



**O Sai ! Thou art our Vithu *Mauli* !**

# O Sai ! Thy Shirdi is our Pandharpur !

*Shirdi majhe Pandharpur I*

*Sai Baba Ramavar II 1 II*

*Shuddha Bhakti Chandrabhaga I*

*Bhav Pundalik jaga II 2 II*

*Ya ho ya ho avghejan I*

*Kara Babansi vandan II 3 II*

*Ganu mhane Baba Sai I*

*Dhav paav majhe Aai II*

In this *Abhang*, which is often recited as a *Prarthana* (prayer), Dasganu Maharaj describes that Shirdi is his Pandharpur where his God resides. He calls upon the devotees to come and take shelter in the loving arms of Sai Baba.

Situated in the devout destination of Pandharpur is a temple that is believed to be very old and has the most surprising aspects that only the pilgrim would love to feel and understand. This is the place where the devotees throng to have a glimpse of their favourite Lord. The Lord here is seen along with His consort Rukmini (Rama). The impressive Deities in their black colour look very resplendent and wonderful. Situated on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga or Bhima, this place is also known as Pandhari, Pandurangpur, Pundalik *kshetra*. The Skandha and the Padma *puranas* refer to places known as Pandurang *kshetra* and Pundalik *kshetra*. The Padma *puran* also mentions Dindiravan, Lohadand *kshetra*, Lakshmi *tirtha*, and Mallikarjun *van*, names that are associated with Pandharpur. The presiding Deity has many different names like Pandharinath, Pandurang, Pandhariraya, Vithai, Vithoba, Vithu *Mauli*, Vitthal *Gururao* etc. But, the well-known and commonly used names are Pandurang or Vitthal or Vithoba. The word Vitthal is said to be derived from the Kannad (a language spoken in the southern parts of India) word for Lord Vishnu.

Lord Vitthal/Vithoba is none other than Lord Vishnu, Lord Narayan or Lord Krishna. It is believed that Lord Krishna had incarnated at the end of *Dwapar Yug* on the eighth day of the dark fortnight in the holy month of *Shravan* (as per the Hindu calendar).

*Utha Panduranga*

*aata prabhatasamayo patala*

*Vaishnawancha mela*

*garudaparin datala*

[Arise, O Pandurang! (Vitthal, Incarnation of Lord Vishnu at Pandharpur), it is now dawn. Vishnu's devotees have gathered in large numbers at Garudpar (eagle-shaped platform found in Vaishnav temples).]

Composed by : Saint Janabai

According to a legend, there was once a devoted son called Pundalik. He served his parents well and looked after all their needs and comforts. Seeing Pundalik's sincere devotion towards his parents, Lord Vishnu was extremely pleased. He left His abode - *Vaikauntha Lok* to bless Pundalik.

Lord Vishnu reached Pundalik's house and knocked on his door; but Pundalik was busy serving his parents. He saw the Lord at his door; but his devotion to his parents was so intense that he wanted to finish his duties first and then attend to his guest.

Pundalik gave the Lord a brick to stand on and asked Him to wait until his duty was completed. The ever-loving Lord was so pleased with His devotee's devotion to his parents that He waited for him. When Pundalik came out, he asked God's forgiveness for neglecting Him; but the Lord instead, asked him to request a boon from Him. Pundalik asked that He should remain on the earth for ever, blessing all His devotees. His wish was granted and Vitthal stood resting on a single brick, just for the love and devotion of Pundalik. The word 'Vitthal' is said to be derived from the Marathi word 'Vit', meaning brick.

*Simhanad shankhabheri*

*aanand hotasein mahadwari I*

*Keshawaraj vitewari*

*Nama charan vandito II*

[The blowing of the conch is like the roaring of the lion. There is rejoicing at the main gate. Nama (Namdev) adores the Feet of the Lord Keshavraaj (Vishnu or Vitthal), Who is standing on the brick.]

Composed by : Saint Namdev

The worshippers of Vitthal perform a pilgrimage to Pandharpur. This holy journey from the places of different saints – Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Tukaram, Chokhamela and Eknath etc. (around 40 in number) to Pandharpur is called *vari*. The people who perform this *vari* are called as *varkaris*. Many people go on different pilgrimages; but the term *varkari* has got exclusively associated with the pilgrimage to Pandharpur. Every year, *varkaris* walk hundreds of miles to the holy town of Pandharpur, gathering there on *Ekadashi* (the 11<sup>th</sup> day) of the Hindu lunar calendar month of *Aashadha* (which falls most probably in July). Another pilgrimage is celebrated on the *Ekadashi* of the month of *Kartik* (which falls most probably in November).

*Varkaris*, making the pilgrimage to Pandharpur, carry the *palkhis* (palanquins) of the saints from their places of *samadhi*. This most outstanding display of the Maharashtrians' devotion to Lord Vitthal is called the '*vari*' or the '*dindi yatra*', a pilgrimage on foot that culminates in Pandharpur. It has been performed annually for the last seven hundred years. The *varkaris* form well-organized and disciplined processions called *dindis*, which start off from the birth sites and *samadhi* places of various saints and converge in Pandharpur. The pilgrims travel 150 to 300 kilometers, depending on where they start. The biggest of all *dindis* is that of Dnyaneshwar, which forms a gigantic procession. It originates in Alandi, near Pune, and covers about 250 kilometers in an eighteen-day walk.

The current tradition of carrying the *paduka* (sandals) of the saints in a *palkhi* was started by the youngest son of saint Tukaram - Narayan Maharaj - in 1685.

The *varkaris* fondly address Vitthal as Vithu *Mauli* (Mother Vithoba).

Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi celebrates three major festivals every year. These are 'Shri Ramnavami', '*Shri Gurupournima*' and 'Shri Sai Baba *Punyatithi*'. Lakhs of devotees throng to these festivals from all parts of the world. As per the tradition of Shree Sai Baba Sansthan Trust, 'Shri Ramnavami' festival is a three day affair, and is celebrated on a large scale. Hundreds of *palkhis* from different parts of the country and lakhs of Sai Baba devotees arrive in Shirdi for the festival. These devotees come travelling 15 days by foot to have Sai Baba's *Darshan*. Though the term *varkari*, as

mentioned above, has got exclusively associated with the pilgrimage to Pandharpur, these pilgrims who religiously perform the pilgrimage to Shirdi on foot are practically *varkaris* too.

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Anyone, born Shaiva or Vaishnava, who considers Vithoba his '*may-bap*' (mother-father) and Pandharpur his '*maher*' (maternal house of a bride) is accepted as a *varkari* by the sect, irrespective of the barriers of caste. '*maher*' (in the Marathi language) means 'mother's home' - a haven of hope, belonging and understanding.

Saint Eknath (1533–1599) was a prominent Marathi saint, scholar and religious poet. In the development of Marathi literature, saint Eknath is seen as a bridge between the towering predecessors Dnyaneshwar and Namdev and the equally noble successors Tukaram and Ramdas. Saint Eknath believed : "The *varikar*, whose father is Vitthal - the husband of Rukmini - is generous with all of his body, speech, mind, and life. Pandharpur is his *maher*. Know that, that is this Pandharpur is the abode of all Gods and the *maher/nij Mandir* (own temple) of all saints"

Saint Namdev, a contemporary saint-poet of saint Dnyaneshwar, is considered a prominent religious poet of Maharashtra. Saint Namdeo burst forth thus, "Here come the children of Hari (God), the brave *varikaras* of Pandharpur, whose being is full of devotion and love. Coloured by Hari, they dance without reserve... At the Pandhari *maher*, there is Mother Vitthal. O Hari! Do not send us to Vaikuntha. Let us reside in Pandhari all the time."

Saint Tukaram was one of the most famous of *varkari* saints of Maharashtra. He lived during the seventeenth century, and over the last three hundred years his devotional influence has been deeply felt by people. His poems, the 4,500 verses known as the *abhangas*, have become part of the public memory. They are sung in every village and every home. He was fond of Pandhari as his *maher*. He always chanted: "Pandhari is my *maher*. This is the soothing religious order, way to *maher*."

Saint Dnyaneshwar also considered Vithoba as his Vithu *Mauli* : "O Mother! I will go to Your Pandharpur and meet our *maher*."

Saint Niloba was brought up as a well-groomed and a religious person. He came under the great influence of religious preacher Santoba Pawar and learned a lot about life and works of Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram and Namdev. It is believed that Lord Krishna blessed him and saint Tukaram inspired him in his dreams. Resultantly, he wrote more than 1200 *abhangas* in praise of Vitthal. His book of *abhangas*, first published in the year 1881, vividly portrays the life of Lord Krishna. He has described Pandhari as *Vaikuntha* on the earth : “*Maher* of devotion and liberation established Pandharpur.”

Saint Chokhamela was a devotee of Lord Pandurang. In one of his *abhangas*, he pays obeisance, in all humility, to Vitthal, offering himself as a servant of His servants and pleads that he be given any left overs of food other *bhaktas* have consumed...

“Salutations to You,

My mother and father (Vitthal)

I am an untouchable *mahar* to Your *mahar*

God, I am even inferior to the people inferior to You...

God, I am extremely starved (for Your love)

I came hoping for Your leftovers

(for the little mercy You will show me)

I brought with me a basket

for Your discarded leftovers...”

Dasganu Maharaj invoked Sai Baba’s grace thus, “*Apane mashid ka jhadu Ganu hai*” (“Ganu is Your mosque’s broom”). What a beautiful expression it is! He never wished to be Baba’s personal secretary. No! But, only a *‘jhadu’* (a broom)! The expression is so very amazing! Saint Chokhamela expressed it one way and Dasganu expressed it another way.

Along with Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Eknath, and Tukaram, Janabai has a revered place in the minds of Marathi-speaking people who belong especially to the *varkari* sect in Maharashtra. Janabai is routinely referred to as saint Janabai. Through the influence of the religious environment around her and her innate inclination, Janabai was all along an ardent devotee of Lord Vitthal, and she was

also gifted with poetic talent. Though she never had any formal schooling, she composed many high-quality religious verses of the *abhang* form. In one of her *abhangas*, she sings -

“If the Ganga flows to the ocean  
and the ocean turns her away,  
tell me, O Vitthal,  
who would hear her complaint?  
Can the river reject its fish?  
Can the mother spurn her child?”

Jan says -

Lord,  
“You must accept those  
who surrender to You.”

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited Pandharpur while on a journey through South India, apparently to search for his *sannyasi* brother, Shankararanya, formerly known as Vishvarupa. After travelling down the east coast of India through the province of Tamil Nadu and up the west coast through Kerala and Karnataka, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu entered Maharashtra. As stated in the Chaitanya Charitamrita (Madhya 9.282-283), the Mahaprabhu went to Pandharpur, where he happily saw the Deity of Lord Vitthal, and chanted and danced.

There was a nonagenarian *varkari* by the name of Gauuli Bua. When this devoted *varkari* used to be on his way to Pandharpur to perform annual *vari*, he would halt at Shirdi to take *Darshan* of Sainath. He used to stare at Baba and say, “This is Pandharinath Vitthal Incarnate, the merciful Lord of the poor and helpless.” (Shri Sai Sat Charita, chapter 4)

There’s absolutely nothing wrong with Gauuli Bua’s perception of Sai Baba. Devotees believe that, for the welfare of the world, *Parabrahman* has appeared in the mortal form of Sai Baba at Shirdi. They look upon Sai Baba as Vitthal and the pilgrimage town of Shirdi as Pandharpur.

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## our Pandharpur !

The relation of Sai Baba with His devotees is that of a mother and her children. Baba is the Divine Mother of all, symbol of purity and well-being. He loves those who lay down their body, mind and wealth at His Feet. His *Darshan* and His Blessings are sufficient to burn all the sins of His devotees and they attain *moksha*. Sai Baba is so fond of His devotees and unifies with them.

Baba had a brick with Him, which He used to look after very carefully. He, while sitting alone in Dwarkamai, would support His hand on this holy brick. At night He would rest His head on the brick, using it as pillow. Every night in solitude, Baba used to take support of this brick and spend the time peacefully submerged in the divine self. This practice had continued unhindered for years. This brick was Baba's visible life. "My *Sadguru* gifted me with this brick", said Sai Baba. "As my *Guru's charan* (feet) touched this brick, I use it as a pillow. Thus, I place my head at *Guru's* feet."

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One day, a young boy was sweeping the Dwarkamai *Masjid* in Baba's absence. He lifted the brick just a little to sweep underneath it. As it was destined, the brick slipped out of his hand and fell down breaking into two pieces. When Sai Baba heard about this, His eyes were full of tears. His heart was torn apart with grief and His voice choked with emotion. He said, "It is not the brick, but the fortune that has broken."

Vithoba has been at the focus of the long tradition of saints and sages that has flourished in Maharashtra. Upon Pundalik's request to stay permanently on the earth to lift *jivas* from ignorance, Vitthal, is still standing here at Pandharpur with His hands on His waist to shower His blessings on His devotees.

The 'Pandurangashtakam' by Adi Shankaracharya explains the reason (of Vithoba's posture) :

"I pray to the Pandurang, the representation of *Parabrahman*, Who rested His hands on His waist to show His devotees the depth of the ocean of *samsar*, and Who holds a (lotus) bud in his navel for *Vidhata* (Brahma) to stay."

Lord Vithoba seems to tell the devotees, “Do not fear. For those who have surrendered unto me, I have reduced the depth of the ocean of material suffering. See, it is only this deep.” He indicates the shallowness of the ocean by placing His hands on His waist.

Likewise, the statue above the tomb in the *Samadhi Mandir* at Shirdi depicts Sai Baba in His iconic seated posture, His left hand resting on His right foot which in turn rests upon His left knee.

This ocean of mundane existence is very hard to cross. That is an absolute and universal truth. Waves of infatuation beat high there against the bank of bad thoughts and break down trees of fortitude. The breeze of egoism blows forcibly and makes the ocean rough and agitated. Crocodiles in the form of anger and hatred move there fearlessly. Eddies in the form of the idea ‘I and mine’ and other doubts whirl there incessantly and innumerable fishes in the form of censure, hate and jealousy play there.

Sai Baba speaks to us from Dwarkamai *Masjid* : “Why fear of these crocodiles when I am here! I have reduced the depth of this fierce and terrible ocean of mundane existence.” Baba specifies the triviality of the ocean by resting His left hand on His right foot which in turn rests upon His left knee. This posture of Baba serves as a ‘Light House’ in this violent and dreadful sea of humdrum life.

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Bhagwantrao Kshirsagar’s story illustrates how Sai Baba was one with Vitthal (Shri Sai Sat Charita, chapter 4) : The father of Bhagwantrao was a devotee of Vithoba, and used to make *vari* (annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur). He had an image of Vithoba at his home, and used to perform regular Vitthal *Mahapooja*. After his father’s demise, the son stopped everything - the *vari*, the worship and the ritual of *Shraddha* etc., and thus strayed away from taking care of his responsibilities and duties as the son of his family. If “All truth is God’s truth”, Baba pulls His men to Shirdi like a sparrow tied to a string. Baba, giving extremely favourable consideration to His relationship with Bhagwantrao’s father, dragged his son to Shirdi. When Bhagwantrao arrived at Shirdi, Baba straight away said, “I towed you here because your father was my devotee. You never offered *naivaidya* (*naivaidya* is food offered to a Hindu Deity as part of a worship ritual, before eating it) after your

father's passing away, and thus starved Vitthal and me. I shall draw you now into worship your household Deity with all your heart." Thus, Baba gave a clear indication to His devotee's son that He was one with Vitthal. Bhagwantrao marvelled at Baba's words and his faith was revived.

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Dasganu Maharaj was an ardent devotee of Sai Baba and was instrumental in spreading His name and fame through his *kirtans*. Dasganu reminisces, "Baba made me go away to the Vitthal temple where I stayed to write lives of saints, or to spend my time in repetition of Vishnu *Sahasranam* etc..." (Bhaktaleelamrit, chapter 31) On one occasion, Baba asked Dasganu Maharaj to conduct '*Naam Saptah*' (chanting and remembrance of God's name for a week). Dasganu replied, "Sure, Baba! Whatever You wish, I will be commanded to perform." However, he sought an assurance from Baba that Lord Vitthal should appear in person after the completion of the '*Naam Saptah*'. Baba assured him, saying, "Yes, of course, Vitthal in person will appear. The devotee should be full of *Shraddha* (faith). Dankapuri of Dakurnath, or Pandharpur of Vitthal, or Dwarka Nagari of Ranchhod is here only, in search of which you need not go a long distance. Is Vitthal going to come from anywhere else, leaving His loneliness? He would appear here, springing up out of the intense devotion of the devotee. By serving his parents Pundalik captivated the God of Gods. Seeing Pundalik's devotion, the Lord stood on the brick and waited."

After the seventh day of the chanting, Baba's words came true, and it is said that Dasganu had *Darshan* of Lord Vitthal at Shirdi. (Shri Sai Sat Charita, chapter 4)

One day, while Kakasaheb Dixit was in mediation after his morning bath in his *wada* at Shirdi, he saw a vision of Vitthal. When he went to take Baba's *Darshan* right afterwards, Baba asked him, "Did Vitthal Patil come? Did you not see Him? Hold Him fast as He is very elusive; He may give you the slip and run away." That is to say, "Hold Him fast by faith and with faith hold tight His Feet, so that power may ooze out from Him and may heal your soul."

Then, at noon, a certain hawker came there, with 20 or 25 pictures of Lord Vitthal for sale. Kakasaheb was awestruck to notice that the figure of Vitthal he saw in his mediation exactly tallied

with that in the picture. Dixit was reminded of Baba's words, and bought one picture most eagerly to keep it in his *pooja graha* (worship room). (Shri Sai Sat Charita, chapter 4)

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Nanasaheb Chandorkar, who was a great devotee of Baba, was a *mamlatdar* at Nandurbar in Khandesh, Maharashtra. He got an order of transfer to Pandharpur. He was very happy as Pandharpur is regarded as heaven on the earth. Since Nanasaheb had to take immediate charge, he left for Pandharpur without informing anybody at Shirdi. He wanted to pay a surprise obeisance to Sai Baba before proceeding further. Nobody knew of Nanasaheb's departure for Shirdi, but Sai Baba knew all about this as He is omniscient. As soon as Nanasaheb approached Nimgaon, just a few miles away from Shirdi, there was a stir at the Dwarkamai *Masjid*. Though Baba was busy talking with some devotees, He abruptly said, "Let us all do some *bhajan*, the doors of the Pandhari are open, let us sing joyfully." Then He started singing in chorus, the theme of the song being, "I have to go to Pandharpur, and I have to stay there, for it is the house of my Lord". When Nanasaheb arrived with his family, he prostrated before Baba and requested Baba to accompany them to Pandharpur and stay with them there. The devotees then revealed to Nanasaheb how Baba was already in the mood of going to Pandharpur and staying there. Hearing this, Nanasaheb fell at Baba's Feet. Then, after getting Baba's permission and Blessings, Nanasaheb left for Pandharpur. (Shri Sai Sat Charita, chapter 7)

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One Ramchandra Atmaram Tarkhad alias Babasaheb Tarkhad from Bandra (Mumbai) was a follower of Prarthana Samaj (an off-shoot of Brahma Samaj founded by Raja Ramamohan Roy in Bengal those days) and did not believe in idol-worship, going on pilgrimages and visiting saints and sages. But, later the same Babasaheb Tarkhad not only became a staunch devotee of Shirdi Sai

Baba, but after Sai Baba attaining *Mahasamadhi*, took an active part in establishing Shri Sai Baba Sansthan on a firm footing. He was the first treasurer of the Sansthan. He further went on to publish the Shri Sai Leela magazine and had written the preface for the very first issue of the magazine. This transformation in his life and views was due to his devotional wife and youngest son Jyotindra.

Once, Mrs. Seetadevi (wife of Babasaheb Tarkhad) and her son Jyotindra visited Shirdi to have Sai Baba's *Darshan*, and had many experiences which are not found in Shri Sai Sat Charita. Jyotindra Tarkhad has given a good account of his live experiences with Sai Baba, which Jyotindra's son Virendra Tarkhad scribed in his seminal book, 'Live Experiences of the Tarkhad Family with Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi.' One such experience is given below, which proves the fact that Baba is Lord Vitthal.

Once, Mrs. Tarkhad desired to go on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur and take *Darshan* of Lord Vithoba. Jyotindra, however, told her to ask Baba and seek His approval.

Accordingly, on her next visit to Shirdi, she asked Baba to permit her to go to Pandharpur. Baba told her, "O mother! There is no need to go to Pandharpur or anywhere else. Shirdi is our Pandharpur." Mrs. Tarkhad felt utterly disillusioned and disappointed at this suggestion. However, she meekly shared her feelings with Baba and pleaded that she has a really very strong urge to visit Pandharpur and perform Lord Vithoba's *pooja* (worship) at least once in her lifetime; because pilgrims visit Pandharpur, firmly believing that Pandharpur alone is the Abode of Lord Vithoba, and once one takes the Lord's *Darshan* there, the pilgrim's path of attaining *moksha* (salvation) becomes plain.

On hearing this, the words of saint Tukaram ("The *jiv* is longing to meet You, O Lord Vithoba!") reverberated in Baba's mind. He could now feel Mrs. Tarkhad's fervour and intense longing for the Supreme Presence - Lord Vithoba, and freely gave His consent, "O Mother! If you feel so, then proceed for Pandharpur and fulfil your desire."

Jyotindra and his mother set out speedily to see their very own Vithu *Mauli* (Mother Vithoba) and soon reached Pandharpur. Both of them entered the sanctum sanctorum, and performed the *pooja* with complete dedication and wholehearted devotion. However, Mrs. Tarkhad still had one more wish to fulfil. Her desire was to put a garland around Vithoba's neck with her own hands. But, the head

priest of the temple prevented her from doing so on the plea that no one was ever permitted to climb the platform where the *Moorti* of Vithoba stood.

Again, Jyotindra advised her mother to pray to Baba and seek His help as He had granted her permission to visit Pandharpur. She closed her eyes and raised both the hands holding the garland, and requested Lord Vithoba to accept her *pooja*.

And then came a miracle... Lo and Behold! The *Moorti* of Lord Vithoba slid down the platform. Jyotindra instantly shook his mother bodily. He told her to open her eyes and see for herself that the Lord had responded to her prayers, and now she could adorn Him with her garland. Without delay she placed the garland around Vithoba's neck, and the Lord was back to its original position. Both the mother and the son prostrated in front of Lord Vithoba.

On seeing this, the head priest was completely astonished and flabbergasted. Jyotindra told him that they are devotees of Shirdi Sai Baba and only after obtaining His consent they have come to Pandharpur.

Immediately on their return from Pandharpur, Mrs. Tarkhad and her son Jyotindra hastened to visit Shirdi, especially to thank Baba. Sai asked Mrs. Tarkhad whether she could meet her Vithoba.

Thanking Sai profusely, Mrs. Tarkhad replied, "O Baba! This is all Your making. I am now ready to part with this world as I consider my life is complete now."

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One Balaram Dhurandhar, a resident of Santacruz (Mumbai), was a devotee of Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. He was a well-known practicing advocate of the Bombay High Court in those days. He had also served a brief stint as principal at the Government Law School in Mumbai. His intelligence and command over English language astonished even great scholars. Pure thoughts, sharp grasping power and good presentation skills were the prominent features of his personality. Once, his brothers Babulji and Vamanrao came to Shirdi and took Baba's *Darshan*. On their return home, they narrated their unique experiences to Balaram and other family members. Balaram's heart overflowed with joy on hearing about strong evidences of Baba's divinity from the mouth of his brothers. Thereupon, all

three brothers decided to visit Shirdi together to take Baba's *Darshan*. The day, they chose for the pilgrimage, happened to be Thursday. *chavadi* procession (palanquin procession) is organized every Thursday in Shirdi. The Dhurandhar brothers had the good fortune of witnessing the *Chavadi* procession that night. Balaram saw the lustre of Pandurang on Baba's face, and the next morning at the *kakad aarati* time, the same glow of Vithoba was visible again on Baba's face. (Shri Sai Sat Charita, chapter 51)

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**- Dr. Subodh Agarwal**

'Shirdi Sai Dham',  
29, Tilak Road, "Dehra Dun - 248 001,  
Uttarakhand.

E-mail: [subodhagarwal27@gmail.com](mailto:subodhagarwal27@gmail.com)

Tel. & Fax: **0135-2622810**

Mobile: **(0)9897202810**



## Sai tests His devotees...

As I begin to write this article I am reminded of an excerpt from a very famous Lama's autobiography which Osho narrated in one of his discourses. The Lama wrote - "When I was five years old, I was sent to a university to study. At that time I was just five years old. My father had told me in the evening that I would be sent to the university the next morning. And he said, "Neither I nor your mother will be there to say goodbye to you. Your mother will not be there because there would be tears in her eyes, and if you saw her crying, you would go on looking at her - and there has never been a man in our family who has looked back. I also will not be there because if you look back even once after getting on the horse, then you will no longer be my son and the doors of this house will be closed to you forever. The servants will say farewell to you tomorrow morning. Remember, do not look back after getting on the horse. There has never been a person in our family who has looked back."

(Such an expectation of a five year old child!) The five year old was woken up at four o'clock in the morning and put on a horse. The servants bade him farewell. As he left a servant said, "My child be careful. You would be seen until the crossroad, your father is watching from upstairs. Do not look back before the crossroad. All the children in this house have departed in this way, but no one has looked back". And the servant also told him, "The place where you are being sent is not an ordinary university - the greatest men in the country have studied at that university. There will be a very difficult entrance examination. So whatever happens, try in every way to pass the entrance examinations because if you fail, there will be no place for you in this house."

(Such harshness with a five year old child!) He sat on the horse, and in his autobiography he wrote that as he sat on the horse, "Tears started flowing from my eyes but how could I look back the house, to my father? I was leaving for the unknown. I was so small, but I could not look back because nobody in my house had ever looked back. If my father were to see it, I would be banned from house forever. So I controlled myself and looked forward, I never looked back."

The child reached the school. He was a five year old child. There was no way to know what his capacities were going to be. The principal of the school said, "The entrance test here is difficult. Sit near the door with your eyes closed and do not open them until I come back - whatever happens. This is your entrance test. If you open your eyes then we will send you back because someone who does not have even this much strength in himself to sit with his eyes closed for a while, cannot learn anything. Then the door to learning will be closed because you will not be worthy. Then go and do something else." All this to a child of five year old...

He sat near the entrance with his eyes closed. Flies started disturbing him, but he knew he must not open his eyes because once he opened his eyes the test would be over. The other children were coming in and out of the school - somebody started pushing him, somebody started disturbing him, but he was determined not to open his eyes; otherwise the whole thing would be spoiled. And he remembered his servants telling him that if he failed the entrance test then his father's house would be closed to him forever.

One hour passed, two hours passed - he sat with closed eyes afraid that even by mistake he might open them. There were many temptations to open his eyes - the road was busy, children were running around, flies were harassing him, some children were pushing him and throwing pebbles at him. He wanted to open his eyes to see if his master had come. One hour passed, two hours passed, three hours passed, four hours... he sat there for six hours!

After six hours the master came and said, "My child, your entrance test is over. You will become a youth of strong will. You have the determination within you to do whatsoever you want. To sit with closed eyes for some five or six hours at this age is a great thing." The master hugged him and said, "Don't be worried, those children were told to harass you. They were told to disturb you a little so that you would be tempted to open your eyes."

The Lama wrote, "At the time, I thought I was being treated very harshly, but now at the end of my life I am full of gratefulness towards those people who were hard on me. They awakened something in me, some dormant strength became active."

One may wonder as to why a parent simply doesn't explain to the little kid what it must do in order to have a successful and happy life and a bright future instead of straightaway putting the little one in such hard and trying conditions. May be the child would understand what is necessary for him to do. No, the child will never understand because a child is a child and is not expected to know even the meaning of words like 'bright future', 'successful' etc. etc. How can one aspire for something absolutely unknown to him. But the mother is fully aware of all these and she also knows how futile it is to talk to the child about them. Instead she has to set the child's life in a way that the child gradually but surely imbibes the values and the qualities needed to lead a happy and meaningful life. And all this she does silently, selflessly and risking her own image in the child's eyes. The child so often feels the mother is harsh, cruel, indifferent and sometimes even selfish. One may wonder what gives the mother (in the above story, the father) so much patience and strength to take in all this and yet keep devising ways for her child's overall growth? Needless to say, it is her sheer compassion and selfless love for her dear one.

Sai is our compassionate Mother. Birth after birth He is simply evolving ways so that we may learn our own lessons well. We all come with our own *karmic* baggage. Sai doesn't create troubles and trials in our life in order to test us. How can an enlightenment one test us, the ignorant ones? What's the need to test that which we are not? And what we essentially are is beyond any test. How will an Awakened One test the ones who are asleep (spiritually)? The next question that is then raised is why doesn't He solve the critical problems of our life, why doesn't He wave His 'magic wand' so that all our hardships, struggles, anxieties, worries, fears and trials simply disappear leaving no trace behind? After all, we are His children, His loving devotees. How can He just keep watching? I shall try to answer this with the help of the following story :-

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared, he sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through the little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress, it appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and could go no further. Then the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. Something was strange. The butterfly had a swollen body and shrivelled wings. The man continued stopwatch the butterfly because he expected at any moment the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened. In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen and deformed wings. It was never able to fly. What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand, was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get

through the small opening of the cocoon are God's (Existence's) way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon. Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life.

Ridding us of the struggles may cripple us forever, may deprive us of the Ultimate Flight for which every human being is born. *Sadguru* Sai is Omnipotent and can do anything and everything. But His one and only 'doing' is to expedite our spiritual growth and not to cripple us. We may not be aware of our own strengths and potentials, but Sai is. Just when we are wondering as to why Sai is not responding to our desperate prayers, why are things getting worse instead of getting better, Sai is actually watching and waiting. Waiting to see if His dear one would muster the last bit of strength and would try to continue from where he has stopped and given up. The devotee thinks he can do no more, can go no further but Omniscient Sai knows that one step more and the devotee will touch a new height for himself. For instance, let us visualize a pot of water that has been placed on fire. The water may be initially thinking that soon it will be removed from fire but instead the heat goes on increasing and so does its fear and struggle. And then comes a time when the temperature reaches to 99.9 degree celsius. May be, the water starts thinking that it's just a matter of few seconds when the pot shall burst and it will be laid to rest eternally on the pyre of fire. No hope. How cruel the fire is! Crueler still is God who made no effort to save it from the raging fire! May be it starts getting ready to fall on the fire and be swallowed by it. But that does not happen. Instead the water gets 'transformed' and is reborn as steam rising high up into the sky where its beloved is waiting to embrace it (I am more of a poet than a scientist to say that water changes into water vapours that rise up to become clouds). That water which thought that to dwell in ditches and wells was its destiny is now moving in the vast expanse of the sky, albeit in a different form. But this it could have never imagined in eternity if it had not gone through the 'test' of fire (and may be like the Lama, it says a word of thanks to the fire). But what appears to be a test is actually the mandatory process. During the most crucial moments in our life, Sai is not busy testing us but is helping us go through the mandatory process of 'transformation'. Transformation from *jeevatma* to *Paramatma*, from mortality to immortality. And for that, like in the case of the Lama, something in us has to be awakened and some dormant strength has to be activated.

All His life and till date Baba is painstakingly trying to activate that dormant strength in each one of us. Sri Hemadpant was a bit disappointed and dejected that Baba had instructed Sri Sathe to read Gurucharitra for another week but did not shower such a blessing on him. Omniscient Baba knew about Sri Hemadpant's thoughts and asked him to go to Shama's house and bring some '*dakshina*' from him. While talking with Shama, Sri Hemadpant came to know about the lady who was adamant on receiving '*upadesha*' from Shri Baba and how Baba told her to have complete faith in the *Guru* and not look for verbal '*upadesha*'. After hearing the story he could draw the meaning and message therein. Though Baba hadn't spoken a single word directly to Hemadpant, yet something got revealed to him and his anguish got dispelled. But why did Baba send him to Shama? Why didn't He Himself explain to Sri Hemadpant that a *Guru's* compassionate glance is enough to nourish His disciples and that only He knows who needs what? Next example is of Megha. Megha was initially reluctant to go for Baba's *Darshan* because he thought Baba was a *Muslim* and it was not quite right for a *brahmin* like him to go for a *Muslim's Darshan*. Finally when Megha went to Dwarkamai for His *Darshan*, Baba ordered him to get out of there. People might think that Baba was testing him. Again, how can we ever think that an ocean will ever test a water droplet. Megha was determined to mend his dogmatic views and find place at Sai's Lotus Feet. He did succeed without Sai uttering a single word to him about what is right or what is wrong. The one who was not even willing to go for Baba's *Darshan* became one of Baba's ardent devotees. But no words of instruction were spoken. Two more devotees, Sri Sapatnekar and Sri Somdev Swami, were also

greeted with the same words - “Get out of here”. No discourse took place, yet each of the two had realised his mistake. How? Dasganu Maharaj was translating Ishopanishad but was not satisfied with his work because he couldn't grasp the essence of the Upanishad. He sought Sai's help and guidance. Baba sent him to Kakasaheb Dixit's house saying that his maid would solve his problem. Those present found this very amusing but Dasganu had full faith in Baba's words. He did go to Kakasaheb Dixit's house and eventually could extract the purport of the said Upanishad. Many wondered couldn't Baba have Himself given the solution to Dasganu's problem? Was He testing his obedience?

Shri Sai Sat Charita is replete with such instances where we think that Baba is testing the devotee's faith or devotion or determination or may be his obedience. And only after he successfully passes that test does he obtain Baba's blessings. Absolutely not. Then what was Baba doing? He was, and still is awakening something in us, activating a dormant strength which can not be done with the help of verbal lecturing or discoursing. Baba targets and touches the devotees' heart. Words are stored in the head. But it is the heart that goes through the experience and assimilates its essence. The head has no access to the heart. So many times it must have happened with each one of us when we have repeatedly vowed to give up a particular bad habit but have never been able to. Why? Because it's the head that takes the vow and it is the heart that indulges in habits and the two are not connected. But a single mishap, a major setback or a tragedy sees us giving up that habit in no time (that is, if that particular habit gets somehow related to the unfortunate incident). What happens that years of vowing and swearing pales before one single event? It is the heart that underwent the blow of the event and a sensitive heart immediately rectifies its mistake and is thus transformed. The head is anyways a storehouse, lot is already stuffed in it in the form of information, opinions, views etc. etc. Yes, it can help create an understanding or '*pragya*' to help us evolve spiritually. But it is the heart that has to be sensitive and strong to embark on the spiritual journey.

So, what appears as Sai's test is actually His way of making our heart open and be sensitive. He wanted His devotees go through an experience because that necessitates and develops sensitivity and awareness. And that is the mandatory process for self-realization. Existence is never keen to give defeat to anybody. Instead it designs each step towards our glorious victory. But for that, one needs to have courage which falls in the domain of the heart. Hence in all the above examples cited from Shri Sai Sat Charita, Baba is seen working on the devotee's heart in myriad ways. Lecturing, discoursing and instructing fall on deaf ears if the heart is not open or has not been activated.

As our scriptures say '*Charaiveti Charaiveti*' - keep going, keep going. Not only is there light at the end of the tunnel, there is a Hand holding ours all through the tunnel - so keep going, do not give up.

Last but not the least - blessed is the one whom Sai finds worthy of His tests if at all He ever decides to test!

– Mrs. Sumona Bagchi

Translator : Shri Sai Sat Charita

Shri Saisagunopasana

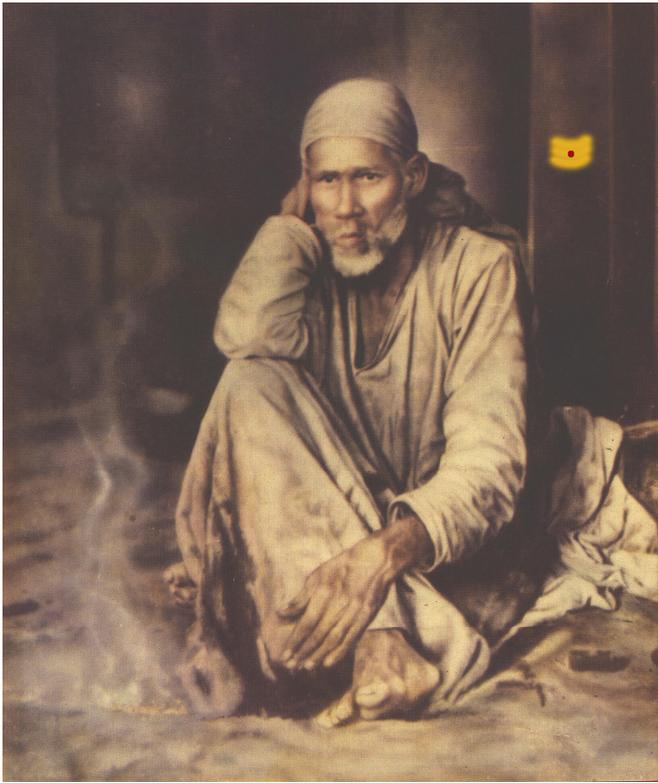
Shri Sainath Stavanmanjari

Chaar Adhyay (on Sai Baba by

Dasganu Maharaj) in Bengali

E-mail : [vpriya1960@yahoo.com](mailto:vpriya1960@yahoo.com)

Mobile : (0)9899774321



## In Sai's Proximity

DADA KELKAR

### Honour on the occasion of *Guru Pournima*

In the earlier years, *Guru Pournima* was not being celebrated in Shirdi. In the year 1908, the fortune of performing the first ever *Guru Pournima Pooja* in Shirdi went to Tatyasaheb Nulkar. Baba had just returned after collecting *bhiksha* in the morning. Nulkar approached Him with preparations of *Pooja* and said, "Today is the auspicious day of *Guru Pournima*." Baba gladly allowed him to perform the *Pooja*.

Later on, Baba sent a message to Kelkar "Dadasaab, today is the auspicious day of *Guru Pournima*. Don't you remember that? Bring the material and perform *Guru Pooja*." As per the customs of those times, as a mark of respect, Dada gave Baba *daxina*, a *shawl* and a *dhotar-jodee*. Thereafter, the practice continued. Thus, Kelkar got the honour of performing his first-ever *Guru Pournima* in Shirdi after Nulkar. There is no doubt that in doing so Baba was showing His appreciation of the spiritual heights achieved by Kelkar.

The tradition of celebrating *Guru Pournima* is being followed even today in Shirdi.

### Own experience speaks

Anantrao Patankar – a resident of Pune – once came to Shirdi to avail Sai *Darshan*. He had made a deep study of religious books like *Ved* and *Upanishad*. But, mental peace eluded him. He held on to Baba's Feet and said, "Baba, whatever I read has gone waste. Now I get a feeling that illiterate people are better off than me. At least, such people experience tranquility through their emotions if not through their knowledge. I should have



remained like them – illiterate! I have heard of your fame and therefore, I came to seek solace at Your Feet. Please give me your blessings!”

Baba replied him by telling him a story. He said, “Once, a trader came on horseback. His horse defecated nine pieces of shit. The man promptly picked up the trash and at that very moment, he found that he has achieved peace!”

Anantrao was not able to catch the real meaning of the story. He had put-up in Sathe *wada*. After returning there, he narrated the incident to Dada Kelkar. He explained that the horse represents blessings of God and the trader is you yourself and the figure of nine represents nine types of devotion.

(1) *Shravan* (listening)

(2) *Keertan* (narrating)

(3) *Naamsmaran*

(chanting the name of the Almighty)

(4) *Paadsevan*

(massaging and pampering the feet)

(5) *Archan* (performing a *Pooja*)

(6) *Vandan* (bowing)

(7) *Dasya* (serving)

(8) *Sakhya* (friendship)

(9) *Atmanivedan*

(narration of one’s own life)

Dada further added that once a devotee imbibes the *Nava Vidha Bhakti* in his heart, he can achieve the bliss of tranquility. He had explained the Baba’s parable so beautifully and with great simplicity. Patankar was very much impressed as well as moved by this. He realized that his study of the religious books so far was without any devotion. It was an exercise in futility. His eyes overflowed with tears. He prostrated at Dada Kelkar’s feet.

Next day, when Anantrao bowed before Baba, He asked, “Did you take the nine pieces of trash? Always try to remember what Dada Bhat told you.” Anantrao replied, “Yes Baba. Please shower Your Blessings on this poor devotee. Then I will be able to follow the path of *Nava Vidha Bhakti*.” Baba said, “I will look after your welfare.”

**“What Dada is saying is right!”**

Kelkar wanted to purchase a plot of land near Shirdi. He conveyed his desire to Sathe, who promptly sent Rs. 1,200 to him. This enabled Kelkar to purchase the plot of land.

After coming to Shirdi, Sathe expressed a desire to see the plot. However, due to certain family problems, Kelkar was not very keen to take Sathe to that plot at that time. He felt that if the widow of his nephew came to know about the land, she may feel that it was ancestral property and may stake her claim to it.

Not aware about these things, Sathe insisted on seeing the plot. He decided to go there on his own and asked his wife to accompany him. At the last moment, she refused to go with him. As it is, Sathe was upset with Dada, but was unable to express his displeasure because of Dada’s age. Now, Dada’s daughter also was refusing to co-operate. This infuriated Sathe further.

Sathe had hired a bullock-cart to visit the plot. He was so angry that he took the hunter from the cart and raised it in the air to beat his wife. Just then, Megha came running and said that Baba has called him for some

urgent work. Thus, the situation was saved as Sathe rushed to the *Masjid*. On reaching there, Baba asked him, “What is going on? What was the reason for making you so angry? What Dadasaab told you is absolutely right. Isn’t it?”

Sathe apologized to Baba and returned back. In his memoirs, he writes -

I surmised from Baba’s talk that my father-in-law and wife were right. Because Baba later on added that “Your land is there where it was. Therefore, what is the need of going there and seeing it?”

Thus, Baba saved Sathe and his family members from a very embarrassing situation.

### **Babu – the loved one**

Dada was very fond of his nephew (brother’s son) Babu. He used to stay with his wife at nearby Kopargaon. Sathe had worked in Kopargaon and Yeola *talukas* as assistant superintendant revenue surveyor. One Limaye worked under him. Therefore, Limaye employed Babu for the work of land mapping.

Babu began spending a lot of time at Shirdi in Baba’s *seva*. He frequently began remaining absent from the work. Limaye expressed his displeasure to Sathe who conveyed it to Dada. Dada knew about the intense devotion of Babu towards Baba. Therefore, he replied, “What can he do? Babu does what Baba tells him to do!”

Baba also said, “Let his job go to the dumps! Let him serve me.”

From the sweets that He got, Baba gave Babu the best of sweets. Baba asked Babu to enjoy the fruits from the heaps of mangos that He got.

In 1910, suddenly Baba told Dada to ‘Keep an eye on Babu!’ After some days, Babu began suffering from fever. One day, Baba asked

*(Contd. from page 18)*

Dada, “Are, he is there isn’t it?” And after a few days, at the young age of 22 years, Babu passed away in Shirdi leaving his young widow behind. On his annual death anniversary, Baba used to remember him.

### **Param Bhagyavan**

#### **(most fortunate) Dada Bhat**

Baba used to fondly call Dada Kelkar as ‘Dadasaab’. On some occasions, when He wanted to be more affectionate, He referred to him as ‘Dada Bhat’. Baba always respected Kelkar’s advanced age and everyday, Baba gave Dada Kelkar a sum of Rs. 5 out of the *daxina* collection. Baba maintained this practice till the last days. Dada Kelkar was one of those fortunate devotees who had the rare honour of receiving a part of the *daxina* collection!

Dadasaheb Khaparde has narrated a beautiful story in the diary maintained by him. In it he has referred to Dada Kelkar.

On the page for 1<sup>st</sup> January 1912, he has written :-

“Today Baba told me a story from His previous birth. While narrating the story, Baba said that in the lane where He resided there were Bapusaheb Jog, Dada Kelkar, Madhavrao Deshpande and Kakasaheb Dixit. These relations from our previous birth have once again brought us together even in our present birth.”

Hemadpant, the author of *Shri Sai Sat Charit*, has bestowed great honour on Dada Kelkar. It will be observed that while describing the relations between Baba and Dada Kelkar, the author has time and again compared it to the ties between a mother and her child.

By body and soul Baba and Kelkar had become one. Baba carried out many experiments on Kelkar and helped him in making his mind and intellect stable at the Feet of his *Guru*.

*(Contd.)*

– Mrs. Mugdha Sudhir Divadkar

61, Hindu Colony, 1st Lane,

Dadar (E), Mumbai - 400 014.

E-mail : [mugdha54@rediffmail.com](mailto:mugdha54@rediffmail.com)

Mobile : (0)9323971117

Translated from original Marathi into English by

**Sudhir**

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