him socially, even risking his own life to save him.**

**A Divine Jewel    In the early seventies Baba used to be very much alone. Only saintly people (like Bidkar Maharaj) visited him and he enjoyed those visits. At that time Shirdi sheltered two holy men one was Devidas who camped in the Maruti temple for last twelve years and the other was Janakidas Gosavi of the Mahanubhava sect.  Another holy man, Mr Gangagir Buwa of Puntambe used to visit Shirdi often. When he saw Baba in the Babul forest he remarked to Mr. Nanasaheb Dengle of Nimgaon that Sai Baba was a *chintamani*  (a mythical jewel that gives whatever you wish). Dengle then went to Babul forest to meet Baba and bowed at his feet. Saint Anandnath (aged 95 years) of Yewala Math and a disciple of Akkalkot Swami once visited Shirdi and seeing Baba exclaimed, "This is a precious real diamond."  Bidkar Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Samarth of Akkalkot met Sai Baba in 1873. Later in 1885 another disciple Anandanath Maharaj met Sai Baba and told villagers that Baba was like a genuine diamond lying in a dung heap.**

**After Baba shifted to the mosque (Dwarkamai) he was a little more regular in his habits.  Villagers used to consider Baba as a mad *fakir* but go to him anyway for medicines. Initially he used to give herbal medicines but later he began to give only the ash (*udi*) from the *dhuni* (continuous fire) maintained in Dawarkamai.**

**By 1878 Mhalsapati the priest of the Khandoba temple, Appa Kulkarni, Jagle and Dengle, when they realised Baba had supernatural powers, became ardent devotees began to accept Sai Baba as their Guru. It is this trio that helped Baba settle in the mosque. Dengle used to move in Government circles and knew many Government officials.. Around 1881 Madhavrao Deshpande who used to be a teacher in the Shirdi primary school accepted Sai Baba as his Guru.  Baba used to call him fondly as Shama and said that both of them had a relationship of many past births. At night Mhalsapati used to sleep near him and used to have discussions on serious metaphysical topics.  In the end, only Mhalsapati and Shama survived Baba.  By next year Chidambar Gadgil, the Mamlatdar was the first important official to consider Sai Baba as a man of knowledge and visited him**

**Somebody brought a bell and the custom of hailing the name of Shri Ram soon started. Baba used to sleep alternate nights at Dwarkamai and at a place called Chawdi where there used to be a program of singing *bhajans*.**

**Baba used to wear a white gown, but later, on request of Kashiram Shimpi he started wearing ochre and green coloured gown. In the early days he used to sit in trance under a *neem* tree, the place now known as Gurupadukasthan (place of Guru’s *padukas*). He used to give spiritual advice to his devotees while sitting under this tree. The branch under which Baba used to sit has sweet leaves while other branches have bitter leaves.**

**Baba took bath by himself using extremely hot water which would have scalded any ordinary person. After bath he went out to beg for alms in five houses, always the same five houses. These were the houses of: Bayajabai Kote Patil, Patilbuwa Gondkar, Nandram Savairam, Appaji Kote and Narayan Teli.  After that he went to a garden called Lendibag cultivated by himself where a leper by the name of Bhagoji used to escort him under an umbrella. He used to enter Lendibag and spend an hour or two alone. (On return from Lendibag there used to be afternoon Arati and thereafter lunch for all. Arati used to be attended by twenty to twenty-five persons. He also had a horse by name Shamsunder who used to stand steady during Arati and used to bend his front legs in obeisance at the end. Afternoon was crowded with devotees of all types, those in difficulties and coming for solace, those desiring material benefits and also those who wanted spiritual guidance.**

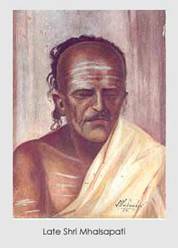
**By 1878-79 began to be recognized as a *jnani*, man of Knowledge.  Mr Chidambar Gadgil, who was a Mamlatdar called on him recognizing him to be a *jnani*.**

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**Satka and tumblers used by Sai Baba**

***Three day samadhi*  Towards end of 1885 Baba had a severe attack of asthma. He called Mhalsapati and told him that he was going into samadhi state for three days and was entrusting the body to him. He was to care of the body for three days.  He then went into *nirvikalapa* samadhi. Mhalsapati sat on guard near the motionless body. Some people wanted to take the body for funeral rites thinking Baba had passed away but Mhalsapati stood firm and did not permit it.  Baba came out of the samadhi three days later to everyone’s relief.  Mhalasapati was close to Baba who trusted him implicitly.  Other persons close to Baba were Madhavrao Deshpande alias Shama,  Bayajabai and Abdul.**

**Abdul    In Nanded there used to be a fakir named Amiruddin.  Abdul had set himself in his service since he was sixteen.  In the year 1889, Baba appeared in Amiruddin’s dream, put two mangoes in his hands and asked him to send Abdul to him.  When Amiruddin woke up he really found two mangoes in his hands.  He gave them to Abdul, and asked him to go to Shirdi and serve Sai Baba.  Abdul came immediately to Shirdi.  On seeing him, Baba said that his crow had come. Baba asked him to do his service with single minded.  From then onwards it was Abdul’s task to keep the Dwarkamai and adjoining places clean.  He also kept clean swept the paths on which Baba walked.  He also cleaned the lamps in Dwarkamai and helped Baba in Lendi Bagh.  Abdul washed Baba’s clothes daily in the nearby stream and kept them neat.**

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**In his leisure time he sat near Baba and read the Quran.  He put two big pots of water near the Nanda Deep in Lendi Bagh.  Baba set in the evenings daily at a fixed time near Nanda Deep.  He took water in his hands from the pots and reading something sprinkled the water on all sides.  After that he got up and looked seriously in all the directions in which water was sprinkled. People thought that this way Baba was protecting his devotees. Abdul survived Baba. His room next to Dwarkamai is still preserved.**

**Abdul used to write notes of his experiences. According to them Baba had profound knowledge of Quran as much as he had the knowledge of Bhagavad-Gita and other Hindu texts..**

**Nanasaheb Chandorkar   Narayan Govind alias Nanasaheb Chnadorkar was personal Assistant to the Collector of Ahmednagar in 1891 when he first met Baba.  According to Baba his connection with Nanasaheb Chandorkar went back to many previous births.  Baba always saw that such people with earlier connections came to him. These persons of course were not aware of their past connections with Baba. The way he made Nanasaheb Chandorkar do this is as follows.**

**One day in 1892 the village *munsif* Appa requested Baba’s permission to leave Shirdi (nobody left Shirdi without Baba’s permission) to go to Kopergaon to meet the  Deputy Collector who was camping there. The name of the Deputy Collector was Nanasaheb Chandorkar.  Baba told Appa to inform the Deputy Collector that Baba wanted him to come to Shirdi.  Appa was surprised because it was unprecedented that a fakir from a small village asking the Deputy Collector to come to him.**

**With great hesitation Appa gave Baba’s message to Nanasaheb Chandorkar.  Nanasaheb Chandorkar ignored Baba’s call twice or thrice.  But after some days, he came to Shirdi.  He had forgotten to bring an offering to Baba as is customary when one visits a saint or a deity. But he remembered he had a small packet of candy sugar and almonds kept in his pocket for emergency. He offered that to Baba who accepted it and distributed the contents to those present. Nanasaheb was surprised to note that that small packet sufficed for the two dozen persons gathered around Baba.**

**At the very first meeting with Baba, Nanasaheb felt that both of them knew each other from several births and felt very happy.  The acquaintance with Baba slowly grew and Nanasaheb Chandorkar became a staunch devotee of Baba. Nanasaheb Chandorkar believed that Baba was the incarnation of God. Baba later told him that they had special relations which went back for four births and that Nana was his responsibility.  Baba seemed to have such relationships in past lives with many people. He somehow managed to bring them to Shirdi and look after their welfare.  In some cases he would instruct them through dreams.  In some cases he would instruct persons in his entourage who knew such people to bring them to him.  He told a devotee that their relationship went back to seventy-two lifetimes.**

**There is no written record of Baba’s *leelas* (activities) prior to the visit of Nanasaheb Chandorkar.  Having noticed this, Nanasaheb Chandorkar gave diaries to all close devotees of Baba with a request to record whenever and whatever they noticed about his greatness, his *leelas* and miracles.  The compilation of Baba’s life history became possible to only because of the foresight of Nanasaheb Chandorkar.**

**Baba went to any extent to help his devotees spiritually and materially too. But he tested them also to see that they remained righteous.**

**Once Nanasaheb agreed to give to the caretaker of the Dattatreya mandir on the Kopergaon-Shirdi route, three hundred rupees towards the cost of building a *ghat*  (steps and landing platform to go to the river or lake shore).   But he could not raise that amount and next time he visited Shirdi, took a circuitous route in order to avoid the caretaker but suffered a lot on the way. On reaching Shirdi he found Baba in a foul mood. Omniscient Baba reprimanded him for not only not keeping his promise to the caretaker but also for trying to avoid him instead of confessing that he could not collect the promised money.**

**Nanasaheb was very careful in his behaviour but he made a mistake once more.  It happened like this. When Nanasaheb lived in Kalyan a beggar woman came to his home for alms. His wife gave her usual alms but the beggar woman demanded that she be given some *Bhajani*  (flour of mixed roasted grains) which his wife had made that very day.  That the beggar woman knew about *Bhajani* itself should have alerted the wife that she was no usual beggar. Not wishing to displease her she gave her a little *Bhajani*. But the beggar woman demanded more.  She gave some more and again the woman demanded more. This made the wife very angry and she called her husband.  He also got angry, called his office *chaprasi* (peon) and threw her out.  Before leaving the woman remarked, “If you didn’t want to give you could have said so but why do you have to call *chaprasi* to send me out? I shall go by myself”.**

**After a few months when Nanasaheb went to Shirdi he again got a cold reception. When asked, Omniscient Baba told him he did not wish to speak to a person who breaks his word and again reprimanded him for calling a *chaprasi* to drive away the beggar woman instead of nicely telling her of his inability to give.**

**Baba often told the importance of Guru’s place in the life of a disciple and how the disciple should consider his Guru as the Supreme Being.**

**The Jammer miracle as it is called occurred in 1904-05.  It concerns Nanasaheb Chandorkar's pregnant daughter Mainatai at Jamner in Jalgaon and shows not only Baba’s siddhis but  extent to which Baba would go to protect his devotees.**

**At that time Nanasaheb Chandorkar was Mamlatdar at Jamner, in the Khandesh District, which is more than 100 miles away from Shirdi.  Mainatai was about to deliver.  Her case was very serious and she was suffering from labour pains for the last two or three days.  Nanasaheb tried all remedies but in vain; he then remembered Baba and invoked His aid.**

**In Shirdi, one Ramgirbuva, whom Baba called Bapugirbuva, wanted at this time to go to his native place in Khandesh.  Baba called him and told him to stop at Jamner on his way home and give the Udi and Arati to Nanasaheb.  Ramgirbuva said that he had only two rupees with him and that amount was just sufficient for the railway fare up to Jalgaon and it was not possible for him to go from Jalgaon to Jamner, a distance of about 30 miles.  Baba said,"God will give." Then Baba asked Shama to write a well-known Arati composed by Madhav Adkar and give a copy of it with Udi to Ramgirbuva to be delivered to Nanasaheb.**

**That was Friday and he started at once.  He reached Manmad at 7-30 p.m.  and Jalgaon at 2-45 a.m.  At that time plague regulations were enforced and he was wondering how to reach Jamner.  To his great relief he heard somebody calling out "Who is Bapugirbuva of Shirdi?" It was a peon who was calling. He told him that he was Bapugirbuva.  Then the peon said he was sent by Nanasaheb and took him out to an excellent tonga (horsebuggy) with a good pair of horses.  They both drove in it.  The tonga ran fast and early in the morning they came to a stream.  The driver took the horses for watering them and the peon asked Ramgirbuva to partake of some eatables.  On seeing the beard, moustache and the livery of the peon, Ramgirbuva suspected him to be a Moslem and was unwilling to take any refreshments from him, but the peon satisfied him by saying that he was a Hindu, a Kshatriya of Garhwal and that Nanasaheb had sent these refreshments and that there should be no objection to his eating them.  After refreshments they started again. They reached Jamner at dawn.  Ramgirbuva alighted to attend a call of nature.  When he returned after a few minutes, there was no tonga, no driver and no peon.  He was dumbfounded.  Then he went to the neighbouring house and made enquiries, he learnt that the Mamlatdar was at home.  He went to Nanasaheb's house, announced himself and gave Baba's Udi and Arati to Nanasaheb.  At this time, Mainatai's condition had become very serious and all were in deep anxiety.  Nanasaheb called his wife and asked her to give the Udi, mixed with water for their daughter to drink and sing Baba's Arati.  He realised Baba's help had come at the most crucial time.  In a few minutes Mainatai delivered the child safely.   When Ramgirbuva thanked Nanasaheb for the peon, tonga and the refreshments etc., the latter was greatly surprised as he had not sent anybody to the station, and was not aware of any person coming from Shirdi.**

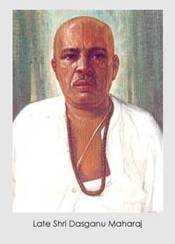
**Mr. Nanasaheb Chandorkar used to get transferred from place to place in the course of his duties.  Once when he was the Mamlatdar at Nandurbar in Khandesh his devotion to Sai Baba bore fruit, as he got an order to go and stay at Pandharpur.  Nanasaheb had to leave for Pandharpur immediately without even writing or informing anybody at Shirdi.  But on the way he wanted to give a surprise visit to Shirdi and salute Baba before going to Pandharpur.  Nobody dreamt of Nanasaheb’s departure for Shirdi, but Sai Baba knew all about this, as he was omniscient.  At the time he reached Nimgaon, a few miles from Shirdi  Baba was sitting and talking with Mhalsapati, Appa Shinde and Kashiram in Dwarkamai  when he suddenly said, "Let us all four do some Bhajan, the doors of Pandhari are open."  Then they began to sing in chorus, the meaning of the song being "I have to go to Pandharpur and I have to stay on there, for it is the house of my Lord."**

**Nobody believed that Baba knew Sanskrit.  One day he surprised all by giving a good interpretation of a verse from the Gita to Nanasaheb Chandorkar and removed his pride.**

***Miracle of the lamps*    Baba liked to illuminate the mosque with oil lamps. Baba used to visit the village shops for the oil and lighting many lamps with it sat on a stone nearby to watch the lights. But how long could they give the oil free? One day they united and decided not to give Baba oil free any more. When Baba came for oil they told they did not have oil. He returned without a word and sat in deep thought. Suddenly he got up, put wicks in the lamps, added water to the oil remaining in the oil container and drank the mixture. Then he added water to the container and poured it in the lamps and calmly lighted the lamps. The traders and other bystanders were watching this act of Baba. When they saw that the lamps were burning even with water they were surprised and bowed before Baba. They were now convinced that Baba was a great *Siddha* with divine powers. They surrendered to him.  Baba reprimanded them for lying about their not having oil and said that they could have told that they were unable to give it free. From that day the devotees increased in number.  This miracle happened in the year 1892.**

**In 1894 some fundamentalist Muslims who did not like worship of Baba in the mosque came in procession led by the Kazi of Sangamner but had to go back.**

***Regular worship* *and* *Aratis* From the year 1904, devotees started performing *aratis* three times a day in Dwarakamai.  Nana Chandorkar had finalised the procedure and the songs to be sung during the aratis.  For the afternoon *arati* all villagers assembled near Dwarakamai and sometimes Dwarakamai overflowed with the devotees.  Even though thousands flocked there, Baba blessed them all.  No true devotee ever left Shirdi empty-handed.  Some devotees thought that since Baba had not seen them nor heard their problems, how could they get relief? Baba knew their doubts and announced publicly, "Oh my devotees! You will get rewarded for the devotion and confidence you reposed in me.  The moment you enter Shirdi village all your worries and difficulties will be over.  Those who step into Dwarakamai, irrespective of their status, will get happiness.  This ‘mother’ is very benevolent."**

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**From 1909 onwards devotees treated Baba like a deity and began observing certain daily rituals common in worship of deities in temples. Seeing their love for him Baba had to reluctantly agree to all this. Whenever he slept in Chawdi they began Kakad Arati or early morning prayers using torch. (This is done symbolically to wake the deity who is treated as if it has all the attributes of a human being.) Then they took him in a procession to Dwarkamai where Baba used to sit on a stone. He then did his routine ablutions like cleaning the mouth, bath etc.**

***Dasganu Maharaj*  His original name was Ganesh Dattatreya Sahasrabuddhe.  He later became famous as Dasganu Maharaj and wrote biographies of many saints. He was with the police department which came under Nanasaheb Chandorkar who forced him to visit Shirdi many times at Baba’s behest.  His Guru Shri Vamanshastri Islampurkar had told him before taking *samadhi* to consider Shirdi Saibaba as his own form and that he would guide him.  Dasganu came to Shirdi for the first time in 1896, was strongly attracted to Baba and became his ardent devotee.**

**Once, Dasganu came from Nevasa to Shirdi without taking official permission to leave his headquarters. Next day there was to be an inspection of his headquarters by the police chief therefore he wanted to hurry back. But Baba, instead of giving him permission insisted that he should not leave. Dasganu was extremely worried because his absence would have resulted in his dismissal but nobody dared disobey Baba's instructions. About 3 AM in the morning Baba kicked him awake and shouting at him for sleeping asked him to leave immediately. Dasganu immediately left Shirdi as per Baba's instructions. It was night when he reached the dry basin of Pravara river where he encountered four persons whispering together under suspicious circumstances. Dasganu rushed forward with his pistol drawn in hand and ordered them to surrender. They were notorious robbers and were sharing the loot. Dasganu took them to the headquarters where his chief had already left after passing adverse remarks on Dasganu. But everything changed for the better when his chief learnt that he had captured the four robbers. Thus Baba timed his departure well.**

**Dasganu left Government service in 1903 and as per Baba's instructions settled at Nanded. He started performing *kirtans*  (discourses) and writing life histories of recent saints. The same year Dasganu's book 'Sant Kathamrit' was published. (Ch. 57 about Sai Baba's advice to Nanasaheb Chandorkar).  Dasganu’s *kirtans* on Baba’s activities spread Baba’s name far and wide. Dasganu's book 'Bhakta-Leelamrit' was published in 1906.**

**Ishavasya Upanishad and the Maidservant  Dasganu once started to write a Marathi commentary on the Ishavasya Upanishad. Though he translated it in *ovi* style verse by verse, he himself did not understand the essence of the Upanishad. Dissatisfied, he consulted pundits who also could not satisfy him and finally he resolved to consult Sai Baba. In his next visit to Shirdi after prostrating before Baba he put forward his difficulties about the Ishavasya Upanishad. Sai Baba, blessed him and said, "You need not be anxious, there is no difficulty about the matter; the maid-servant of Kaka (Kakasaheb Dixit) will solve your doubts at Vileparle, on your way home".  The people who were present then and heard this, thought that Baba was joking and said, "How could an illiterate maid-servant solve the difficulties of this nature", but Dasganu thought otherwise.  He was sure that whatever Baba spoke must come true.**

**From Shirdi he went to Vileparle in Bombay and stayed with Kakasaheb Dixit.  The next day morning  he heard a girl singing in clear and melodious tones a beautiful song describing the beauty of a crimson coloured embroidered Sari with pretty borders. He came out and saw that it was the maidservant girl who was singing it while cleaning the utensils. The girl was happy oblivious of being dressed in rags. Dasganu felt pity for her and arranged through his host to give her a new Sari. The girl was very happy and came next day to work wearing that new Sari. That day also she played and danced with other girls in happy mood.  But next day she was back dressed in her rags but she was as happy as the previous day. Now he realized that feelings of pain and pleasure depend upon the attitude of our mind.  On thinking deeply over this incident, he realized that he had received a practical demonstration of the lesson of the Upanishad - the lesson of contentment with one's own**

**lot in the belief that whatever happens, is ordained by God and is ultimately good for us.**

### *Radhakrishna Mai*    A 25 year old widow, Mrs Sunderabai Kshirsagar, arrived in Shirdi in 1907.   She came to be called Radhakrishna Mai.  She was blessed by Baba who used to send a part of food collected as *Bhiksha* to her.  One Balaji Patil Newaskar a great devotee of Baba used to keep clean all the passages and streets on which Baba walked daily.  After Balaji’s death this work was done by Radhakrishna Mai and after her by Abdul.

### Ideal devotionThis Balaji who was a farmer. He used to bring all his annual crop to Baba and took back only whatever Baba gave him for his family’s sustenance during the year.  This practice was continued by his son. One can only contrast this devotion with that of the devotees” who came (and come) to Baba only for their personal gains.

***Celebration of Ramnavmi and 'Urus' at Shirdi*   Mr. Gopalrao Gund a Revenue Inspector at Kopergaon was a great devotee of Baba by whose blessings he had got a son.  He suggested the idea of celebrating a ‘Urus’ (fair) in the year 1897.  Other Shirdi devotees Tatya Patil, Dada Kote Patil and Madhavrao Deshpande (Shama) approved of the idea and Baba’s permission and blessings for the same were obtained.  Their application to the Collector for permission to hold the Urus was first rejected on the recommendation of the village Kulkarni but was given later. Baba suggested that the Urus should be held on Ramnavmi day.  Simultaneously the Muslim devotees started the Sandal Utsav.  This idea of ‘Sandal’ procession originated with one Amir Shakkar Dalal, a Muslim devotee from Korhla.  This procession is held in honour of great Muslim Saints.  Sandalwood paste and scrapings are put in *thalis* (metal dishes) which are carried in procession through the village with incense burning before them and to the accompaniment of band and music. Then, after returning to the Masjid, the contents of the dishes are thrown by handfuls on the ‘Nimbar’ (niche) and walls of the Masjid.  This work was managed by Amir Shakkar for the first three years and then afterwards by his wife.  So on one day, the two processions, the ‘Flags’ by the Hindus and that of ‘Sandal’ by the Muslims, went on side by side, and are still going on without any hitch.**

**In combining the Urus and Ramnavmi it seems Baba had some end in view, in this, viz., the unification of the two festivals, the Urus and the Rama-Navami and the unification of the two communities - the Hindus and the Muslims.  As future events showed, this object was achieved.**

**In 1912 A.D. a devotee Mr.  Krishnarao Bhisma (the author of the pamphlet ‘Sai Sagunopasana’), came for the fair with Dadasaheb Khaparde of Amravati. He suggested that Birth of Rama with traditional rituals also should be celebrated on the Urus day with kirtan, *prasad* etc. Since 1912, this festival began to grow in scale gradually year by year.  From the 8th to 12th of Chaitra, Shirdi looked like a bee-hive of men.  Shops began to be set up in increasing numbers.  Wrestling bouts were also held.**

**Radha-Krishna Mai used to be a major support during these festivals. Her residence was full of guests on the occasion, and she had to look to their needs and also to arrange for all the paraphernalia of the fair.  Feeding the poor, so dear to Sai Baba, was done on a grand scale in this fair.  For this purpose, cooking on a grand scale and preparing various sweet dishes was done in Radha-Krishna Mai’s home. The rich and wealthy devotees took a leading part in this programme. Another work, which she willingly did was to clean and white-wash the entire Masjid, its walls and floor, which were blackened and were full of soot on account of the ever-burning Dhuni (sacred fire).  She did this work during the night when Sai Baba went to sleep every alternate day in the Chawdi.  She had to take out everything, including the Dhuni and replace them after thorough cleaning and whitewashing.  She worked hard during these festivals and that hard work and sincere efforts turned Shirdi into a Sansthan (State).  Paraphernalia increased.  Devotees presented a beautiful horse, a palanquin, chariot and many silver things, pots, buckets, pictures, mirrors etc.  Elephants were also sent for the procession.  Though the scale of celebrations with all the paraphernalia increased enormously, Baba ignored all these things and continued with his simplicity as before.  It is to be noted that both Hindus and Muslims worked in unison in both the processions and during the entire festival there has been no hitch or quarrel between them so far.  In the beginning about 5000-7000 people used to gather but in some years that figure went up to 75000.  There has been no outbreak of any epidemic or any riots worth the name during past so many years.**

## Construction of Sathe Wada      Rao Bahadur H. V. Sathe who was the Deputy Collector of Ahmednagar came to Shirdi in 1904.  He had come for an official work to Kopargaon and having heard about Sai Baba’s greatness he came to Shirdi. He became attracted to Baba who also took a great fondness to Sathe.  Sathe became close with Baba but there was not much spiritual progress in him.  The reason was that even with advancing age he could not control his lust.  He used to visit a woman of ill repute in Shirdi.  Sathe once went to see Baba before visiting her.  On seeing him, Baba asked him whether he was on his way to the ‘Shala’ (the word natakshala is used in Marathi for a woman of ill repute).  But Sathe, not aware of this nickname for the place, thought Baba was asking him about school (shala also means school) and gave some vague answer.  Afterwards, he went to the house of the woman and sat in the outside verandah, indulging in some pleasant talks.  After the pleasantries, when Sathe entered the house he was shocked to find Baba standing there staring at him with his sharp eyes, as if to caution Sathe.  Baba also made some gestures with his hand which appeared as though he was questioning him whether he had all the way come to Shirdi only to get ruined.  He immediately turned back and came to the mosque.  He fell at Baba’s feet and took a vow not to visit that woman again during his life time.  Then Baba blessed him with his raised hand.  In this incident Baba did everything silently without uttering a word.  Baba corrected the wrongs of his devotees in such a way that only those who committed them would understand without others knowing about them.

**Sathe purchased a piece of land near Gurusthan in the year 1906 and constructed a Wada (A large house) in 1908.  Naming it Sathe Wada it came to be used as a Dharmashala (resthouse) for devotees. It still stands with some changes. Baba regarded Sathe as his right hand in regard to all matters. Because Baba was keeping Sathe close to him and relying on him for everything the residents of Shirdi grew jealous towards him.**

***How devotion develops*    While Baba lived many persons came to him for their problems and were satisfied but that is not surprising. What is remarkable is that many persons who did not believe in his divine qualities and considered all the miracles to be a fraud became his devotees as soon as they met him. All such stories would fill a book but the following typical story illustrates the point.**

**Mr. Laxman Nulkar, a subjudge at Pandharpur was a confirmed atheist while his friend Nanasaheb Chandorkar, the *mamlatdar* (administrator) at Pandharpur was an ardent devotee of Baba. He tried many times but without success to induce Nulkar to visit Shirdi to meet Baba but finally Nulkar agreed to accompany Chandorkar to Shirdi on the condition that he would visit Baba only in western style dress and would not bow before Baba. Also that he would come only as a tourist and only if he found a Brahmin cook before he left for Shirdi.  Chandorkar smiled and agreed to these conditions. The same evening, a Brahmin came to Chandorkar for a cook's job and was sent to Nulkar thus satisfying the first condition. When the day of departure was fixed, Nulkar put one more condition that he should get the best quality Nagpur oranges for taking to Shirdi. Next day Nulkar found that somebody had kept a basket of hundred best quality Nagpur oranges in front of his door. Nobody could find out who kept them but the second condition was also fulfilled. Next day both friends left for Shirdi.**

**After reaching Shirdi Chandorkar was surprised to see that Nulkar had come to meet Baba in pure white Indian dress and not only that he prostrated before Baba who asked Chandorkar, "Who is this silly fellow you have brought with you?" Nulkar suspected that Baba knew about what he had said about him. When he told this to Chandorkar he consoled him telling him not get disturbed because Baba was an ocean of kindness. Next day Baba became wild on seeing Nulkar, abused him and said that it will be his "Satyanash" meaning destruction. Baba then held his head and hit it against a pillar. Everybody there quietly left. Chandorkar consoled Nulkar saying that Baba never does anything bad to anyone and he must have meant that not Nulkar but his sins will get destroyed. But Nulkar was worried.**

**That night Nulkar woke up suddenly at about two AM and developed a sudden craving for tobacco loaded betel leaf ("Pan"). He did not have any and he woke up Chandorkar who tried to convince him that in a village like that nobody was likely to give them Pan and tobacco at that hour. As Nulkar was pacing up and down the room somebody knocked on the door. Chandorkar opened the door to find a man from Dwarkamai who had come with four Pans saying that Baba had sent him because a devotee in that house was craving for it. He handed over the Pans to Chandorkar and left. Nulkar was watching all this with open mouth. Nulkar was no longer an atheist and became an ardent devotee of Baba.**

***In the image you worship*  Many visitors refused to bow to Baba or even to visit him for various reasons.  Noolkar above was an atheist and did not like to visit. There was a doctor from Bombay who was a devotee of Shri Rama and would not bow to any other deity.  A Ramdasi woman also got similar darshan of Shri Rama. Some were devotees of Dattatreya or Vithoba and insisted similarly.  There were others who would bow only to their Guru.  However in every case when they met Baba what they saw in Baba’s place was their own deity or guru and then they became Baba’s ardent devotees.**

**There are several incidents which go to prove Baba’s oneness with other saints. some typical incidents are:**

**(1) Muleshastri was a learned person in Shastras, the six *darshanas*, astrology and palmistry. He once came to Shirdi to meet Mr Gopalrao Buti am ardent devotee of Baba from Nagpur. Though he had intended to return to Nashik immediately, on the spur of the moment he accompanied others in the morning to see Baba. At that time Baba was distributing bananas as *prasad* to those present.  Muleshastri had a hidden desire to see Baba’s palm and extended his hand to hold Baba’s hand.  Baba ignored it and gave him four bananas. Silently Muleshastri returned to the Wada where he was staying and prepared to perform his daily *agnihotra* ritual.  Here in Dwarkamai Baba set out for Lendibag and remarked “Take *geru*  (ochre coloured clay used for paint) with you, I have to wear the ochre coloured robe today.”  By the time Baba returned to Dwarkamai afternoon *arati* was about to begin, Baba said, “Go to the newly arrived Brahmin and get *dakshina* from him. So Buti went to him and found him busy in *agnihotra*.   But out of respect for Buti he left it unfinished and accompanied Buti to see Baba with *dakshina*.  But being conscious of getting polluted by entering a *masjid* he made obeisance to Baba and offered flowers from a distance. Now Miuleshastri got a shock. While everyone else was seeing Baba sitting in Dwarkamai what Muleshastri was watching was his Guru Gholap in ochre coloured clothes. He ran up to the *masjid* and embraced the feet of his guru.  After arati was over what Muleshastri saw was Baba asking for dakshina. Muleshastri prostrated before Baba.**

**(2) Shri Vamanshastri Islampurkar, guru of  Dasganu Maharaj, had told his disciple before taking samadhi to consider Shirdi Saibaba as his own form and there was no difference between them and that Baba would guide him from time to time in future.**

**(3) A rich and religious Parsi gentleman named Ratanshi from Nanded once decided to visit Baba with the desire of getting a son.  Before leaving for Shirdi he gave a small party to the local Muslim saint Moulavi Jamalsaheb. That cost him three rupees and fourteen *annas*. When he visited Baba in Shirdi and put his hand in the pocket to make an offering of money, Baba said, “From the offering you are going to make deduct three rupees and fourteen annas and give the rest. I have already received three rupees and fourteen *annas* from you.”  It was much later that a puzzled Ratanshi with the help from Dasganu Maharaj related the two incidents.**

**(4) One Mr Pitale from Bombay came to Shirdi and bowed with folded hands before Baba. Baba took three rupees from his gown (*kafni*) pocket and said, “Bapu, I had given you earlier two rupees. Now add these three to those and worship them daily”. Pitale was surprised because he had never met Baba earlier. However on his return to Bombay his mother remembered that his father had once visited Akkalkot to meet Swami Samarth and Swami had given him two rupees with instructions to worship them daily. After his father’s death the daily *puja*  had stopped and the two rupees had been lost hence Pitale was not aware of it.**

**(5) There was a person from Goa who had taken a vow that if he got a job he would offer first month’s salary to Lord Dattatreya.  He did get a job for Rs 15 a month but forgot to complete his vow.  When he visited Shirdi after many years (his salary had increased to Rs 700), Baba asked him for Rs 15 and told him that he had completed his vow to Lord Dattatreya.**

***Mrs. Radhabai Deshmukh* There was an old woman by name Radhabai, mother of one Khashaba Deshmukh.  Hearing Baba's fame, she came to Shirdi with the people of Sangamner and after Baba's darshan resolved in her mind, that she should accept Baba as her Guru, and take mantra from Him.  But Baba never gave any such mantra so she decided to fast herself unto death until Baba accepted her as disciple and gave her Mantra.  She stayed in her lodging and fasted without even water for three days.  Shama (Madhavrao Deshpande) noticed this and reported the matter to Baba interceding on her behalf. Baba sent for her, asked why she was putting herself to such torture and told her his own story concerning his guru. He said, “Oh mother, why are you subjecting yourself to unnecessary tortures and hastening your death? You are really My Mother and I am your child.  I tell you my own story. I had a Guru.  He was a great Saint and most merciful.  I served him long, very long; still he would not blow any Mantra into my ears.  I had a keen desire, never to leave him but to stay with and serve him; and at all costs receive some instructions from him.  But he had his own way.  He first got my head shaved and asked me two *pice* as Dakshina (1 *pice* was one sixty-fourth of a Rupee.).  I gave the same at once.  But these two *pice* were not coins. They were: (1) Firm Faith and (2) Patience or perseverance.  I gave these two *pice* or things to him, and he was pleased.  I resorted to My Guru for 12 years.  He brought me up.  He was my sole refuge.  My mind was always fixed on him. This was Nishtha or Shraddha which is one *pice* of the Dakshina.  Saburi (Patience or perseverance) is the other pice.  I waited patiently and very long on my Guru and served him.  This Saburi will ferry you across the sea of this mundane existence.  Saburi is manliness in man, it removes all sins and afflictions, gets rid of calamities in various ways, and casts aside all fear, and ultimately gives you success.  Saburi is the mine of virtues, consort of good thought.  Nishtha (Faith) and Saburi (Patience) are like twin sisters, loving each other very intimately.  "My Guru never expected any other thing from Me.   Oh mother, my Guru never taught me any Mantra, then how shall I blow any Mantra in your ears? Just remember that Guru's tortoise-like loving glance gives us happiness.  Do not try to get Mantra or Upadesh from anybody.  Make me the sole object of your thoughts and actions; and you will, no doubt, attain Paramartha (the spiritual goal of life the truth.  No Sadhanas, nor proficiency in the six Shastras, are necessary.  Have faith and confidence in your Guru.  Believe fully, that Guru is the sole Actor or Doer.  Blessed is he who knows the greatness of his Guru and thinks him to be Hari, Hara and Brahma (Trimurti) Incarnate."  Instructed in this way, the old lady was convinced; she bowed to Baba and gave up her fast.**

***Bade Baba*Bade Baba the Muslim fakir in Aurangabad whom Sai Baba trained for twelve years came to Shirdi permanently in 1909. This Bade Baba was much respected by Sai Baba. He always sat on the right hand of Sai Baba.  After the chilim (pipe) was first smoked by him, it was then offered to Baba and others.  After the dishes were served, at the time of taking meals at noon, Baba respectfully called Bade Baba and made him sit on His left side, and then all partook of food.  Baba paid him also daily Rs.50/- out of the amount collected as Dakshina.  Baba accompanied him hundred paces whenever he was going away.  Such was his position with Baba.**

**While a second cholera epidemic was around, somebody brought an old goat to the Masjid . It was weak, and about to die.   Baba asked Bade Baba who was nearby to behead it with one stroke and offer it as sacrifice.  But he flatly refused, saying why it should be killed for no reason. Then Baba asked Shama to kill it.  He went to Radha-Krishna-Mai and brought a knife from her and placed it before Baba.  Knowing the purpose for which the knife was taken, she took it back.  Then Shama went to bring another knife, but stayed in the Wada, and did not return immediately.  Then Baba asked Kakasaheb Dixit to do the job. Kakasaheb went to Sathe Wada and returned with a knife.  He was ready to kill it at Baba's bidding even though he was a Brahmin who never in his life knew killing.  All the people wondered to see that Bade Baba, a Muslim was unwilling to kill it while this pure Brahmin was making preparations to do so.  He tightened his *dhoti* dress and with a semicircular motion raised his hand with the knife and looked at Baba for the final signal.  Baba said - "What are you waiting for? Strike!”  Then, when the hand was just about to come down, Baba said - "Stop, how cruel you are! Being a Brahmin, you are killing a goat?" Kakasaheb obeyed and kept the knife down and said to Baba, "Your nectar like word is law to me, I do not know any other ordinance.  I remember you always, meditate on your form and obey you always without bothering whether it is right or wrong.  Prompt compliance with Guru's orders is our duty and dharma".  Then Baba said to Kakaseheb, that he would Himself do the offering and killing business.  It was settled that the goat should be disposed of near a place called Takkya, where fakirs used to sit.  When the goat was being removed to that place, it fell dead on the way.**

**Hemadpant closes the account with a classification of disciples.  (1) First or best (2) Second or middling and (3) Third or ordinary.  The best kind of disciples are those who guess what their Gurus want and immediately carry it out and serve them without waiting for an order from them.  The average disciples are those who carry out the orders of their Masters to a letter, without any delay, and the third kind of disciples are those, who go on postponing the carrying out of their orders and making mistakes at every step.  The disciples should have firm faith, backed up by intelligence and if they have patience to these, their spiritual goal will not be distant.  Difficult practices like *pranayama* or Hathayoga are not at all necessary. When the disciples get the above-mentioned qualities, they become ready for further instructions and the Masters then appear and lead them on, in their spiritual path to perfection.**

***Dadasaheb Khaparde*  Dadasaheb Khaparde of Amravati, Member of the Central Legislative assembly and author of Shirdi Diary visited Shirdi in 1910.   In 1911 when Khaparde family was living in Shirdi one day their son got high fever which further developed into Bubonic plague. A frightened Mrs. Khaparde thought of leaving Shirdi and went to Baba for permission. She met him as he was coming near the Buti Wada during his evening rounds.  She informed him about his son having plague.  Baba consoled her and reassured her that the difficulty will pass. He then lifted up his gown and showed to all present, four fully developed bubos, as big as eggs, and added, "See, how I have to suffer for my devotees; their difficulties are mine." Seeing this unique and extraordinary deed, the people were convinced about how the Saints suffer for their devotees.  How their mind is soft and kind and how they love their devotees without any idea of personal gains regarding them as their own kin.**

***Gopalrao Buti*  Gopalrao Buti, a barrister from Nagpur was a disciple of Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon..  Having been attracted to Baba he made Shirdi his home since 1910.  Once he had a severe attack of diarrheal and vomiting which no medicine could cure. He went to Baba who made him sit, raised his finger and ordered not to go for evacuation of bowels or to vomit.  Both the afflictions stopped immediately. Another time Buti was asked to drink *kheer* as medicine for cholera, which also worked.**

**One day, while Buti was sleeping he had a dream in which Baba directed Buti to build a *wada* along with a temple. Buti woke up to find Shama who was sleeping in an adjoining room crying in his sleep. When asked Shama replied that he had a dream in which Baba said let there be a *wada* with a temple so that he could satisfy the needs of all.  They Buti decided to build the *wada* for which he along with Shama and Kakasaheb Dikshit met Baba and obtained his permission.**

**Construction started and then Buti had an inner urge to build a temple on the ground floor where he would install an idol of Murlidhar in the *sanctum* *sanctorum*.  Baba consented but remarked, “When the temple is built we shall inhabit it and ever afterwards live in joy.”  A platform for the idol was mae and an order for the idol was also placed.**

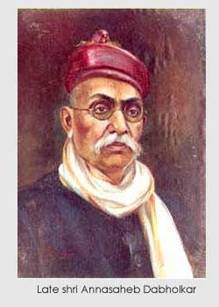
**As it turned out Sai Baba fell ill immediately afterwards and it was his body and not the Murlidhar idol that was installed there.**

***Mr.* *Dabholkar (Hemadpant)*   Mr. Govind Raghunath Dabholkar or Hemadpant came to see Baba in 1910 through the grace of Nana Chandorkar.  He was present when the episode of Baba grinding wheat himself and asking it to be thrown along village boundaries occurred.   When he was grinding four women came to help him.  But after the grinding was over they divided the flour into four parts to take with them. Baba became angry with tem and the women felt ashamed. But Baba asked them to  go and sprinkle the flour along village boundaries.  Hemadpant later was told that Baba had done this to keep cholera epidemic out of Shirdi.  It was later found from records that while cholera had taken lives elsewhere there were none in Shirdi.**

**Hemadpant wanted to write a book describing the activities and miracles of Baba.  Baba asked him to wait for some time.  In 1917 he again approached Baba through Shama for permission to write the book. Baba blessed him and gave permission. Thus Sai Satcharitra in Marathi was written.**

**After retirement from Govt. service Hemadpant found it difficult to make two ends meet on a meagre pension. But Baba saw to it that he had alternate jobs to make up the deficit.**

***Laxmibai Shinde*     Laxmibai Shinde was a good and well-to-do woman.  She used to work in the Masjid day and night.  Except Mhalasapati, Tatya and Laxmibai, none was allowed to step in the Masjid at night.  Once while Baba was sitting in the Masjid with Tatya in the evening, Laxmibai came and saluted Baba.  The latter said to her – “Oh Laxmi, I am very hungry."  She immediately left saying – “Baba, wait a bit, I am coming immediately with *Bhakri*." She returned soon with  *Bhakri* and vegetables and placed them before Baba.  But instead of eating it himself he gave it to a dog.  Laxmibai then asked – “What is this, Baba, I hurried home, prepared *Bhakri* with my own hands for you and you are giving it to a dog without eating it yourself? You trouble unnecessarily." Baba replied – “Why are you unhappy?  If the dog’s hunger is satisfied then so is mine.  The dog has got a soul; the creatures may be different, but the hunger of all is the same, though some speak and others are dumb.  Understand for certain, that he who feeds the hungry, really serves me with food.  Regard this as an absolute Truth." This is an ordinary incident but Baba thereby propounded a great spiritual truth and showed its practical application in daily life without hurting anybody's feelings.  From this time onward Laxmibai began to offer Him daily Bhakri and milk with love and devotion.  Baba accepted and ate it lovingly.  He took a part of this and sent the remainder with Laxmibai to Radha-Krishna-Mai who always relished and ate Baba's remnant *prasad*.  This Bhakri story shows how Sai Baba pervaded all the creatures and transcended them.**

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***Devotees from everywhere*   Baba never claimed himself to be a Guru but he was always surrounded by innumerable devotees of all castes, creeds and religions, including educated people like doctors, pleaders, government officials etc. from cities as well as illiterate villagers irrespective of whether they were rich or poor.  In the beginning Baba did not ask for *dakshina* but later he began to ask for it and at the end of the day distribute it around. Baba knew what was in everyone’s pocket so nobody could say he did not have the money or whatever Baba asked. Often the person himself did not know that he was carrying the very item Baba was asking him for and was surprised when he found it.  Baba’s grace extended even to animals some of whom, Baba informed, were men with bad *karmas* reborn as animals.**

**His devotees belonged to all religions, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Parsees as well as Christians. Political celebrities like Lokamanya Tilak (1917) and Dadasaheb Khaparde (1910), saints like Bidkar Maharaj, famous actors like Ganpatrao Bodas and even senior British officials like Commissioner of Central Provinces Sir George and Lady Curtis and Collector of Nagar district Mr. Macaulay visited him. Baba had the power to read what was going on in people's minds even when they were in faraway places and used to talk to them giving them solace. He always said "Allah Malik Hai" i.e. God is the master, "Alla Tera Bhala Karega" i.e. God will bless you but he never claimed himself to be God. Baba did not preach but managed in various ways proper lesson to be imparted to the person concerned. We have already seen how Dasganu was taught the meaning of Ishavasyopnishad. Two mottos from Baba’s teachings are Shraddha (Faith) and Saburi (Patience). Another remarkable thing about Baba was that ardent prayers for help reached him even from a distance and he helped. Baba cured people of their diseases and material problems as well. People found that his instructions, however strange or ill advised they may appear, should be obeyed otherwise they suffered losses.**

**Only a few incidents from Baba’s life are given in the above.  It would be impossible to give details of every incidence which even Sai Satcharitra could not fully cover.**

***Events Preliminary to Samadhi*    Baba knew about his own as well as others’ past births, so he must have known about the present lifetime also especially when his own *mahasamadhi* would be.  According to Kamath and Kher (See Bibliography), Baba, four months earlier to *mahasamdhi*, called Bade Baba’s son Kasim. Giving him Rs 250 he sent him to Aurangabad to see Fakir Shamsuddin Mian with a message to arrange for “*Nat*” i.e., singing the Prophet’s praise, *qawali* (Muslim *Bhajans* to the accompaniment of drum and clapping) and *langar* (feeding people). He also gave him a garland of *sevanti* flowers (*chrysanthamums*) to be given to Fakir Banne Mia with the message: “*Nou din, nou tarikh, Allah Mia apne dhunia le jayega. Marji Allahki.”*   Baba asked Imam Chhota Khan to accompany him.  They left Shirdi and reached Aurangabad railway station at 3 PM. Fakir Shamsuddin Mian had come to the station to receive them. He asked Imam Chhota Khan whom he knew, who the guests were that had come from Fakir Sai and repeated Baba’s instructions to him word for word.**

**Next day, Kasim and Imam went to Banne Mia’s house. He was standing with one arm raised in the air. The Arabs standing around him warned them not to disturb him lest they were beaten by him. An hour later  Imam took courage and put the garland given by Baba in Banne Mia’s neck.  Banne Mia lowered his arm and the Imam gave him Baba’s message. Fakir Banne Mia gazed at the sky and tears began to flow from his eyes.  Baba passed away four months later.  These actions of Sai Baba confirm his Sufi connections.**

**Fourteen days earlier to his passing away Baba made Vaze a devotee to sit in the Masjid and read the book Ramvijaya and sat listening. Vaze took eight days for the first reading took, three days for the second and during the third reading Vaze became tired and Baba made him stop and sent him away.**

**Two years earlier one Ramchandra Patil who was very ill was praying to Baba.  Baba had told him in a vision that he himself need not worry but Tatya Kote’s days were numbered and that in 1918 Tatya would die on Vijayadashmi day. Tatya was Bayajabai’s son. Though Baba asked Patil to keep this a secret he was very disturbed and told the prediction to Bala Shimpi.**

**There were other signs too. A few days earlier the brick mentioned earlier fell and broke due to the negligence of a devotee. When Baba came to know about it he said, "It is not the brick which has broken but it my life which has been smashed. That brick was my companion for life. Now I am not going to live much longer." And soon after that Baba started getting fever.**

***The Day of Samadhi*   True to Baba's word told to Ramachandra Patil, Tatya fell sick in September 1918 and was bed-ridden. He could not come for Baba's *darshan*.  Baba was also down with fever. Tatya had full faith in Baba and Baba in God. Tatya's illness worsened and he could not move at all but always remembered Baba.  The predicament of Baba began to grow equally worse. The day predicted, i.e. Vijayadashami was approaching and both Ramachandra Patil and Bala Shimpi were terribly frightened about Tatya because Baba’s words could not be false.  On Vijayadashami day which was Tuesday, the 15th October 1918 Tatya's pulse became very slow and he was expected to pass away any moment.  But a curious thing happened.  Tatya remained, his death was averted and in his stead Baba left his mortal coil at about 2-35 p.m.  It seemed as if there was an exchange.  People said that Baba gave up his life for Tatya. Only Baba can tell why he did so.  It seems, however, that Baba hinted about his own departure,  substituting Tatya's name for His.**

**On the day of his samadhi Baba sent home all the people who normally used to eat with him in the Mosque. Then he gave Laxmibai five rupees first and then four more rupees. Shyama alias Madhavrao Deshpande was sitting on the steps of Dwarkamai to whom he told in a weak voice to take him to the stone house of Mr. Buti. And those were the last words uttered by him. He kept his head on the lap of his devotee Bayajiappa Kote Patil and in that sitting position breathed his last.**

**There was a big gathering of his devotees and there were arguments about the relics. Muslims wanted to build a *Darga* while Hindus wanted to build his Samadhi in the house of Mr Buti as per the last words. Finally, the Mamlatdar of Kopergaon took a vote and decided to build the samadhi in Buti's house which was done thirty-six hours after his death. But during this period Baba's body did not lose its brightness.**

**Today Shirdi has become a place of pilgrimage where thousands flock to pray to Baba and take part in the daily rituals. His temples are being established in many countries. Baba is more like a God than a spiritual human being. There are many temples in many towns and cities devoted to him. Besides the organisation which manages the Shirdi Establishment many other institutions have been established that sponsor temples as well as social services to the public. One such organisation is Shri Sai Baba (Shirdi) Mission International based in UK which has a plan of installing 110 silver Padukas at various locations round the world of which more than a dozen have already been installed, some of them in Europe.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj**

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**DATTATREYA TRADITION -- (DATTA-PARAMPARA)**

**PART VII-4: FAMOUS DISCIPLES OF DATTATREYA PART 4**

**Dr V.V.Shirvaikar**

**CONTENTS:  Purohitswami • Shri Chile Maharaj • Concluding Remarks Bibliography**

**PUROHITSWAMI**

**It has been mentioned earlier that there are just a handful of autobiographies by saints and Purohitswami’s book “An Indian Monk” is one of them. It gives an insight into the conditions of birth, childhood and further spiritual progress of a saint.  As Shri Krishna tells Arjuna (Dnyaneswari or Bhagwadgita Ch 6)**

**“Arjuna, can there be anything other than liberation for one who longs for it? He is merely taking rest for some time, and even during that rest period there is such a happiness which even gods do not gain.  Had he practiced yoga then he would have attained liberation before death.  But because of lack of speed he had to stop in the middle; but liberation is reserved for him. (6:437-440). He reaches with ease the planes which even Indra the king of Gods finds it difficult to attain. But he gets sick of the incomparable enjoyments on these planes and says all the time, ‘Oh God! Why are there impediments in my path to liberation?’ Then he returns to the earth to be born in a religious family and starts gaining spiritual wealth. People in such family observe morals, speak clearly and truthfully and behave as prescribed in the Scriptures. (6:441-445). Vedas are the living deity for them, their actions are guided by *Swadharma* and discrimination, thoughts of God alone enter their minds and their wealth is their family deity. The person happily is born here on the strength of his meritorious deeds. (6:446-448). Or he is reborn into the family of a yogi of high level. Even as a child he is already loaded with knowledge because of his past.  Due to his mature intellect he knows all branches of knowledge easily. (6:451-454). His intellect develops further from the point of his death in the earlier lifetime and he is able to grasp mysterious subjects and even difficult things told by a Guru. (6:457,459). His sense-organs come under his control, mind becomes one with the *Prana* the vital life-breath and the *Prana* dissolves in the Consciousness.  Somehow, yoga practice also comes easily to him and he can attain the *Samadhi State* effortlessly. (6:460-461). He attains *Siddhis* even while he is an acolyte. (6:464). He is able to do his spiritual exercises effortlessly because he has reached the shores of the Self-realization after millions of years and after overcoming the impediments of thousands of births over millions of years.  He gets the power of discrimination and putting that also behind in time and going beyond thought he becomes one with the Brahman. (6:465-467). He then gets that indescribable and unfathomable bliss which is beyond words. He becomes the living image of the state of the Brahman, which is the ultimate destination. (6:469-470)."**

**The autobiography of Purohitswami bears out all this as will be seen even from his brief biography.**

***Birth and early childhood*    Purohitswami’s birth name was Shankar. He was born in Badnera, situated in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra on October 12, 1882.  His father Mr. Gajanan Purohit was a wealthy and religious Maharashtran Brahmin. He was a man of principles and with a**

** Shri Purohitswami**

**basically detached nature. Gajanan’s father died when he was only eight years old and his mother Akkasaheb leaving the inheritance to her stepson to avoid disputes went to live with her brother in Satara District taking young Gajanan with her. At a tender age of fifteen Gajanan  took up a clerk’s job in the then Great Indian Peninsular Railway (now Central Railway) and came to live at Badnera.  His first two children were daughters.  Gajanan prayed to Lord Shiva for the gift of a boy. His prayers were answered and he was blessed with a boy whom he name Shankar. (Two more daughters and one son followed later). He rose to become chief of administration in the GIP Railway but for health reasons left his job and settled in Amaravati working as a clerk. He was never attracted towards wealth.**

**Akkasaheb herself had a sound spiritual base. She was a keen devotee of Goddess Mahalakshmi. When Shankar was only eight, Akkasaheb told the family members that she was going to leave her body that afternoon. She asked her bed to be spread and lay down on it with a cloth belonging to her late husband which she had still treasured.  She lay down on the bed, drank a little Ganga water and left her body calmly with the name of Goddess Mahalakshmi on her lips. Such was Shankar’s (Purohitswami’s) family background. Before the final moments she had called Purohitswami and with her hand on his head blessed him saying that he would realize Truth.**

**Right from childhood Purohitswami showed keen interest in religious festivals. His thread ceremony was performed at the age of nine after which he was entitled to carry out the regular daily rituals assigned to Brahmins. Yogis and saints always used to give him special attention for they apparently realised his spiritual status from earlier births.  His father Gajanan was well read in religious literature. He was a devotee of Shri Dattatreya and used to read Gurucharitra daily. In his company Purohitswami realised that devotion to God is pure and holy by itself and one should not ask Him for petty things in life.**

**After passing the Matriculation exam at the age of sixteen he joined Morris College in Nagpur in Arts branch. Like his grandmother he was also attracted towards Goddess Mahalakshmi and spent nights pining for her vision.  One night she did come in his dream and asked for what he wanted, but he remained tongue-tied. She kept Her blessing hand on his head and disappeared. He woke up happy now sure of Her support.**

**Introduction to the Occult  He was never interested too much in studies but somehow managed to reach the final year of BA with philosophy as special subject. His professor of philosophy recognised his interest in the spiritual field and advised him that the bookish knowledge of philosophy would not be useful to him and that he should consult a yogi. He then introduced Purohitswami to the Shankaracharya of Shivgangadham who was a learned person well versed in yoga. Purohitswami used to visit him every evening for some time. Later he met a sage, a person who had experienced Self-realisation, who showed him the power of the *Siddhis* by coming out of a locked room and by floating above ground. He told that Purohitswami also would experience these *Siddhis* in future and would realise that Brahman is only real and the world is unreal. Then he blessed him in Shri Dattatreya’s name keeping his hand of blessing on Purohitswami’s head.  He also told him that he was going to leave next day for Varanasi and offer his body to the Ganges.  Subsequently Purohitswami received a telegram from a disciple that he had really done so at sunrise as planned.**

**He began to live an austere life and slowly lost his liking for luxurious mode of living. He also realised that his so called friends were not real friends but jealous, ungrateful persons indulging in spreading all sorts of rumours about him. He remembered his father’s words that: *if one wishes to attain high ideals and realize God then lesser one keeps contact with people more would it lead to ultimate happiness.* He began regular reading of Gita and Gurucharitra and practising yoga and sitting in deep meditation.  He used to observe certain austerities like sleeping without a pillow on a straw bed (made of *Darbha* grass), bathing thrice daily followed by worship and *japa*.**

**During vacations Purohitswami used to go in search of saints, listen attentively to their advice and serve them. He realized that each saint lived and behaved differently but he never indulged in judging them because he believed in the metaphor his father used, “When we eat a mango we never bother about the tree from which it came; whether it was a five year old tree or fifty year old, whether the tree is planted by a crook or a saint. Mango will always taste like a mango. One should just enjoy it.”  He also noted that these great persons never spoke ill of one another but it was their disciples who in order to show the greatness of their own Guru indulged making bad propaganda about others. He also realised common man’s inability to understand teachings of such great persons due to his own limitations.**

**He failed in his BA examination but passed it later as an external student from Calcutta University in 1903. He then went to Pune to study law and *en route* visited many holy places of Dattatreya worship such as Narsobawadi, Oudumber and Kolhapur. At Hubli he met the great saint Siddharudha Swami who, to the surprise of his disciples, came out specially to bless him even though it was not the normal time for visitors.**

**For the final year of his law course he joined a college in Bombay taking a teacher’s job for financial support and residing in Kalyan, a suburban town about 60 Km from Bombay. His yoga practice continued. To keep his body and mind pure he limited his diet to milk and fruits. He used to prefer *Siddhasana* posture which all big yogis use. He preferred the easily achievable Rajayoga to the Pranayama of Hathayoga, which, unless practised under an able Guru, can be harmful, leading even to permanent damage. One day he saw Shri Dattatreya in his vision and realised that this was the deity he was pining for. But he also realised that all these deities are ultimately the same and take form according to individual mind and perception.**

***Meets his Guru*    His seriousness of the mind and inner understanding developed fast after he started worshipping Shri Dattatreya. One day while he was lying down on his grass mattress he began to cry with the thought that God was very hard hearted but probably he was not yet worthy of meeting Him. Just then one of his friends came and told him that he had come to take him to a great yogi saint who was staying with his friend.  They went to a Chawl (tenement building) called Kirtikar Chawl.  The yogi who was sitting on a tiger skin got up as soon as he saw Purohitswami and as their eyes met embraced Purohitswami saying, “We are meeting after many days isn’t it?”  Purohitswami experienced indescribable bliss in that embrace. That acquaintance was of previous births.  The yogi made him sit by his side, to the utter amazement of everybody.  They talked for a long time. The yogi was thin with hardly any flesh on him but very effulgent.  Fragrance was emanating from him. Purohitswami could feel his strong spiritual vibrations. He assured that God was taking care of him and he would experience Him one day but he should keep patience. Then blessing him he bade farewell and Purohitswami left. Purohitswami did not know at that time that it was this friend, only four years older than himself, who was to be his Guru.  This saint’s name (or rather surname) was Natekar, who later took the monastic name Hamsa Swami.**

**Purohitswami realised that it was necessary to be regular in the yogic practice and the time should be fixed. It was no use practising yoga for a long period one day and giving it a break the next day. He kept aside all books including Gita but began reading Avadhut Gita, the advice of Shri Dattatreya to Kartikswami. He also stopped visiting holy places and discussions with people. While he was preparing for his law examination he had a vision of Shri Dattatreya in the form he was worshipping him. He said, “My child, why are you going here and there? Come to me.”**

***Visit to Girnar*   Immediately after he wrote the last paper of his final law examination, he went to meet his yogi friend Mr Natekar who was preparing to go to the Girnar Mountain, the famous place associated with Shri Dattatreya. He invited Purohitswami to accompany him. They camped at a friend’s house for three weeks spent in yoga practice, meditation and meeting visitors.  They set forth to climb the mountain on Dattajayanti day, the day of the birth of Shri Dattatreya, which that year in 1907 fell on twenty-fifth December. Purohitswami had become weak due to his restricted diet but his friend was giving him courage. It was necessary to reach the place of Dattatreya Padukas before evening. By afternoon they reached the Gomukhi Kund, a small lake where they took a little rest in the Shiva temple. Purohitswami felt fresh after a bath in the cold lake water. While he was praying on the lake shore he saw an extremely beautiful woman standing under the Oudumber tree. She was a *yogini* who had come to meet him and give him her blessings. She reassured that by the blessings of his Guru all his wishes would be fulfilled. They reached the Dattatreya hill, their final destination just after sunset. Due to the extreme weakness Purohitswami fainted when he touched the Padukas but in that unconscious state itself he had a vision of Shri Dattatreya who again asked him to come to him and not wander here and there. He asked him to do *tapas* for attaining him.  They then returned to Junagarh.  Purohitswami was happy that he was accepted by Shri Dattatreya. His friend Mr. Natekar was instructed to go to mount Kailas in the Himalayas. Purohitswami set for Amaravati.  *En route* he visited Shegaon, famous for the great saint Shri Gajanan Maharaj, where he met his father. Gajanan Maharaj told his father not to worry about his son.**

***Serves Shri Dattatreya at Mahur*    From Amaravati Purohitswami went to Mahur, another place associated with Shri Dattatreya. It is the place where Shri Dattatreya comes every night for sleep. First he reached Yavatmal from where, instead of taking the road, he proceeded to Mahur on foot through the jungles. After two or three days travel without food, he came to a temple at the base of a hillock. There he met an old man, the temple priest, who had been waiting for him because only the previous day he had a vision in which God told him, “My darling boy is coming tomorrow. Look after him properly.”  Then he asked him to take bath and freshen himself because it was time for the evening *Arati*.  It was in this temple that Shri Dattatreya came to rest at night.**

**It was a beautiful temple, built in stone, with a large assembly hall in front.  There was a small cot in one corner.   He was told that this was where Shri Dattatreya rests at night. The priest joined by Purohitswami burnt incense, recited Vedic hymns and sang *arati.*  He then made an offering of *naivadya* (food offering) praying Shri Dattatreya to accept it and come there for the night rest.  They then spread a clean white bed sheet on the cot, a woollen Kashmiri shawl and kept a soft pillow to which rose scent was applied. Lighting incense sticks they sang *Shej-arati,* thelast prayers said before deity before the deity sleeps. (Though God is formless and attributeless, for the purpose of worship a form is assigned to Him. Corresponding human attributes are also assigned and naturally it is assumed that the deity sleeps at night, gets up in the morning, cleans his or her mouth and partakes of food twice daily as man would do.)   The priest then told Purohitswami, “This is the bed that you were so anxious to see. If you are fortunate then you will see Shri Dattatreya.”  He further assured, “He comes here every night any time after about eleven and you will know of his presence by the sound of his sandals or some other sign.  Perhaps you may also see him when in the early morning he leaves for Varanasi to bathe in the Ganges. He is so merciful that he will make you know of his presence some way or other.”  The priest then locked the temple door and invited Purohitswami to his home for a meal.  Purohitswami declined the invitation so he brought him some milk. After some discussions on spiritual matters and exchange of divine experiences he left, leaving Purohitswami in the assembly hall alone to experience Shri Dattatreya’s presence.**

**Purohitswami sat in the cold dark hall repeating God’s name, his faculties alert for any sign of Shri Dattatreya’s arrival. Around one a.m. he heard the sound of sandals treading the ground, and the whole atmosphere was filled with a divine fragrance. He stood up to welcome his Master and made obeisance repeatedly with folded hands. He was drenched in sweat and his eyes were full of tears of joy. He was standing like that for a few hours. The sound of the sandals again came, this time receding. It was a sign that Shri Dattatreya was leaving after the night’s rest.**

**The priest was happy to hear of his experience which was repeated the following night also. On the third night, with the priest’s permission, he decorated the bed with flowers. He had the same experience of previous nights. He could hear the sound of the cot when the occupant turns on sides. Again in the morning he heard the door being opened and sounds of receding sandals amidst entrancing fragrance. Next morning when the priest opened the temple door he was shocked to see the creased bed sheet and the shawl lying on one side as happens when one gets up from the bed. The signs of somebody having *physically* used the cot were evident and the priest was certain it was the result of Purohitswami’s intense devotion and deep faith. This was the first time he was seeing such an event.**

**Purohitswami left after bidding farewell to the old priest accepting his blessings. When he emerged from the forest he saw a yogi who was naked and was looking as if he was staring into the infinite. Purohitswami approached him and made his obeisance. The saint muttered, “Behold the darling child of God who is struggling to get to Him.” and hurried away.  Purohitswami was sure these remarks referred to him, but the whole thing happened in a flash moment and appeared like an illusion.**

***The drinking yogi*     From Mahur Purohitswami came to the nearby town of Darva with the intention of meeting a sage. This sage, highly respected for his knowledge, could always be found in a tavern drinking liquor but was never affected by it. He used to say, “You people do not need advice or wisdom, you are born with it. But for these people who come here the best thing they have is liquor and they offer it to me and I give them in return the best thing I have that is the power of yoga.”  Purohitswami was staying with a pleader friend of his in Darva.  The sage unexpectedly came there to meet Purohitswami and advised him to get married assuring him that his Guru would see it would not come in the way of his spiritual progress.**

***Marriage* His father decided to settle permanently in Pune and came there with the entire family. Soon after coming to Pune he arranged for Purohitswami’s marriage to Godavari, a good girl from middle class family. She mixed well with his family, understood her husband’s love for the spiritual path and gave him her full support. Purohitswami would have liked to observe celibacy, but now that he was married the *Shastras* required that he father a male child in order that the family lineage continued. It would have been unethical to hurt the feelings of his family who dearly loved him and he compromised himself into following a family life leaving everything to the will of God. Their first child was a daughter. After her birth his wife also joined him in spiritual sadhana.**

***His Guru nominated*   While his wife had gone to her mother’s place for the delivery of their daughter Purohitswami’s *kundalini* was awakened as a result of his yogic practice. He passed now through a mixture of divine bliss and internal physical torture which many persons (but not all) suffer after the activation of Kundalini. This state lasted for three months. Purohitswami had considered Shri Dattatreya as his Guru from early days. One day he had a vision of Shri Dattatreya in which he was clearly told that “The person whom you have so far considered your friend is your Guru. There is no difference of any kind between him and me. I am worthy of his grace and he is worthy of mine. In future he shall be your Guru.”**

**When he told this to Mr. Natekar he gave a sweet smile and embraced him. Purohitswami accepted his discipleship and sat at his feet. Mr. Natekar came from a rich family known for their good, ethical behaviour and religious nature. His father was a famous advocate who had handed over his share of property to his brother after their father’s death.  Purohitswami’s Guru was married and had two daughters and a son. He had completely devoted himself to the spiritual path. He had given away all his property in charity keeping just enough for family’s survival. He was fully supported in his endeavour by his wife. He had considered Shri Dattatreya as his Guru and learnt yoga from various yogi saints. He had also made a pilgrimage all over India surviving on alms. Thus he had a lot of experience of the spiritual as well as the materialistic world. He had many disciples whose call he heard telepathically. Sometimes he would suddenly get up as if he has received a message and say he must go urgently and somehow he would reach that disciple who might be in need of his help or be in the final moments of his physical life.**

**His Guru came to stay with him in Pune and he had full opportunity to serve him. But his Guru always treated him like a friend. Whenever Purohitswami prepared bath water his Guru would go into a deep trance and come out of it after Purohitswami recited some Vedic hymns. He had achieved complete unity with God.  Their stay together was very helpful to Purohitswami in overcoming many difficulties in his yogic practice. His Guru toured Maharashtra for six months taking Purohitswami with him. During the tour they had discussions on yoga and spiritual topics with many yogis and other people. Purohitswami realised that he himself had also developed certain powers for healing.**

**During the travels Purohitswami received instructions from Shri Dattatreya to start writing. He did not begin to write immediately and that day the vision was repeated. On the third night Shri Dattatreya again came in the vision and telling him that he was aware of his unwillingness to write but asked him to write for his sake. And when he sat for writing, he wrote three books in English, “In Quest of Myself”, “Harbinger of Love” and “Song of Silence”, taking eight days for each. Later he wrote two more books, “Honeycomb” and “At your Lotus feet”. Later he also wrote poems, a drama, a novel, and a practical translation of Gita in Marathi.  Besides he also wrote articles in Hindi and in Sanskrit on the topic of God.**

**After the birth of daughters in 1910 and 1914 and a son in 1915 the way for his adopting *sanyasa* was cleared according to the Shastras, (subject of course to the consent of his wife). His wife agreed to give her consent. After bidding farewell to his parents and family he left for Girnar where his Guru was waiting for him. But he did not become a *sanyasi* immediately.**

***Humility in service*   His Guru used to tell him that there was nothing new in the path of yoga. Every day the same steps are to be repeated. More we concentrate on the inside more one forgets the outside world. The more you concentrate on God the less your self-interest becomes, and your attention is drawn towards perfection. Pursuing your goal with complete determination strictly and without bothering about anything else is the only proper way to attain it.**

**Purohitswami found pleasure in serving his Guru. There was no duality between him and Guru.  Serving him was not a service at all. But real test lay in serving somebody who had no love or respect for you. Purohitswami therefore took up a 24-hour job with a person on a small salary. His wife and children also came to live with him. Their lodging and boarding was part of the wages. He worked for four years for an unappreciative person attending to his trade in the combined role of accountant, clerk, manager and labourer all in one. Only his Guru’s strength carried him through. He experienced during this stint the truth of the dictum “Rich can do no wrong”. At the end of the four years his family went to stay in his Guru’s ashram and Purohitswami himself went to Mumbai. The rigours of the job had weakened his health. But a Gujarati friend took care of him and he recovered in about two months. He made one more visit to Girnar during the stormy monsoon weather of July dressed only in a gown and possessing only a brass pot for water.**

***Pilgrimage*    By 1923 he had passed through the three stages of life, Brahmachari (celibate), Grihasthi (householder) and Vanaprastha (living in forests), the latter being spent in the Guru’s ashram for nine months working on farm jobs, as a mason and carpenter besides managing the routine worship in the ashram. One day his Guru called him and instructed him to go first to Girnar and from there to visit all the important holy places in India, from the south to the north in the Himalayas. Many of these places were related to Shri Dattatreya. He was to observe certain rules very strictly. They were:**

**(1) To live by begging for alms only once in a day and only in one house.**

**(2) To accept invitation for meals without bothering about who has invited.**

**(3) Not to observe any caste restrictions.**

**(4) Never beg for money or clothes.**

**(5) Accept hospitality from any home only for one day unless requested by the host.**

**(6) Accept cooked food.**

**He then gave him a begging bowl and bade farewell. Purohitswami remembered his Guru telling his mother sixteen years earlier that the day she would see begging bowl in her son’s hand would be the day of rejoicing.**

**Purohitswami went to Girnar and from there to the holy places all over India from Himalayas to Kanyakumari again in the Himalayas to Rishikesh, Uttarkashi, and Badrinarayan.  He travelled by whatever transport offered to him and if none then on foot. He had no money and could ask none for it, but somehow somebody always came along to help him either with a ticket or ride in a vehicle for the next stage of his journey. Many people whom he had never seen in his life before gave him shelter during his travels and felt happy in his company and talking to him. Sometimes his presence brought cure to the sick in the house and they were grateful.**

**Hand of Shri Dattatreya    Purohitswami left everything to God’s mercy and saw His hand working in times of need. Once while going to Himalayas from Hardwar, a person who had promised to give him some money next morning for his travels did not turn up. However as Purohitswami was leaving he came running and told him that he had forgotten his promise as he was engrossed in a worship but a sanyasi had come and reminded him. The person had rushed home to bring the five rupees for giving to Purohitswami. He had asked the sanyasi who he was and was told, “I am Dattatreya.”  Purohitswami thanked the person and explained to him who Dattatreya was. Purohitswami felt sorry that Shri Dattatreya had been put to so much trouble for his sake. During the dangerous travels through treacherous paths in the chilly Himalayas a dog suddenly joined him and accompanied him until his return to the plains and then disappeared as suddenly. He met a saint who invited him for meals. Purohitswami stayed with him for five days. At night while everybody was shivering he saw the saint sweating, such was his yogic attainment. Purohitswami had nothing new to tell him because the saint knew Purohitswami’s mind inside out. On the other hand there was plenty to learn from him. Actually the saint told him before departing that he had a deep love for Purohitswami and had specially come there to meet him.  After five days he asked Purohitswami to continue his pilgrimage and bade him farewell.  There was even an incidence when he was saved from going on a wrong trail in the mountains by Maharshi Vyasa himself.  But he came to know this two years later only from a saint when he returned to Pune.  Such are the spiritual relations not comprehensible to worldly people.**

**Before going on the pilgrimage Purohitswami had kept away from public contact as much as possible to avoid disturbance in his *sadhana* (spiritual efforts). Many monks try to remain aloof from public for the very same reason and often do their *sadhana* in the solitude of deep forests.  But it is one thing to avoid the world and another to face it and live in it without getting disturbed by vagaries of its behaviour. The former is comparatively easy but real test of equanimity which is the main sign of a yogi lies in the latter. The pilgrimages such as Purohitswami was doing were meant to prepare the seeker for developing equanimity. Purohitswami now had to eat whatever was offered to him and sometimes nothing at all.  In India it is part of religion and culture to feed a guest and especially *sadhus* who in turn bless you and share some of their spiritual knowledge with you if you are interested.  But then not all are generous. He met an old lady who gave him  stale *puris* even though fresh ones were available, and in Kashmir where he was entertained by a Government official, the keeper of the guest house where he was sheltered used to divert the good food sent for him to his own starving family. In Mathura, the place made famous by Shri Krishna the ocean of compassion  and notorious by the greedy priests, the priest of a temple to whom Purohitswami approached for alms, instead of giving alms, directed him to buy food from outside with own money. But these were exceptions which go to make the world what it is.  He had to taste all sorts of food typical to the local customs: the sweets of Madhya Pradesh, extremely hot food of Andhra, food with lot of tamarind in Tamilnadu, the spiced tea of Gujarat, the salted tea of Kashmir and so on, and digest it. He had to accept and live on food which he had never liked earlier. This created a type of attitude of acceptance and removed all love of bodily pleasures. On his return Purohitswami was ill for several months with weak heart, liver, kidneys and what not. Allopathic treatment did not work and finally he was cured slowly and steadily by Ayurvedic treatment given by one of his friends.**

**One day his Guru called him and expressed satisfaction at his physical and spiritual progress and suggested he should go abroad. There were many persons there who were impressed by his poems.  In India itself the principal of the Wilson College, Father Scott was very much impressed by his poems and had suggested that he should visit England. Now the same suggestion came from his Guru.  After arranging for funds and getting introductions to various personalities abroad he left for England in 1930. While in Paris he again suffered from influenza and doctors had given up hopes. But that night he saw his Guru in person by his bedside in the hospital where he was kept. He kept his hand on his chest, gazed into his eyes lovingly and vanished. Purohitswami recovered to the surprise of all.**

**Before the departure for England his Guru had told him, “Remember that you are the Brahman.”  Purohitswami says, “People ask that if this world is filled with God then why good and evil were created and why the differences of big and small exist? The answer is that the norms of the practical world are not applicable to the divine. The differences come from intuitive understanding and are to be understood individually. Others cannot give you that understanding. When we personally enjoy the bliss of attaining the Divine with concentrated mind, we also realise and obtain the highest kind of bliss.”   It is not clear when Purohitswami left his mortal body but it is believed he passed away in the late 1930s or early 1940s.**

**SHRI CHILE MAHARAJ**

**We now come to the biography of an unusual Datta devotee, Shri Chile Maharaj, who lived in Kolhapur and has a large number of devotees in Pune and Bombay. His name was Shankar and was the son of Mr. Dattatreya and Manjulabai Chile, a family of cowherds (Gavali) from Jeur, a village about twenty-five kilometres from Kolhapur. He was born on August 15, 1922. He lost his mother when he was a child and his father moved to Kolhapur where he studied up to matriculation. Unfortunately his father also died when he was studying in the matriculation class. Around the same time some strange changes occurred in his personality and he left his studies.**

**It is not clear what he did for the next five or six years and where he went for spiritual guidance. One version says that just before the matriculation examination his teacher remarked that he would not pass in mathematics; taking it to heart he remained for three days in a state of meditation in his closed room.  After some days he went to the nearby Panchganga River and sat there in meditation for twenty-one days near one of the *samadhis* on the river bank.  It is said that Shri Siddheshwar Maharaj brought him out of the *samadhi* state but since then he used to remain continuously in “Unmani” state, a high state of trance.**

**When he was about twenty-two he began to be known for his apparently incoherent behaviour like a mentally deranged person but people also found that whatever he said or predicted came out to be true. People started coming to him for solving their problems through spiritual means and the word spread that he was a great saint. Many took spiritual advice from him and found peace. He was unpredictable in his behaviour and would wander or eat anywhere and anytime, a behaviour associated with *Avaliyas* i.e. saints who have attained spiritual perfection who are not bound by any rules of behaviour.**

**In the compound of the famous Mahalakshmi temple of Kolhapur there is a Dattatreya temple near the north gate with an Oudumber tree nearby. Shri Chile Maharaj used to come there occasionally and rest under the tree. One day he picked up a bucket and started sprinkling water in front of Dattatreya temple.  Mr Vyas the temple priest objected to it and angrily drove him away.  The same night Shri Dattatreya came in Mr Vyas’s dream with a trident and *damaru* (a small drum) in hand and angrily asked him why he had stopped him when he was sprinkling water, warning him not to it again. Now he realised the worth of Chile Maharaj and was full of remorse.  When after a few days Shri Chile Maharaj (he was about twenty-five years of age then) came to the temple Mr Vyas, understanding now that he was a form of Shri Dattatreya, prostrated before him and worshipped him by regular ritual with sandal paste, flowers followed by *arati*. Recognising the bond of devotion now developed, Shri Chile Maharaj used to visit Mr Vyas at his home also. On the Gurupurnima day Mr Vyas would perform his worship elaborately in great splendour while Chile Maharaj, who normally would have created some chaos, watched the whole process serenely respecting the devotion of Mr Vyas. Besides Mr Vyas there were others like Mr. Sitaram Mane, also from Kolhapur, who had recognised the presence of Shri Dattatreya in Shri Chile Maharaj. He began to be known as Dattaswarupi Shri Chile Maharaj, Dattaswarupi meaning having the form of Shri Dattatreya.**

**Shri Chile Maharaj had devotees from all strata of society.  He rarely remained in one place. If anyone wanted to know his whereabouts people went to a shoemaker who has a shop in Kolhapur (The shoemaker is no more. His son runs the shop). He always knew where Shri Chile Maharaj was at any time. Shri Chile Maharaj was beyond all rules and used to eat meat and drink hard liquor but was never affected by it. He often made others drink a glass of the drink but to them it tasted like coconut water or sherbet. He would shower choice abuses on a person and be very loving at the same time. People believed that when he abused somebody it removed a lot of *karmas* from that person’s account. Often his behaviour and his instructions looked ridiculous for a common man, but people knew that they should obey them if they were to benefit. He would give difficult tasks to people who came for spiritual guidance to test their steadiness. He always advised not to forget Shri Dattatreya while leading a family life. Mrs. Rajkunvar Bobde has given her experiences with Shri Chile Maharaj in an article. She used to have a deep desire for practising yoga for spiritual purposes but was afraid to consult anybody because of the hypocrisy prevalent in the spiritual field. She practised meditation only at home.  She had met Shri Chile Maharaj first in 1963 and was impressed by him.  She tells about how Chile Maharaj blessed her and predicted she will have good spiritual experiences. Two days later her Kundalini was awakened while she sat for meditation. She experienced bright light and musical sounds while in the state of meditation and saw Goddess Jagdamba in her beautiful splendour and later Shri Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi, who had taken *samadhi* hundred years earlier.**

**Mr Baburao Athane, a Jain by religion, was his ardent devotee and has written his biography which is out of print today. He became a devotee after he had a strange experience of the occult powers of Chile Maharaj. Mr Athane had once gone to Narsobawadi on the instructions of Chile Maharaj. After worship the priest gave him five *pedhas* (milk sweet ball) as *prasad*. He returned to Kolhapur and was going to meet Chile Maharaj when somebody slapped on the back. It was Chile Maharaj himself who asked for his five *pedhas* before even Athane could say anything.  Athane’s mother was an orthodox Jain worshipping Shri Mahavir. She had no faith in Chile Maharaj.  He also refused to go to Athane’s house because she did not like this person who lived like an Avaliya who she thought desecrated her house. But one day she had the vision of Shri Mahavir in him and the situation changed.  Many other persons became his devotees because of similar visions through which their Gurus told them they were not different from him. Many had similar experiences. One thing must be mentioned and that is, Chile Maharaj used his powers to benefit his devotees and he used them even to free people from possession by spirits and effects of black magic besides curing people of their illnesses. Though he guided many he never initiated anybody as his disciple.**

**Chile Maharaj used to consider Shri Shankar Maharaj of Pune as his spiritual elder brother. Devotees of Shri Shankar Maharaj were always welcome in his presence. For a fortnight before he left his body he was not well and had become very weak. His devotees brought him from Kolhapur to Pune and admitted him in a hospital. He passed away on May 7, 1986. His body was first taken to the house of Mr. Datta Abhyankar, a great disciple of Shri Shankar Maharaj where thousands of people paid their respects. From there the body was taken to Paijarwadi near his birth place Jeur where he had already selected a place for his samadhi.  His body now reposes there. Thousands of devotees visit there every year. Currently his sister Akka looks after the daily arrangements.**

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**The biographies presented above take one to the world of seekers and saints who have only one aim and that is self-realization.  Worldly desires and ambitions are all secondary and are abandoned by the seekers who do not mind even physical pain for achieving their goal.  Some may hanker for a vision of Dattatreya and some may even be successful in achieving it but the main aim even there is Shri Dattatreya's grace for achieving that goal.**

**We have already seen from Part I that Dattatreya we worship today is not Dattatreya the historical person born in Atri lineage and who was a householder to start with.  Neither is he the Dattatreya associated with Tantric cult.  He is the one created by Puranas**

**Some of us worship him in a normal human form dressed as an ascetic and some others as the form with three-heads-six arms or some other combinations.**

**But we must take cognizance of Sir Vajrendranath Sheel's  statement (See Part I-A) and on the same lines of argument say “Whether Shri Dattatreya we worship is the Historical one or the Puranic one or whether we worship Dattatreya as a principle does  not matter. The three can exist independently and the vision devotees get is of the Dattatreya we worship in the form we imagine him to be, either one headed or three headed or we may merely experience him as a Principle or a manifestation of the Ultimate Brahman."**

**The above biographies of the saints show that the saints were born with spiritual qualities. These qualities were manifested in most cases since their childhood itself. This is true for all saints, whichever traditions they belong to.  This also indicates that these saints were reincarnations of persons who had significantly developed spiritually and died before they could achieve Self-realization. In this regard what Dnyaneshwar Maharaj has said in Dnyaneshwari in Ch 6:437-467 becomes exactly relevant. (See quote in Part VII-1). Some saints reincarnate intentionally as in the case of Saint Balavadhut, the Guru of Pantmaharaj Balekundrikar who reincarnated as Balmukund Saraswati,**

**We see a Divine hand in the way in which any particular saint was steered in his lifetime towards his goal.  Many aspirants read such biographies and become sad or lose hope because they do not get their divine experience.  But they need not because one does not know who they were in their earlier lifetimes, leaving alone their own spiritual achievements.  Success depends upon so many factors: strength and sincerity of desire, one's character, behaviour and attitudes, regularity of *Sadhana* (spiritual efforts), and most of all Divine grace (Dnyaneshwari 18:348-352),  may extend over more than one lifetime and every step we take takes us nearer to the goal in whichever lifetime the Divine will lead to it.**

**Many of the saints achieve *siddhis* (occult powers) by virtue of their *sadhana.* Though it has been recommended that these powers should not be used lest it causes their spiritual downfall, the compassion of these saints is such that some of them take the risk to help mankind.  And it appears they do get a Divine support in this.**

**The Orthodox and Non-orthodox   We note among the devotees and avatars of Dattatreya two distinct attitudes towards the Chaturvarnya or the Four-caste system in the Hindu religion and towards the hitherto prescribed ways of behaviour for the four castes. .**

**There are the extreme orthodox saints like Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati and Vamanbuva (Brahmachari) Vamorikar who believed that Dattatreya’s avatars were intended to maintain the four-caste system which they considered as the foundation of the Vedic religion.  Though their grace extended to all, they considered Vedas, and many religious practices are taboo to women and non-Brahmins. They considered reciting Vedas in their presence and people of other religions a great sin resulting in even rebirth as a *Chandala*, i.e. lowest of the low castes and an untouchable.**

**Opposed to this we have saints like Shri Swami Samarth, Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi, Shri Shankar Maharaj, Shri Chile Maharaj, Purohitswami, the Nath Sect yogis, saints belonging to the Mahanubhava sect etc.,  who never gave any importance to caste or gender or even religion. That is why there are many Muslims who are devotees of Dattatreya and many belong to the Nath sect.**

**We shall see in the forthcoming discussions that in the early Vedic times there was a *Varna* system which was not birth based but evolved into a birth based caste system later. Though the four-caste system has been rigorously practiced over centuries, the advent of foreign rule has made the system very much redundant. There are many orthodox Brahmins who still practice the daily religious rites as prescribed by *smritis*  which is very creditable because it gives them a great inner strength and even Divine grace.  However for the most part, the caste system seems to be invoked today only as far as marriages are concerned in most parts of India.  Thus foreign rule, both by the Muslim invaders and by the British-Portuguese-French conquerors, has had great influence in progressively changing the socio-religious structure of the Hindu society in India.  Large scale emigration abroad has further changed the manner of religious practices in the alien lands on account of the very different geographical and climatic conditions there, compared to the native Indian.**

**Adjusting to Socio-political conditions    We note from the biographies of the avatars and devotees of Dattatreya that these saints worked according to the socio-political situation existing during their era and tried to save the Hindu way of life from corruption at the same time extending their compassion and grace to others whether a Hindu or not.**

**Before the Muslim invasions of India, the Hindu daily life was led according to the caste system.  Study of religious texts and philosophy like *darshanas*, Bhagavad-Gita etc. was restricted to Brahmins; Kshatriyas were assigned fighting and protection of people; Vaishyas were traders, farmers and practiced other crafts also; Shudras were supposed to serve the higher castes.**

**There was no caste system but only *varnas* in the Vedic times when Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya were professions and not castes; a Kshatriya's son could choose to be a Brahmin as can be seen from the example of king Shantanu's brother Devapi who chose to be a *rishi* and became the disciple of Rishi Arstisena.  Devapi’s hymn occurs in the tenth *mandala* of the Rigveda. Brahmins also chose to follow Kshatriya profession: Parashurama became a warrior and King Bharata’s son Vitatha was born a Brahmin of rishi Bharadwaja descent.  To a lesser scale even Vaishyas could be rishis as may be seen from the example of Manu Savarni who became a priest to kings Nahusha and Yayati.**

**After the profession based caste system turned into birth based caste system a conflict between the Brahmins and Kshatriyas started as to who was superior. A good amount of text in Shantivarva of Mahabharata is devoted to this issue.   Parashurama's battles with Kshatriyas is part of this conflict. With time however, with Kshatriyas becoming busy in ruling the kingdom and in wars, Brahmins tightened their hold on them banning even Brahmin women from listening to Veda recitations, making education and learning a Brahmin sanctuary, in stark contrast to the past when women like Maitreyi and Lopamudra could be rishis.**

**With the advent of Buddhism the system broke to some extent because Buddhism (and also Jainism) did not recognize the caste system and admitted all in their fold.  After Adi Shankaracharya (ca. 8th century AD) resurrected the Hindu religion the caste system again raised its head even though it borrowed many things from the new Buddhism.  Puranas created the new Dattatreya around this time, and it is no wonder that they stressed that his birth was meant to save the Chaturvarnya system i.e. the Four-caste system. The Chaturvarnya system seems to have been an accepted way of life until Muslims began to rule India.**

**Early Muslim invaders invaded to loot and take it away to back home. They also killed men from the conquered areas and took away the rest to be sold as slaves.  What happened to the caste system among these enslaved victims when survival overrode everything else can well be imagined.**

**Later Muslim invaders came to stay and rule the conquered regions.  For the sake of administering the conquered lands these rulers had to be tolerant to the conquered people because they needed the services of educated people good in administration, which the Hindu educational system provided.  Brahmins who were educated were the first choice and out of avarice many of them converted to Islam.  Those who did not convert had to change their lifestyles to suit the new masters because all said and done to royal displeasure meant imprisonment, death or forced conversion. Unfortunately the bane of the Hindu psyche has been that while they could be courteous or indifferent to non-Hindus, Hindu society is not sympathetic with their own brother Hindus who socialised with Muslims. They are quickly outcasts, forcing them to be converted.**

**Next were the warriors and other castes that went the same way.  But this tolerance did not bridge the divide between the followers of the two religions.  Step motherly treatment with restrictions on the Hindus became a normal way of life.**

**Brahmins being the highest educated class well versed in the Dharma, rituals and ethics have always been the guiding flames in those matters.  Suppression by Muslim rulers and natural human avarice undermined their capacity to guide.  The type of egotistic Brahmins mentioned in Ch 25 of the Gurucharitra, who bragged about their knowledge of the Vedas, reciting them before the Muslim king and travelling in the kingdom with his permission seeking debates with other Brahmins naturally lost the moral right to guide the Hindus in the matter of the practice of Dharma.   Thus it was natural and proper for Shri Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1458 A.D.) to uphold the Chaturvarnya System.**

**Within two centuries after Narasimha Saraswati, it was common for Brahmins to work for the Muslim rulers.  Janardanswami and Eknath had reached a high level in the administration and the Muslim king was so influenced by the spiritual power of Janardanswami that even the weekly holiday was shifted from Friday to Thursday in Daulatabad.  By this time some Muslim Sufis had begun to worship Dattatreya who appeared before Janardanswami and Eknath dressed as Malang i.e. a Muslim fakir.**

**The birth and the field of action of the Fourth Dattatreya avatar Manik Prabhu was in the Muslim ruled Nizam kingdom. By this time merger of Hindu and Muslim population had reached some sort of equilibrium point. Manik Prabhu was supported by the Nizam administration and also had many Muslim followers though they seem to have been attracted more by his occult powers than the religious doctrine of the Sakalmat Sampradaya.  By this time the British had started ruling a major part of India.  We see repercussions of this in the attitude of Shri Swami Samarth the third avatar.**

**We see Swami Samarth totally ignoring rules of caste, gender and religion.  He had Muslim disciples and among Hindus, he had disciples among Brahmins as well as Shudras.  He tried to rid his disciples of the caste and religion bias as can be seen from his instructions to Balappa to drink water from an "impure house" and Madhavji Govindji to give the food first to a fakir and then eat the remnants.  But not everybody accepted it.  We have already seen how Vamanbuva Vamorikar has supported the Caste system in Guruleelamrita.**

***Thus we see that the avatars of Dattatreya in the last seven centuries have been in consonance with the socio-political conditions and have tried to elevate the spirituality level within the society against the prevailing odds since the first avatar 1320AD.***

**When one reviews the biographies of Datta-devotees, we notice that a large number were Brahmins by birth. This should be expected because Brahmins had a more intimate religious background compared with others and also had the basic training in austere behaviour by choice or by birth rather than by poverty. But many Datta-devotees were not Brahmins e.g. Kinaram Aghori (a Kshatriya) and Chile Maharaj (a cowherd).  Among the disciples of Shri Swami Samarth were Swamisut (a maratha), Ananda Bharati (a fisherman) and the Muslim Jamadar of Mandargi. Chand Bodhale, the guru of Janardanswami was a Muslim.  When we come to Nath sect yogis who are also devotees of Dattatreya we note that these yogis came from even lowest strata of society e.g. Jandharnath was a *shudra* or probably even lower.**

**The Four paths   Dattatreya tradition has devotees who follow all the four paths viz. Jnana (Knowledge), Action (karma), Yoga and Bhakti (devotion.)   We may note that it is natural, for historical reasons that the path of *jnana* in India would be followed almost exclusively by Brahmins though that need not be the situation today.  In olden days, *karma* implied performance of *yajnas* etc. and would have been confined only to Brahmins and Kshatriyas.  However the Bhagavad-Gita interprets Karma more broadly as any action or duty in normal life and further enjoins the doer to do actions with the attitude of a non-doer.  Yoga also in ancient days - because it requires a Guru - was confined mostly to Brahmins and Kshatriyas, but with the introduction of Rajyoga and especially the Siddhayoga or Shaktipat system of awakening kundalini (See Biography of Gulwani Maharaj in Part VII-3) persons including women from all strata of society have been initiated in the system. The fourth path of Bhakti or devotion does not require a Guru. It requires only a spark of devotion to be created in the mind. How can a caste system prevent anyone from being a devotee?**

**When we come to the devotees of Rama and Krishna (especially as Vithoba of Pandharpur) we see  devotes from a wide range of caste levels: the untouchable Chokha Mela, Narahari the goldsmith, Sena the barber, Saint Tukaram a Vaishya (who had a Brahmin disciple), Gora the potter, Namdeo the tailor and Eknath a Brahmin, just to name a few.   The Varkari sect who are devotees of Vithoba of Pandharpur observe the caste rules only for Matrimonial purposes.   Kabir was a Muslim and his guru was Swami Ramanand Tirth, a Brahmin.**

**Thus the path of Bhakti or devotion has devotees from all strata of society and the deity worshipped may be any of the many deities e.g. Shiva, Vishnu, Devi or Dattatreya.**

**Passage to Hypocrisy    In the new way of life during and after the British rule livelihood became increasingly dependent upon attending offices and factories. Punctuality became a virtue and the timetable of work came to be determined by the Gregorian calendar instead of the *muhurtas* (auspicious times) from the lunar *panchangas.***

**In the beginning, it was the higher caste persons that joined such type of work in the government offices. People from other castes also joined with the opening of the education the other castes.  With a stable government with built-in protection from law and order, business and trade increased and naturally offices to manage them also increased.  Cities developed and progressed. Banks progressively replaced the traditional moneylenders. In general need for management of both government and private enterprises created a boom in the number of office and factory workers from peons, clerks, operators to managers who had to be punctual.  Thus it became impractical to live with the daily routines prescribed in Ch 36 and 37 of Gurucharitra or in *smritis* in general for a traditional Hindu way of life except in the rural areas.  Ghaisas (See Bibliography) in the commentary on the above chapters in the book  giving the prose translation of Gurucharitra acknowledges this situation and conceding the impracticability of practicing the prescribed routines recommends that they should be modified to suit the conditions.  However this has not resulted in the rethinking about the practicability of a caste system in modern India.  And in the Hindu religious system there is no final authority on religion.**

**Problems of Urban life   Today we see a very hypocritical Hindu society in which we talk about casts without really bothering about behaviour according to caste rules.  In today's world it is difficult to observe them.  Nobody bothers or has ever bothered that the very texts taboo to Hindu non-Brahmins were made freely available to Western Scholars under the protection from British rule. They not only translated the Vedas and other ancient religious works into English and other languages making them available to one and all but also analysed them among thoroughly for their authenticity also among other aspects.**

**We have given up the caste system for all practical purposes.  Even those Brahmins who read Gurucharitra piously and study the 36th and 37th chapters on the prescribed behaviour of a Brahmin cannot live according to those prescribed standards. Those who live in cities and have to maintain work timings cannot observe the rules of *sandhya* strictly. He has to take at least one meal plus the mid-time snacks outside his home and not only eat food cooked and served by persons of who knows which caste or religion!  One cannot perform a *homa* in a small flat or feed the cow or even crows during a *shraddha* ceremony in a city in India, leave alone in a foreign country.  In fact, even in the matter of reading of Gurucharitra for which certain norms have been prescribed, there are Datta-devotees who have to mange the reading during the free time available during flights or a bus or car ride. I personally am sure Lord Dattatreya would not mind these devotees bypassing the norms, such is his compassion.**

**Problems of living abroad   People who have to travel abroad in the west for a living have still worse problems regarding traditional religious practices.   In the northern latitudes in the west the length of the day may be from about eight hours in winter to sixteen hours in summer; in the arctic zone countries sun does not rise at all for a few days and does not set at all for another few days six months later. In winter the sun rises almost in the south rather than the east as in the middle and southern India.  *Smriti* rules for daily activities related to sunrise and sunset and to the directions were meant for the Indian situation and do not hold good in these regions. Other problems like taking bath, washing feet and suitable food also exist. Now that a large number of emigrants from India have settled in UK, USA and Europe can our Pundits modify the rules suitably?**

**It appears that the rules of the caste system today are used only in matrimonial relationships.**

**In summary, it is evident that Dattatreya Tradition has always adopted itself to the prevailing socio-political situations.  As regards the orthodox views about Dattatreya′s birth being in support of caste system it is evident that these were merely personal views of these saints who lived true to their beliefs.  The personal views of the aspirants or devotees or saints do not matter to the Divine. They are really earthly matters, otherwise how could the world which is 90% non-Hindu and therefore beyond the purview of caste system, would have survived?**

**Guru worship is the heart of Dattatreya Tradition.  Dattatreya is more often referred to as Datta-guru than any other name.  In this tradition we see a fusion of all the four paths viz. Knowledge, Action (Karma), Yoga and Devotion (Bhakti.  Every *sadhak* in this tradition practices a combination of the four paths with Bhakti as a common denominator.  Introduction of Shaktipat yoga by Gulwani Maharaj and Swami Loknath Tirth has made the yoga path relatively simple. It has been said that one may experience Brahman through Kundalini path but that experience is without bliss. Bliss can be experienced only if the practice is supported by devotion because devotion is love that induces happiness.**

**Not all devotees are *sadhaks* or aspirants.  They are actually in minority. Most people pray to God with materialistic aims.  Life in this world is full of failures, disappointments, pain and sorrow.  People need relief.  Just as we go to a doctor for our illnesses similarly we turn to God in case of distress if it cannot be mitigated easily.  And the best way to approach God is to approach a saint who is closer to God and intercede on your behalf.  Even here, it is to approach a saint who is no more in his (or her) physical body rather than a living one because in view of the large number of frauds going around, it is safer to go to a proved saint.  When people cannot reach a saint then they perform *vratas like* fasting, reciting mantras and japa, worship rituals, reading and recitation of *Stotras and so on.* For Datta devotees reading of Gurucharitra has proved to be very effective probably because it brings you nearer to Dattatreya who listens to your problems.**

**Now we close this series on Datta-devotees by saying Jai Gurudevadatta.**

**Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.**

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