

In Sai's Proximity



DADA KELKAR

Background and Upbringing

Dada Kelkar's full name was Ganesh Damodar Kelkar. Though it was rather difficult to get information about his earlier life, he was one of the oldest and most prominent devotees of Shri Sai Baba, who was not a resident of Shirdi.

Dada was a very steadfastly orthodox *brahmin*. He was born in a well cultured family. Good values had been inculcated and hammered in him since his childhood. He had studied *Vedic* literature in depth. His *upasana* was very intense. He was very staunchly proud of the values and tenets and beliefs of Hindu religion. Therefore, it was against his upbringing to go to a 'Muslim' like Sai Baba. According to the Hindu traditional values of those days, he believed that all Muslims were lowly creatures. He believed that a *brahmin* saint will take him towards salvation. Therefore, in spite of being attracted to Baba, his mind was not prepared to let him go to Him.

It is said that "You can not make a person your *Guru*. It just happens." Dada Kelkar was yet to experience how true this saying is.

His first meeting with Sai Baba

Dada Kelkar knew Raobahadur Sathe well. Therefore, he wrote a letter to Sathe and requested him to find a suitable boy for his daughter.

Sathe was surprised to receive a letter on such a highly personal matter.

Sathe had lost his first wife and was thinking of getting married again. He began wondering whether Kelkar was making a matrimonial proposal to him. He wrote a letter seeking clarification from Kelkar. He requested Kelkar that if he was being considered for matrimony then Kelkar should take into consideration the difference in the ages of Kelkar's daughter and Sathe. He further added that Kelkar should first take concurrence of Shrei Sai Baba and only then proceed further in the matter.

Dada Kelkar was more inclined towards consulting any well-known *brahmin* priest from the pilgrimage town of Wai, near Mahabaleshwar. Therefore, he was not very much inclined to take advice of Sai Baba. Further, considering his upbringing, he had some prejudices against Baba. Therefore, he was not very keen on seeking advice of Baba. He also felt that Baba may know the biased thoughts that Kelkar was having in his mind and may not give his go ahead to the marriage.

However, Sathe was very firm in his resolve. Therefore, Dada Kelkar went to Shirdi and took his daughter along with him. Madhavrao Deshpande took them to Baba. The moment they stepped inside the *Masjid*, Baba blessed the girl. He put a musk melon in her *oti*, anointed her with *kumkum* and said, "Send this girl to Ahmedabad!" Kelkar was both surprised as well as overjoyed with this development.

Thus, in 1905, at the age of 50 years, Sathe got married to Kelkar's daughter. Baba had used this incident and lit a flame of devotion in the mind of Kelkar. Very soon, Kelkar became an ardent devotee of Baba.

During the years 1906 to 1916, Sathe, his wife and children as well as Kelkar family stayed in 'Sathe Wada' constructed by his son-in-law. During this decade, Dada Kelkar was fortunate enough to be near his *Guru*. He could also spend time with other ardent devotees like Upasani Baba, Bapusaheb Jog, Dadasaheb Khaparde, Ram-Maruti Maharaj,

Kakasaheb Dixit, Laxmibai Koujalagi. All these devotees were very well educated and had also reached pinnacle spiritual matters. In their company, Dada Kelkar began reading and re-reading various religious and spiritual books.

As indicated above, Dada was a very steadfastly orthodox *brahmin*. He was very staunchly proud of the values and tenets of Hindu religion. Therefore, during his stay in Shirdi, there were occasions on which his upbringing clashed with certain events. His faith in Baba was put to test from time to time. Baba was teaching him that *paramartha* is not tied down by artificial boundaries like religion, caste and colour. Baba was making repeated attempts to put across this lesson.

I am lowest of the low

Dr. Jagannathrao Pandit was a close friend of renowned Sai devotee Shri Tatyasaheb Nulkar. He once visited *Masjid* to avail the *Darshan* of Baba. After he bowed down before Baba, he was directed to go to Kelkar. After meeting Dr. Pandit, Kelkar left the place to go to the *Masjid* to perform Baba's *Pooja*. He cajoled Dr. Pandit to come with him.

Till that time no one had dared to anoint a *Tilak* on Baba's forehead. Only Mhalsapati used to apply *Gandha/Tilak* on Baba's throat. Others used to apply it on Baba's Feet. Dr. Pandit was not aware of these practices. After Kelkar performed the *Pooja* as per his routine, Dr. Pandit took the plate containing *Gandha* and drew a beautiful *Tripundra* (a typical *Tilak* generally seen on the forehead of Lord Shankar. It consists of three lines with a dot in the middle).

After seeing what Dr. Pandit had done, Kelkar was petrified. He was afraid that now Baba will loose His temper and become ferocious like Lord Narasimha. However, Baba did nothing of the sort. On the contrary, He appeared to be pleased.

This disturbed Kelkar. He decided to seek an explanation from Baba in the evening. He said to Baba, "If we attempt to apply a small dot of *Gandha* on Your forehead, You do not allow us to even touch Your forehead. What a strange thing took place this morning? Does it mean that You despise us and love Dr. Pandit's *Tripundra*? This baffles people like us!"

Baba laughed with affection and said, "It is like this Dada. Dr. Pandit's *Guru* comes from a great *brahmin* family from higher echelons of the community while I belong to the lowest of the low Muslim society. In spite of this, Dr. Pandit performed my *Pooja*! The above facts did not hinder him. Not only that, he performed the *Pooja* considering me as 'Him' (the Almighty)! How could I say 'No' to him? I had no other go but to allow him to do whatever he wanted to do."

One may feel that Baba had said all this in a lighter mood. But, Dada Kelkar realized that Baba is fully aware about Kelkar's deep rooted prejudices about Baba being a Muslim. On making further enquiries, Kelkar came to know that Dr. Pandit's *Guru* was Raghunathrao alias Kaka Puranik (also known as Dhopeswar Maharaj). He was a *Sidhdha Purush* and really belonged to a very highly respected *brahmin* family. He was amazed about how Baba knew about this.

Why this false pride about certain religious practices?

- Once, Baba had lit up a stove in the open area opposite the *Masjid* and was busy preparing *khara pulav* (a salty dish of rice). Just then, Kelkar arrived there. Baba asked him, "Dadasab, I have made khara pulav. Would you taste it and tell me how it is?" Kelkar was very steadfast in observing matters like what he ate, where he ate and similar things. Therefore, just to wriggle out of the situation, without tasting the rice he said, "Yes. It tastes well!" Baba laughed on hearing this and said, "You have not even tasted it and how are you saying it tastes well? Open the vessel and put your hand inside." Later on, Baba held Kelkar's hand and put it in the vessel. "Take this small spoon and put some rice in your plate. And do away with your religious do's and don'ts. Why are you so proud of these things?"

- A similar incident took place on a day of *Ekadashi*, a day considered to be very holy and on which staunch Hindus observe fast. Baba said to Kelkar, "I feel like having mutton. Can you bring it from village Korhala?" He even followed up this request by giving the required amount of cash to Kelkar and added, "You go yourself for this. I know you will do it for me." Kelkar now faced a dilemma. On the one hand, being a *brahmin*, he could never go near mutton. On the other hand, he believed that 'It is the duty of a disciple to follow his *Guru*'s directions.' He gave precedence to the wishes of his *Guru*, put on his clothes and got ready to leave for Korhala. Baba was observing him. He said, "You have become quite old now. Let it be. I will send someone else to bring it." He then pretended to send a servant named Pandu. Later on he said, "Pandur, let it be. We will bring it on some other day."

Thus, He was only testing Kelkar.

- As directed by Baba, Shantaram Balavant Nachane, an ardent devotee of Baba, was staying with his family in Sathé Wada. The building belonged to son-in-law of Kelkar, who prohibited use of things like onion and garlic.

Nachane family was not aware of this rule. Therefore, on the very first day, Nachane's mother-in-law began cutting onion as she planned to use it in the food that day. The moment Kelkar smelt onion, he became furious. He entered the room from where the smell of onion was coming and began scolding the lady. She was at a loss to understand the reason for his anger and was very much hurt.

After sometime, Kelkar's grand-daughter began suffering from some eye ailment. She began crying incessantly. He, therefore, took her to Baba. "Put a few drops of onion juice in her eyes!" Baba said. As Kelkar despised onion, he was at a loss as to where he would get them. He then realized that Baba liked onions and always kept some with Him. He was, therefore, confident that he will get the vegetable from Baba. The moment this thought entered his mind, Baba pointed a finger at Nachane's mother-in-law and said, "Go to your this mother and ask her. Don't ask me!" The lady had no desire to oblige Kelkar after the scolding he gave her. But, just because Baba had given the order, she complied. After putting the extract of onions, Kelkar's grand-daughter got relief from her suffering.

- Kashibai Kanitkar was a very learned lady of that time. Her family had very close ties with Kelkar's family. One of her relatives – Shrimati Gokhale wished to go to Shirdi, avail Baba's *Darshan* and observe a fast for three days at His Feet. Therefore, to fulfil the lady's wishes, Kashibai sent her to Kelkar with a note. The lady went to Shirdi on the day of *Shimga* festival and met Kelkar. As is the practice, people eat a sweet called *puran poli* on this day and on that day Gokhalebai was observing fast!

She availed Baba's *Darshan*, bowed down before Him and sat down. Immediately, Baba said, "Food and the person are both God. Then, why observe fast? Do we need these things? Go to Dada Bhat's (Kelkar's) house. Make *puran polis* and feed his children and grandchildren. And, you also have them. It is a beautiful day of *Shimga*. Why should you observe fast and go without food?"

Dada Bhat's wife was having her periods at that time and hence, was not touching anyone or anything as per customs of that time. Just a day prior to that day, Baba had said to Dada, "So? Tomorrow my children will have to go without food? But, how will I allow them to go hungry? Then why am I here?"

No change in Kelkar's ways

There were some devotees like Madhavrao Deshpande, Dasganu Maharaj, Nanasaheb Chandorkar, Nimonkar who had unwavering belief in foolish customs and rituals like untouchability and similar other matters. They were ardent devotees of Baba; but at the same time, they could not give up the orthodox and irrational practices. These had become a way of life for them. On the one hand, they had reached the pinnacle of *paramartha*; but simultaneously, they were tied down by these customs. But, this did not come in the way of their devotion, love and affection between them and Baba.

Dada Kelkar joined their ranks. Though he got many such experiences and he developed a deep affection towards Baba, it was not easy for Kelkar to give up his foolish customs and rituals in matters like un-touchability and the like.

It is the affection of the Lord towards His true devotees. A disciple may momentarily lose his sense of the right and wrong. He may even utter a few harsh words to his *Sadguru* who advises him to mend his ways. He may not adhere to his *Sadguru*'s guidance. But, his *Guru* continues to lovingly look at these as a mere child's behaviour. Using very mild words, he may rebuke him and say, "It is not like that", "Do not behave like this". The *Guru* is unable to scold his disciple. There are occasions on which he may assume a different stance and shower the choicest abuses also. But, even while doing so his intention is to shower blessings on his true devotees.

(Contd. from page 12)

Baba also did the same. He tried to put sense in His devotees by telling them what is right and what is wrong. He illustrated it by giving examples. But, He never insisted on someone following His advice. Ultimately, He allowed everyone to behave as per their wishes. These differences in personal opinions never came in the way of their devotion and affection.

Baba ignored these minor matters; but He always ensured that the devotee does not go astray from the path of *paramartha* and spiritual progress. Baba sometimes put the devotee to a test and acted as if He is a novice in these matters.

All this was true more particularly of Kelkar. He was born in a *brahmin* family and brought-up strictly according to the traditions and customs prevalent in those times. Further, he had studied *vedic* literature in great detail. It was no wonder that his beliefs were steadfast. Therefore, Baba also left him undisturbed in these matters.

(Contd.)

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* Sai Experiences *

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With Sai's Grace became an MBA and success leads the way...

In our home since ages the *Sant Shiromani* of Shirdi, *Sadguru* Shri Sai Baba is being worshipped. My parents are ardent devotees of Sai Baba alone.

This experience is nearly nine years old (2005).

In 2003, I passed my B.Com. with great difficulty. At that time my grandmother had just left her mortal coil. I was appearing for several competitive examinations. But, I kept failing in these exams. Similarly, I appeared for the MBA-CET and scored 89 marks out of 240. I tried getting admission in Pune. But leave alone Mumbai or Pune, I could not get admission even in Nasik! My father Sri Vijay Kelkar was trying to get me admission in Wadia college in Pune by paying donation from the management quota. But, I did not agree to that. I prayed to Shri Sai Baba, ‘‘Dear Baba, if need be, let me be at home; but I do not want admission with donation’’. It happened as I wished. The effort at Wadia failed.

Further I gave banking, UPSC, MPSC, Air Force, etc. examinations; but never succeeded. The days kept going by. I became hopeless and dejected at my efforts going in vain.

I again attempted CET. I scored 83 out of 240, which was less than the earlier attempt, which added more to my sense of failure and dejection.

Then I decided, ‘Enough of my studies, let me take up a job’. But, even that was not easy. I applied at the Wipro call center in Powai. I got selected and was asked to join from August 1. While leaving from there my

competitors came and told me, “Here in Wipro, it is a one year contract only. Try your luck with Accenture at Vikhroli, it is close by.”

I went there; though my Maths was just so so, I got selected and was asked to join from the very next day. Further, I was sent to Bengaluru for one month training. With this new job I was satisfied that I was now earning. But, for future prospects this was not a good job. I wanted to do MBA, hence, was vigilant about CET in Maharashtra.

My brother Satyam Kelkar was doing his Hotel Management course in the new Lonavala campus of Sinhgad Institute of Hotel Management. My mother Mrs. Medha Kelkar, father and brother started trying for my admission in Lonavala.

My mind would not be on my job in Bengaluru. My dejection reached pits. Some of my friends started dissuading me from doing MBA. It is said, “Our mind is something and God’s mind something else”.

I was in constant touch with development in Lonavala from Bengaluru. But, I could get no feedback or response. Finally, with Baba’s inspiration, I applied for leave and came to Lonavala. First, I went to Nasik and got the mark sheet of my CET exam. Officials at the DTE office told me that with these marks I would not get admission to an MBA course anywhere in the world. Frustrated, from there I straightway left for Shirdi.

“Whosever feet touch Shirdi soil, all their problems are solved,” I prayed to Baba wholeheartedly and sought His Blessings and next day went to Lonavala and met the institute director Dr. Mangnale and gave him my application. Mrs. Padma Pillai was the officer there. Stating that admission was not possible in the present circumstance, she asked me to wait till August 31.

On August 31, I was in Mumbai. My father and brother were in Lonavala. My brother’s principal Prof. Shingote had put in a word for me to Dr. Mangnale. But, the admission process was over by then.

Finally, Shirdi Sai Baba displayed evidence of His Being. He fulfilled the assurance of His eleven promises. Exactly around the time of the noon *Aarati* in Shirdi, a student sought transfer to the Sinhgad Institute in Pune and that seat became vacant in Lonavala.

A minimum of 25 student applicants were waiting for that seat. This seat could have gone into the donation quota too. But, **everything happens as per Sai Baba’s Will**. Mrs. Padma went to Dr. Mangnale. He immediately summoned my father. With Sai’s Grace I got my admission. Not only that, soon after an order was received by the college from DTE that the college should not admit any more students in that batch. Mine was the last admission!

If I had taken up the Wipro job, I would have been stuck in the contract for one year. Ahead from 2004-06, confronting unlimited obstacles and difficulties and making persevering efforts, Baba firmly stood by me and I completed my MBA with His Compassion.

I got campus placement. I also got the opportunity to be a visiting faculty. And now, I have been bestowed the presidency of the Sibaca Alumni Association of this very institute with Baba’s Grace.

Today it must be nearing a hundred years since *Sadguru* Shri Sai Baba shed His mortal coil, yet Sai Nath is always there in the *Chinmaya* form with His devotees, taking care of His devotees. I humbly pray at the *Samadhi* of Sai Baba, “May Mother Sai be compassionate to all Sai devotees”...

OM SAI... SHRI SAI... JAI JAI SAI...

- Rohan Kelkar

Mumbai

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By Sai's Grace saved from attack of dacoits...

When I remember the incident of October 16, 1997, my heart gets heavy, I tremble and my body shivers.

That day Shri Sai Baba gave me a great experience. I fall short of words to describe His incomprehensible and infinite *Leelas*. Such is His limitless power.

Sri Vijay Nerkar and I were working as internal auditors in the Central Bank of India. At that time our audit work was going on in the bank's Wardha branch. Before completing the work, it had to be discussed with the branch manager and then a report had to be prepared.

I like to visit any kind of temple. So during the audit period, I used to go to the Sai Baba temple in Wardha everyday at 5 a.m. Devotees going there used to bathe Baba after filling the bucket with water with love and devotion. Watching that, I too followed them. It was *Kojagiri Pournima* on October 16, 1997. As per my routine in the last few days, I went to the temple at 5 a.m. There Baba was being bathed with milk, curd and water. After the bathing ritual, I prostrated at Baba's Feet and told Him, "Today is our last meeting", as, by now our audit work was completed.

We were staying at hotel Center Point in Wardha. Since we were staying there for nearly 15 days the hotel owner and staff were well acquainted with our habits.

On October 16, 1997 at about 9.30 p.m. I went to my colleague Sri Vijay Nerkar in the adjoining room to discuss certain official matters and returned to my room. It was 12 o'clock at night. In a few moments the call bell of my room rang. I opened the door and what did I see, three well-built men with sharp knives at the door. Holding the knife on my chest they pushed me inside. They bolted the door of the room, snapped the telephone wires and increased the volume of the television. I was ordered to stay put on the bed. One of them kept holding the knife to my chest, the other cut the bedsheet and made strips, and the third asking me to hand over all valuables started searching me. They found Rs. 2500/- cash in my pocket and the 14th chapter of Gurucharitra and other things in my bag. Keeping the cash, they threw back the other things. They gagged me and bound my hands and legs with the bedsheet strips and took me to the bathroom and tied me to the tap.

I was totally scared at this sudden horrifying incident. To gain courage, I started remembering the name of Shri Sai Baba. And what a surprise! The knot that bound me to the tap came off. Removing the gag on my mouth, I started shouting loudly. Being *Kojagiri*, residents in the neighbouring building were awake. They called out to the hotel owner. Displaying his presence of mind, the hotel owner got the main entrance door locked. At that time the dacoits were climbing down the stairs. They were having knives; yet, the hotel owner and employees threatened them with a sword and other weapons. Taking advantage of the scuffle that ensued, one of them fled. However, they succeeded in nabbing the other two. Having intimidated the police, they soon arrived and took the two into custody. Our whole night was spent at the police station. The dacoits seemed to be murmuring that they should have killed me. My life was saved by the blessings of

Sai Baba and utterance of His Name. Remembering Him, the idol of Sai Baba appeared in front of my closed eyes and inadvertently my hands folded (before Him).

- **R. G. Panbude**

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Shirdi News

* Public Relations Publicity Section *

Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi)

- Translated from Marathi into English by

Vishwarath Nayar

Sai Ashram (Phase 1)

Ready for Stay of Sai devotees



Sri K. V. Ramani of Chennai, on behalf of the Shirdi Sai Trust, built the Sai Ashram, a *Bhakta Niwas* (abode for Sai devotees) project, at a cost of Rs. 110 crore and donated it to Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi).

Sai Ashram - Phase 1 of this project was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra State Sri Prithviraj Chavan on Thursday, April 11, 2013 on the auspicious occasion of Gudhi Padva. On this occasion Sri Ramani was felicitated by the Chief Minister and dignitaries with a citation, on behalf of Shree Sai Baba Sansthan.

The Sai Ashram - Phase 1 is built on 5.8 hectares of land near the Sai Baba Bhakta Niwas Sthan (of 500 rooms). Sai Ashram has 1536 rooms, of which 384 rooms are air conditioned. Here 6000 devotees can be accommodated at a time.

The State's Agriculture and Marketing Minister Sri Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil presided at the inauguration function and the main dignitaries, who graced the occasion were the Guardian Minister of Ahmednagar Sri Babanrao Pachpute, Revenue Minister Sri Balasaheb Thorat, Co-operation Minister Sri Harshavardhan Patil, Member of Parliament from Shirdi constituency Sri Bhausahab Wakchaure, Chief Secretary of Law and Judiciary Department Sri V. L. Achaliya, Chairman of the 3-Members Managing Committee of Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Trust and Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) Sri Jayant Kulkarni, Member and District Collector (Ahmednagar) Dr. Sanjeev Kumar, Member and Executive Officer Sri Kishore More, Former Union Minister Sri Balasaheb Vikhe Patil, Former Chairman of the Sansthan Sri Jayant Sasane, Chairperson of Shirdi Municipal Council Smt. Sumitra Kote and Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane.

Shri Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi)

CITATION

HON. SHRI K. V. RAMNIJI,

11th April, 2013

We feel immensely happy to present this Citation to you on behalf of the Shri Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi) at the auspicious hands of Honourable Shri Prithviraj Chavan, Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Wholehearted service and unflinching devotion to Sai Baba is your Passion. It is out of this deep-rooted reverence and with the noble objective of serving Sai devotees, that you have supported the construction of the 'Sai Ashram - 1 and Sai Ashram - 2' in the holy town of Shirdi through the Shirdi Sai Trust, Chennai. These spacious buildings comprising 1536 rooms and 192 dormitory halls and built on a 20-acre plot offered by the Shri Sai Baba Sansthan can easily accommodate 10 thousand devotees at a time. Your munificent contribution of Rupees 110 crore has made this mega project a concrete reality. This gleaming, colossal project is indeed symbolic of your generosity and innate devotion to Shri Sai Baba.

A peep into the past reveals that Shri Sai Baba would ask His devotees for *dakshina*. The motive behind this gesture was to make devotees aware of the significance of compassion and to enable their spiritual cleansing. Whether the sum is paltry or big and whatever the social status of the individual, that person is simply not an ordinary mortal. You too, Sir, are among the select group of blessed people who enjoy the undiminished grace of Shri Sai Baba. That is why have not made a donation; you have most humbly offered *dakshina* at the holy Feet of Shri Sai Baba.

This outstanding building created out of your historic contribution will always offer devotees the sanctity of an *ashram*, the benevolence of a temple and the warmth of a home. That is because this mammoth project has been made possible not only because of exceptional charity but also because of deep devotion to Sai Baba and an intense sense of sacrifice.

This architectural masterpiece will undoubtedly enhance the glory of the Sansthan. We also hope it will give devotees the priceless joy of having spent a few memorable moments close to their beloved Shri Sai Baba.

Wishing you excellent health and longevity.

With the bountiful blessings of Shri Sai Baba.....

11th April 2013, Thursday

The Management Committee,

'Gudhi Padva' Shri Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi)

Sai Ashram Project - Other Features

- Shree Sai Baba Sansthan (Shirdi) spent Rs. 30 crores for internal roads, footpaths and street lights, etc.
- Separate toilets, restaurant and a grand open theatre having capacity of 6000 seats for cultural programmes.
- Parking for 2-wheeler and 4-wheeler vehicles.
- Plantation of various trees with attractive landscaping to enhance the natural beauty.
- Re-cycling system for multiple use of natural resources like water.
- Solar Power System for hot water supply to every room.
- Rs. 900/- per day for AC room and Rs. 500/- per day for non-AC room.



Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi) donated Rs. 25 crore for drought relief in Maharashtra. A symbolic cheque of the said amount was presented to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra Sri Prithviraj Chavan at the inauguration function of the Sai Ashram - Phase 1 by the Chairman of the Sansthan and Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) Sri Jayant Kulkarni.

Shri Ram Navami Festival celebrated With Victory Chants of the Name 'SAI RAM'

Under the auspices of Shree Sai Baba Sansthan, the annual Ram Navami festival was celebrated this year too, from Thursday, April 18 to Saturday, April 20 amidst chants of the name of 'Sai Ram' in sacred environs.

The *Kakad Aarati* of Shri Sai Baba was done at 4.30 a.m. on the first day of the festival on April 18. After that a *Shobhayatra* (religious procession) of Baba's Photo, *Pothi* (holy book) 'Shri Sai Sat Charita' and *Veena* was taken out at 5 a.m. from the *Samadhi Mandir* to Dwarkamai via *Gurusthan*. Sri Kishore More, Member of the 3-Members Managing Committee of the Sansthan and Executive Officer carrying the *Pothi*, Dr. Yashwantrao Mane, Deputy Executive Officer and Sri Ramrao Shelke, Chief of the temple carrying Sai Baba's Photo and Sri Chandrakant Gorkar, *Purohit* (Priest) of the Sansthan carrying the *Veena* participated in the *Shobhayatra*. Villagers and Sai devotees participated in the *Shobhayatra*.

After reaching Dwarkamai, as per the tradition, the *Akhand Parayan* (continuous reading) of the sacred *Pothi* (holy book) 'Shri Sai Sat Charita' auspiciously commenced. The first chapter was read by Sri Kishore More and the second by Dr. Yashwantrao Mane. At 5.20 a.m. Shri's holy bath was done. In the morning, the worship of the holy Feet of Baba in the *Samadhi Mandir* was ritually done by the Executive Officer Sri Kishore More and Mrs. Manjushri More.

At 12.30 p.m. the noon *Aarati* was done and *Teertha Prasad* was distributed. From 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. *H. B. P. (Hari Bhakta Parayan)* Sri Vikram Nandedkar presented devotion filled melodious *kirtan*. *Dhoop Aarati* was done at 6.30 p.m. After that, invitee artistes performed their programmes from 7 p.m. at the Sai Nagar ground. At 9.15 p.m. a grand procession of Sai *Palkhi* (palanquin) was taken through the village. The *Iezim* troupe of girl students of Shri Sainath Secondary School, the cymbals troupe of Sanmitra Yuvak Mandal, *shehnai – choughada* troupe, band troupes and local *bhajan* (devotional songs) *mandals* participated in this *Shobhayatra*. After the *Palkhi* arrived towards the *Gurusthan* in the *Samadhi Mandir* complex, Sri Subhash Jakhadhi, Sri Prakash Bhalerao and Sri Sonyabapu Jagtap performed *bharud* in front of the *Palkhi*. On this day Dwarkamai was kept open the whole night for *Parayan*.

Friday, April 19 was the main day of the festival. *Kakad Aarati* was done at 4.30 a.m. After that at 5 a.m. a *Shobhayatra* of Baba's Photo, *Pothi* and *Veena* was taken out from Dwarkamai to *Samadhi Mandir* after the conclusion of *Akhand Parayan* of 'Shri Sai Sat Charita'.

Sri Jayant Kulkarni, Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) and Chairman of the 3-Members Managing Committee of the Sansthan carrying the *Pothi*, Member and Executive Officer Sri Kishore More and Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane carrying the photo of Shri Sai Baba and Temple Chief Sri Ramrao Shelke carrying the *Veena* participated in the *Shobhayatra*. Villagers and devotees participated in the *Shobhayatra*.

After the *Shobhayatra* came to the *Samadhi Mandir*, Sri Jayant Kulkarni and Mrs. Anuradha Kulkarni performed the *Pooja* (worship) of *kavadis* and the *Shobhayatra* was taken out. After that Shri's holy bath was done with the water from Godavari river. After the *Snan*, the worship of the Holy Feet was done by Sri Jayant Kulkarni and Mrs. Anuradha Kulkarni. On the main day of Ram Navami, the sack of wheat is ritually worshipped and kept in place of the old sack of wheat. As per this tradition the *Pooja* of the new sack of wheat was performed by the chairman of the Sansthan Sri Jayant Kulkarni.

Kirtan on the birth of Lord Ram was presented by H. B. P. Sri Vikram Nandedkar from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. At 12.30 p.m. the noon *Aarati* was done.

As per the tradition the annual worship of the Flags brought by Sri Rasane and Sri Nimonkar families was performed and the Flags were placed on the *Samadhi*. At 4 p.m. a *Shobhayatra* of the Flags was taken out from the

Samadhi Mandir, first to the house of the descendents of late Sri Kondaji Sutar in front of Sainath Chhaya building. As per the tradition the Flags and stick were worshipped there and then the *Shobhayatra* was taken through the *Palkhi* path ahead near the tomb of Tajimkhan Baba to Dwarkamai. There the Flags were hoisted on Dwarkamai by Sri Rasane and Sri Nimonkar families.

At 5 p.m. a *Shobhayatra* of the Chariot was taken out through the village. The *lezim* troupe of girl students of Shri Sainath Secondary School, the cymbals troupe of Sanmitra Yuvak Mandal and local *bhajan mandals* participated in this *Shobhayatra*. After the Chariot procession arrived towards *Gurusthan* in the *Samadhi Mandir* complex, Sri Kishore Gagare, Sri Subhash Jakhadhi and Sri Sonyabapu Jagtap performed *bharud* in front of the Chariot. After that *Dhoop Aarati* was done. From 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. next day artistes presented their programmes in front of Shri Sai Baba. Being the main day of the festival, *Samadhi Mandir* was kept open the whole night for *Darshan*. On this day the Agriculture and Marketing Minister of Maharashtra Sri Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil alongwith his wife took *Darshan* of Shri Sai Baba's *Samadhi* and did *Padyapooja* (worship of the Holy Feet).

On Saturday, April 20, the concluding day of the festival, after the holy bath of Shri Sai Baba at 5.05 a.m. the brief *Aarati* - “*Shirdi majhe Pandharpur...*” was done. After that Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane and Mrs. Daivashala Mane performed the *Padyapooja* of Shri Sai Baba in the *Samadhi Mandir* and Executive Officer Shri Kishore More and Mrs. Manjushri More performed the *Rudrabhishek* at *Gurusthan*. At 10.30 a.m. H. B. P. Sri Vikram Nandedkar performed *kirtan* on *Gopalkala*. As per the tradition every year after the *kirtan* on *Gopalkala* at 12 noon the *dahi-handi* (pot of curd) was broken and then the mid-day *Aarati* was done.

H. B. P. Sri Vikram Nandedkar was felicitated on behalf of the Sansthan for rendering melodious *kirtan seva* (service) on all the three days of the festival. *Dhoop Aarati* was done at 6.30 p.m. In the evening invitee artistes performed their programmes at the Sai Nagar ground. As a part of the festival the Sansthan and the villagers jointly organized a grand wrestling bout. Wrestler Sri Chandrahar Patil bagged the first prize.

The massive gate and decorations erected by Dwarkamai Mandal of Mumbai near *Gurusthan* drew attention of all devotees. This Mandal put up eye-catching electric lighting in the *Samadhi Mandir* and its premises. The decoration artistes were felicitated on behalf of the Sansthan. The Dwarkamai Mandal is doing this decoration *seva* (service) since the last 35 years.

On all the three days the *Prasadbhojan* was served free of cost in the *Prasadalaya* from the donations of Sairam Janardan Jarad (of Ambi), Viru Palsiaarwali (Belgaum), M. Sita (Hyderabad), Dr. Ashok Kumar Deor (Bengaluru), S. Saraswati (Chennai), Laxman Maruti Sukale (Mumbai), Sunil Agrawal (Mumbai), Dabanshu Agrawal (Kolkata), Vyankat Subbarao (Hyderabad), Srinivas Shirgurkar (Bengaluru) and Mrs. Vrinda Sunderam.

Considering the expected crowd, perfect arrangements for staying and *Prasadbhojan* were made. For the protection from the heat, *mandaps* were put up in the temple premises. 24 hours security, drinking water and lights were provided in the *mandaps*. Similarly, for *padayatris* (pilgrims on foot) coming with *Palkhis* from Mumbai and other regions, cloth mandaps with bedding were provided for shelter at several places on the Mumbai-Shirdi route. In that too, water and electricity were provided. Water was provided through tankers. Apart from this, mobile dispensary was also stationed on the *Palkhi* route. To ensure the easy availability of *Ladu Prasad* to all the devotees during the festival period ladus of 243 quintals' sugar were prepared. Similarly, in the New Bhakta Niwas (of 500 rooms) additional arrangement for buffet *Prasadbhojan* was made.

Under the guidance of the Chairman of the Sansthan and Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) Sri Jayant Kulkarni, Member and Collector (Ahmednagar) Dr. Sanjeev Kumar, Member and Executive Officer, Sri Kishore More and Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane all administrative officers, head of departments and employees worked very hard day and night to ensure the successful conduct of the festival.

The renowned classical maestro vocalist Sri Rahul Deshpande gave an hour long classical music presentation in the Sai Baba temple on Monday, March 18. The tunes of classical music reverberated in front of Shri Sai Nath after several years. This small *mehfil* (gathering of revellers) started at 8.30 p.m. and ended at 10 p.m. He presented ‘*Sunta hai Guru Gyani*’ *bhajan* of Sri Kumar Gandharva in *bandishi* of Shankara *raga*. The *mehfil* reached its peak with the rendition of ‘*Surat piya ki*’ from the drama ‘*Katyar kaljat ghusli*’. He concluded the *mehfil* singing the popular *bhajan* of Dasganu Maharaj “*Raham nazar karo...*”

The audience showered loud applause and appreciation of the pure classical rendition. Sri Mohan Yadav, Public Relation Officer felicitated Sri Rahul Deshpande and his associates, on behalf of the Sansthan.

Other Special Features

- 2 lakh devotees availed the free *Prasadbhojan* during the 3 days of the festival.
- 3.5 lakh devotees availed the *laduprasad* and 20 thousand availed the breakfast packets.
- The magnificent attractive decoration of flowers and grapes was done with the donation made by Sai devotee Sri S. Devraj from Chennai.
- Like every year this year too, the Dwarkamai Mandal gave eye soothing experience (of decoration and lighting in the temple premises).
- Due to the preventive order on DJ music by the police administration, the devotees were relieved of rough loud sounds.

Bountiful Programmes in the Festival

There is an un-breakable connect to the festival in Shirdi and the various programmes performed by renowned artistes since the last many years. This year too, several famous artistes performed their programmes on the grand stage erected in the compound of Sai Nagar in Shirdi.

On the first day of the festival, Mrs. Prajakta Joglekar from Shirdi presented a **Bharat Natyam** at 6.20 p.m., Sri Kailas Harekrishnadas from Nagpur presented **Om Sairam Bhajan Sandhya** at 7.30 p.m. and Kumari Archita Venugopal from Hyderabad presented **Kuchipudi dance** at 9.30 p.m. On the second day, Sri Saigopal Deshmukh from Beed presented **Darbar mere Sain ka** at 7.30 p.m. and Mrs. Sunita Tikare from Mumbai presented **Bhakti Geet and Abhang programme** at 9.30 p.m. On the third day, smt. Guru Rekha Sri (Desai) from Mumbai presented **Bharat Natyam, Kaththak and Bhajan** at 7.30 p.m. and renowned playback singer Mrs. Anupama Deshpande from Mumbai presented **Sai Bhajan Sandhya** at 9.30 p.m. The audience lauded all the programmes profusely.

10 TRAINS FROM SHIRDI EVERY WEEK

Sai devotees from Andhra Pradesh, Karnatak and Tamilnadu as also Maharashtra are benefitting a great deal due to the 10 trains introduced every week from Sainagar railway station in Shirdi, built for the convenience of Sai devotees.

Sainagar railway station is located 2 kms. away from Shirdi town on Nagar–Manmad highway. From here presently Sainagar–Mumbai Fast Passenger Train No. 51034 departs at 4.40 p.m. daily, Sainagar–Dadar Express Train No. 12132 departs at 10.25 p.m. every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday

and Sainagar–Pandharpur Express Train No. 11001 departs at 5 a.m. every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

Sainagar–Secunderabad Express Train No. 17001 departs at 5.10 p.m. every Monday and Saturday, Sainagar–Kakinada Express Train No. 17205 departs at 5.10 p.m. every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, Sainagar–Vijayawada Express Train No. 17207 departs at 5.10 p.m. every Wednesday, Sainagar–Howrah Express Train No. 22893 departs at 1.55 p.m. every Saturday, Sainagar–Chennai Express Train No. 22602 departs at 8.25 a.m. every Friday, Sainagar–Vishakhapatnam Express Train No. 22802 departs at 7.10 p.m. every Friday and Sainagar–Mysore Express Train No. 16218 departs at 11.55 p.m. every Tuesday.

Sai devotee passengers are very grateful to the railway administration for providing this convenience.

A free aids and equipments distribution camp for the handicapped and deaf patients, jointly organized by Shree Sai Baba Sansthan and Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Sahayata Samiti, Mumbai at the Shri Sai Baba English Medium School of Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi) on April 25, was inaugurated by the Chairman of the 3-Members Managing Committee of the Sansthan and Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) Sri Jayant Kulkarni.

Speaking on the occasion, Sri Kulkarni remarked that “This was a very commendable activity. This activity could be started on a continuous basis, to ensure that the handicapped get the needed aids on time, if the Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Seva Sanstha provides an expert person to the Sansthan on a full time basis.”

Hearing aids, calipers, artificial feet (Jaipur foot), three–wheeler cycles, wheel chairs, hip and knee bands and other aids were distributed to the registered persons at the camp held from April 25 to 28. Patients from Ahmednagar, as also Amravati, Nanded, Buldhana, Aurangabad, Jalna, Nasik and other districts availed the services of the camp.

The aids were distributed by the Chairman of the Sansthan Sri Jayant Kulkarni. The office bearers of Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Seva Sanstha were felicitated on behalf of the Sansthan by Sri Jayant Kulkarni. Member of the Managing Committee and Executive Officer of the Sansthan Sri Kishore More and Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane, administrative officers and others graced the occasion.

The introduction of the programme was presented by the Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane. Sri Narayan Vyas of Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Seva Sanstha gave information about the activities and Principal Sri Vikas Shivgaje compered the proceedings of the function.



Worship of Holika



Worship of the Gudhi

by the Member of the 3-Members Managing Committee and Executive Officer of the Sansthan
Sri Kishore More and Mrs. Manjushri More



Equipment – aids distributed to the handicapped and deaf patients by the Chairman of the 3-Members Managing Committee of the Sansthan and Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) Sri Jayant Kulkarni at a free camp organized for the same.



Chairman of the Sansthan's Managing Committee
Sri Jayant Kulkarni, Member and Executive Officer Sri Kishore More, Deputy Executive Officer
Dr. Yashwantrao Mane,
Administrative Officer Sri B. D. Sabale and other dignitaries at the inaugural function of the camp...



Meritorious employees of the Sansthan were felicitated by the Chairman of the 3-Members Managing Committee of the Sansthan and Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) Sri Jayant Kulkarni, Member and Executive Officer Sri Kishore More, Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane, Administrative Officer Sri S. V. Game, Chief Accounts Officer Sri Hemant Jadhavar and other dignitaries...

On the occasion of Maharashtra Day and International Labour Day meritorious employees and students of the Sansthan were felicitated with a certificate and memento on behalf of the Sansthan. Chairman of the 3-Members Managing Committee of the Sansthan and Chief District Judge (Ahmednagar) Sri Jayant Kulkarni presided at the function.

Sri Kulkarni congratulated all the meritorious employees and students on the occasion. Similarly, he lauded the students, who participated in the essay competition on 'our expectations from the Sansthan', conducted on behalf of the Sansthan's Educational Complex, and the suggestions they made. Stating that some of the suggestions were truly welcome, he assured that all efforts will certainly be made to make necessary improvements. Sri Kulkarni called upon the police and security personnel to help the students cross the road near the school, where there is heavy traffic.

Member of the Sansthan's Managing Committee and Executive Officer Sri Kishore More hoisted the flag. Thereafter the students' orchestra of the Educational Complex presented patriotic songs. Thereafter the meritorious were honoured by the Chairman of the Sansthan Sri Jayant Kulkarni, Executive Officer Sri Kishore More, Deputy Executive Officer Dr. Yashwantrao Mane, Administrative Officers Sri B. D. Sabale, Sri S. N. Garkal, Sri D. T. Ugale, Sri U. P. Gondkar, Sri S. V. Game, Medical Director Dr. Makhwana, Chief Accounts Officer Sri Hemant Jadhavar and other dignitaries. Alongwith Senior Accountant Sri Jayant Vaze, Sri Ramdas Kote, Sri Punja Kote, Sri Rajendra Pawar, 35 employees were honoured as ideal employees. Sri Jayant Kulkarni also felicitated Sri Rajendra Kohakade, the sports teacher of the Educational Complex for being selected as the technical officer for the 98th state level school sports competition at Balewadi.

Sri Rajendra Jagtap, Chairman of the Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Employees' Society, all officers and employees of the Sansthan were present on the occasion.

AT THE FEET OF SAI

... Actress and Member of the Parliament

Smt. Jaya Bachchan

... Actress Rati Agnihotri

... Actress and Former Member of the Parliament

Smt. Hema Malini

... *Santoor* Musician *Ustad* Amjad Ali Khan

... Former Cricketer Ravi Shastri -

... being felicitated by the Sansthan's Chairman

Sri Jayant Kulkarni