

॥श्रीगुरुः शरणम्॥

A compact biography
of
Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati
(Tembe) Swāmi.

By

Dr. Vasudeo V. Deshmukh.

Publishers
Shashwat Prakashan, Vasai.

A compact biography of
Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swami.

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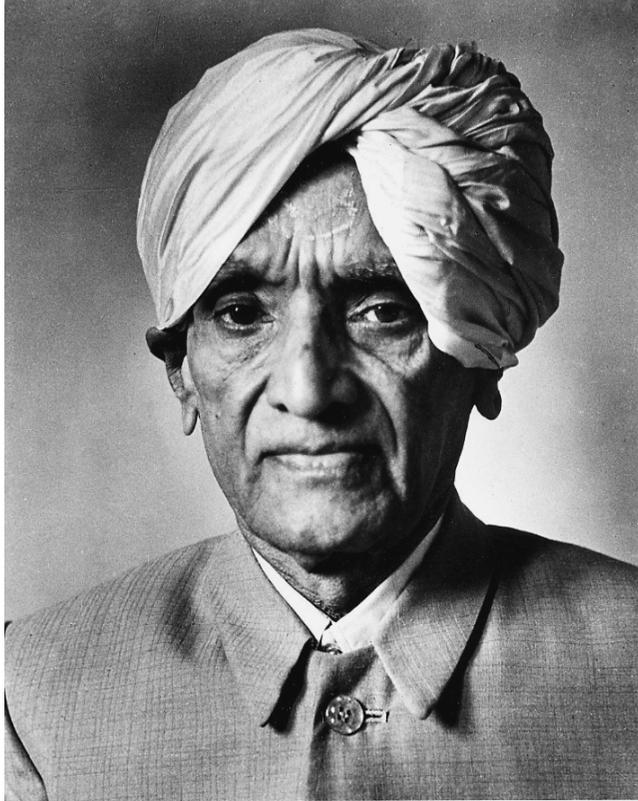
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**Dedicated to the Sacred Memory of
My Master**



Yogirāja Vāmanrao D. Guḷava, c Mahārāja

The picture of Shri Swāmi Mahārāja on the cover page displays the lyrical garland (Hārābandha) composed by P.P. Shri Dixita Swāmi in his praise.

मेशं केशं सुशंभुं भुवनवनवहं मारहं रत्नरत्नं ।
वंदे श्रीदेवदेवं सगुणगुरुरगुरुं श्रीकरं कंजकंजं ॥

Mēśaṃ Kēśaṃ Suśambhuṃ
Bhuvanavanavahaṃ Mārahaṃ Ratnaratnaṃ.
Vandē Śrīdēvadēvaṃ Saguṇagururagurum
Śrīkaraṃ Kañjakañjaṃ..

The scheme of transliteration.

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ		
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	r	r̄		
ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	अं	अः				
ē	ai	ō	au	aṁ	aḥ				
क	ख	ग	घ	ङ	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa	ca	cha	ja	jha	ña
ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण	त	थ	द	ध	न
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa	ta	tha	da	dha	na
प	फ	ब	भ	म	य	र	ल	व	
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	ya	ra	la	va	

श	ष	स	ह	ळ	क्ष	ज्ञ
śa	ṣa	sa	ha	ḷa	kṣa	jña

Blessings of

P. Pujya Shri Narayan Kaka Maharaj Dhekane.

श्रीगणेशदत्तगुरुभ्यो नमः।

Paramahans Parivrājakāchārya Shri Vāsudevananda Saraswati (Tembe) Swami Maharaj is widely believed to be the incarnation of Lord Dattātreyā. In his rather brief life of 60 years, 24 of them as an itinerant monk, he revived not only the Datta tradition but also the Vedic religion as expounded in the *Smritis* and *Purānās*. His life has been a source of succour and inspiration to countless devotees as well as a solace and a guide post to many an aspirant.

We have recently celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of this great saint all over the world and the author of this 'Compact Biography', Dr. Vasudeo V Deshmukh has played a significant part in the same. He has also been instrumental in building and maintaining the web-site <shrivasudevanandsaraswati.com>. As a result he has been studying the life and works of Shri Swami Maharaj and has clear insight into his mission and the message. The author is a disciple of Param Pujya Yogiraj Shri Vāmanaraoji Gulavani Maharaj who in turn is one of the major disciples of Shri Swami Maharaj.

Apart from narrating briefly the main events in the life of Shri Swami Maharaj, the author has attempted to interpret these in the light of Swamiji's view of life as reflected in his sizeable body of literature. This has made the book not merely informative but also educational. The author has succeeded in furnishing a brief manual of Indian religious thought through this biography. I have no doubt it will be of great value to all spiritual aspirants irrespective of their religious persuasion.

Shri Sunil Padhye of Shashwat Prakashan, Vasai has shown missionary zeal and dedication in spreading the gospel of Shri Swami Maharaj and deserves to be strongly commended.

I fervently pray to Lord Dattatreya to bless this book with abundant success that it deserves.



Narayan Yashavant Dhekane.
Chief Trustee
Shri Vasudev Nivas, PUNE 411004

Observations **by** **Shastri Jayendra Dave***

The life and work of Shri P.P. Vasudevanand Saraswati is a tremendous record of what a Sannyasin can do in a very short span constrained by physical ailments on the one hand and divine obligation on the other, not to talk about circumstantial shortcomings that he personally faced throughout his life.

There are, of course quite a few biographical records available both in Marathi and Gujarati composed with a view to provide the details of his life and work, contextual significance of which, however, was yet to be attempted. This particular need has been fulfilled; it can be said, by the present book.

Dr. Vasudeo V. Deshmukh M.D. (Patho), being basically a scientist, has very wisely tried in the present book to see and present the life and the work of Swāmi Mahārājashri in the context of Shree Gurucharitra. The GURU in Hindu system of philosophization is depicted as an individual and as a concept as well. Hence one may find detailed and extensive description of conceptual clarification and influential significance of Guru, his strength, grace and motivational bearings, etc., in almost all the branches of different schools of thought. But if one is inclined to get by heart the real characteristics of the living life of GURU in particular and GURU PARAMAPARA in general, one must consult the GURUCHARITRA, an epic-treatise, the first of its kind

* Retd. Professor & Head, Department of Education, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat. Highly qualified in both the modern and the traditional Indian systems of education, he has guided dozens scholars for their doctorates. He is devoted disciple of Parama Pujya Shri Ranga Avadhuta Mahārāja. Thus apart from being an authority in Sanskrit literature and Indian Philosophical systems, he is an advanced *śādhaka* with a keen insight into the literature and view of life of Shri Swami Mahārāja.

in the prolonged tradition of religion in India, composed in Marathi by Saraswati Gangadhar in 15th Century A.D.

It was P.P. Shri Swāmi Mahārājashri who devoted his whole life to propagate and popularize this GURUCHARITRA to an ever spreading society of GURUMAHARAJ. Dr. Deshmukh has done a great service by providing this contextual frame in this book. The readers, I am sure, will not only be benefited but will enjoy the biography of a great soul in this compact composition.

Vallabh Vidyanagar
March 20, 2006.

Shastree Jayendra Dave

**A Short Review of the
“Compact Biography”
By
Dwight A. Tkatschow
(*Yogin Bhairavananda Giri*)[†]**

Sometimes, one is given the rare opportunity to glimpse and experience the path to God, to ultimate Reality in a direct and intimate manner. Such is the case with the biography of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Maharaj. A portrait of a true sadhaka, a pure devotee, a real jnānin and a manifestation of God, within its pages the reader is taken into the heart of what it is to practice and embody the path of the Vedas. One is not just an external observer reading his life events from afar, but feels as if one is actually walking with Shri Vasudevanand on his journey to ultimate godhead. It is an excellent example of hagiographical literature at its highest level.

Each event, each experience of his biography is like the unfolding of the petals of a lotus flower. One is carefully shown the steps he used to accomplish the highest level of God realization and how with true devotion and through the proper application of the precepts of Sanatana Dharma, one can and will realize Brahman in a

[†] Sessional Lecturer, Ritsumeikan University & Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts. Canadian citizen of Russo-German Descent, he is a university professor living and teaching Peace Studies, Media Education & Awareness, Research Methodology, Foreign Language Instruction and related areas in Kyoto, Japan. He holds several upper level degrees from Canadian Universities in the areas of Religious and Asian Studies specializing in Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and other Asian Religions as well as the Gnostic Traditions of Antiquity and Interreligious Dialogue. In addition to this academic education, he was also traditionally trained as a Lama and Mantradhari (Ngakpa) in the Tibetan Buddhist Traditions, is an initiated and trained Yogin & Tantrika in the Giri Panth of Dashnami Orders of Shankaracharya, and is an ordained priest in the Japanese Tantric Tradition of Shingon Buddhism. He is also a Third Degree Yamabushi or Tantric Mountain Priest in the Japanese Tendai Tradition

single lifetime. Shri Vasudevanand did just this. Applying himself to Sadhana one pointedly and with tireless effort, he realized the fullness and depth of God in the flesh and became a Jivanmukta.

Moreover, it clearly shows how the three traditional paths to God: Bhakti, Jnana and Karma Yoga are not separate, but one intertwined and unified course of action for self-realization and that the various stages of a Vedic life are but the various levels one must go through and are needed to accomplish this end.

In addition, the biography gives an inside look at the worship of Shri Dattatreya, son of the Great Rishi Atri -- the tripartite Devata who is the combined manifestation of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. As the focus of his Sadhana, through his devotion and practice of the rites of Shri Dattaprabhu, we are shown how God works within a true devotee to accomplish self-realization and liberation. Not only was this possible for Shri Vasudevanand, but we are also shown that in each one of us, we are in fact God albeit in a limited and contract form, and that through careful and correct practice of Dharma, it is possible to bring about a restoration in the ultimate which is to be and embody God while still alive. Through the events of his life, we are given a look at essential Puja practices, the application of mantra Japa such as Shri Gayatri and the Digambara Mahamantra, the importance of the reading and recitation of the Shri Gurucharita and other scriptures of importance, as well as various courses of action in order to bring this about.

The life of Shri Vasudevanand does not just stand as a singular or isolated example of a sadhaka devoted to a particular aspect of godhead, but is an outstanding example of spiritual biography belonging to a long and time honoured tradition of masters in the great parampara - spiritual genealogies -- coming down from Shri Dattatreya himself through the great Rishis of the Vedas, the masters and saints of the Samartha lineage of Maharashtra such a Shripad Vallabha, Narasimha Saraswati, Ramdaas and Akkalkot Niwasi Shri Swami Samarth, etc., the Gurus of lines of Nath Siddhas such as Gorakhanath & Jnānadev and various other great spiritual lines of transmission.

In its pages, we see the lifeblood and essence of Indian religiosity, as well as the manifestation and crystallization of Vedic spirituality in its purest form. We not only walk with this saint through the events of his life, but meet gods, goddesses, saints and other experienced sadhaka, as well as experience his struggles and ecstasies on the spiritual path, meeting God every step of the way.

As an added bonus, the reader is given an essential tool that he or she can use to begin to awaken this process in them -- the Digambara Guru Mantra. Here for the first time in the English language is a detailed exegesis of this Mahamantra detailing its significance for the experience of self-realization and ultimate godhead. To read it is to understand an important key for the achievement of the highest levels of Sadhana and reality.

To read the biography of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Maharaj is not only to experience the life of a great God-realized soul, but to experience the heart and soul of the great religions and philosophies of India.

Kyoto, Japan

Dwight A. Tkatschow

Compact Biography - An Appraisal

By

Dr. Antonio Rigopoulos‡

Substantially, I think it is a useful contribution to our knowledge of the life and works of Shri P. P. Vasudevanand Saraswati, especially for people outside of the Marathi cultural milieu who have no access to the Marathi language. I myself learned many things which I didn't know.

What I notice is that you have construed it as according to the "caritra" genre, in a balancing/admixture of biography and hagiography. In this respect, I think it is in line with the Brahmanical tradition of the Datta-Sampradaya and its contemporary revivalism and reappropriation of the same. I think scholars will particularly appreciate your Appendixes concerning the "Chronology and Itinerary" as well as the "Literary Works" of the saint. His writings are especially significant and an English translation/critical edition of some of the most important ones would certainly be a precious addition. I've also enjoyed reading your "Significance of Digambara Mantra".

Your Biography reads indeed as a very accurate, even meticulous synthesis of the major happenings in Shri P. P. Vasudevanand Saraswati's life, as culled from his own works and devotional literature.

I think all people interested in the Dattatreya cult and its lineage of saints will find inspiration from this introductory work and will want to probe further into the various aspects of Tembe Swami's life and many significant writings.

Venice, Italy

Antonio Rigopoulos

‡ Associate Professor of "Sanskrit" and "Religions and Philosophies of India", Department of Euro-asiatic Studies, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, Italy.; author of "The Life and Teachings of Saibaba of Shirdi" and "Dattatreya: The Immortal Guru, Yogin, and Avatāra."

Foreword by the Author

*smṛtō'pyavati yō vighnaṃ nighnamambāsutaḥ stutaḥ.
gandharvasthaḥ sa hi kalau malaughaghno'stu mē hr̥di.. 1
namastē Śāradē dēvī vīṇāvādanataparē.
Sarasvatī Jagannmātā sā mē buddhiṃ pracōdayāt..2
Vāsudēvayatiṃ vandē Vāmanaṃ mama sadgurum.
Kavīśvaraṃ ca Dattākhyāṃ yācē matiprakāśanam..3*

This "Compact Biography" was initially written for the site www.shrivasudevanandsaraswati.com. There is no dearth of biographical works on P.P. Shri Vāsudevānanda Saraswati (Tembe) Swami Mahārāja. However only a few of these are in English. The challenge was to extract the essence out of the surfeit of material to arrive at an inclusive yet brief account of the life and mission of this great saint. Even though fully aware of my own limitations in this respect, I had to undertake the task out of sheer necessity. That this work is accomplished is in itself a sign of the grace of Shri Guru Maharaja.

The initial part of the biography, covering the first thirty-odd years prior to renunciation was written in the usual chronological format. Over this period, the life of Shri Swāmi Mahārāja evolves in a predictable plan, progressing towards a conceivable goal. With Shri Swami Mahārāja entering the Sannyās, this thread is suddenly lost. It is impossible to discern any motivation in his life beyond this point. In fact his individuality becomes imperceptible, except for his meticulous adherence to the code of Sannyasin. The events in these 25 years of his life are no more focussed on him. In the manner of Lord Shri Krishna, he did not seem to owe any duty to anyone in the three spheres, nor have anything to achieve as there is nothing that he had not achieved[§]. Thus an approach had to be adopted based on his interactions with the people he came across. Hence the chapter on Lokasangraha came to be written. Once it was near conclusion, the

[§] na mē pārthāsti kartavyaṃ triṣu lōkēṣu kiñcana/
nānavāptamavāptavyaṃ varta ēva ca karmaṇi. 3:22

theme of the next chapter on The Seekers of Truth came to mind. This is how the scheme of the biography progressed. Right up to the conclusion of one chapter, or even a part thereof, the theme of the next one was nowhere on the horizon; and then all of a sudden it seemed to dawn as if from nowhere. This is especially true of the chapter, "Shri Gurudev Datta."

The chapters on Gurucharitra and the Datta Parampara did not form the part of the original biography. These have been added later since these were thought to be essential to the proper understanding of the life and mission of Shri Swami Mahārāja. The chapter on the 'Digambar Mantra' based on an Ārati (hymn) by Shri Swami Maharaj was added since this Mantra, a supreme gift of the saint to the humanity, has become a distinctive feature all sections of Datta Sampradāya. The Appendix on the 'Chronology & Itinerary' is furnished to provide the relevant context of the anecdotes in the biography. The brief summary of the corpus of the literary works of Shri Swami Maharaja will not only apprise the readers of the range and variety of his writings but also find the work most suited for their regular *Pātha* or for detailed study.

The third Appendix summarising the lives and work of some major disciples has been added at the instance of Shastri Jayendrabhai Dave, who rightly asserts that the life of a Guru is substantially the life of his disciples. This is particularly true of the life of P.P. Shri Tembe Swami Maharaj. His glory, his way of life and his doctrines shine through the lives of his disciples who have been instrumental in the revival of Datta sect not only in the India but in the whole world, in the last century. I am acutely conscious of being very selective regarding inclusion of the disciples for this appendix. The selection is admittedly subjective. Let me reassert my deepest reverence towards the dozens of disciples of Shri Tembe Swami Maharaja who could not be included here purely for want of space.

The final appendix on the *Vidhanam* of the Mantra 'Drām Dattātrēyāya Namaḥ' has been included following the "divine inspiration of Lord Dattatreya" to an advanced devotee who prefers to

remain anonymous. It is hoped that the *Vidhanam* would be of use to the Eastern and Western devotees as a powerful tool to attain the grace of Lord Dattatreya.

This text has gone through several writings which have been vetted by **Shastree Jayendra Dave, Shri Dwight A. Tkatschow (Yogin Bhairavananda Giri), Dr. Antonio Rigopoulos and Shri Umakant Kurlekar****, whose emendations and valuable suggestions have substantially enhanced the accuracy and authenticity of this book. I am deeply grateful to these learned scholars for their kind and painstaking help.

I must express my heartfelt gratitude to **P. Puja Shri Narayan Kaka Maharaj Dhekane** who has consistently been a source of inspiration and encouragement.

My special thanks are due to M/s Shashwat Prakashan, Vasai, more particularly **Shri Sunil Padhye** (Padhyeakaka) for making this book presentable.

The composition of this biography has been a spiritually fulfilling and elevating experience and a source of joy. I humbly beseech Shri Datta Prabhu to dwell in this work, inspired and fulfilled by Him, and through it, confer his grace upon the readers!

That the 2nd edition of this biography is being brought out during the Samadhi Centenary year of P.P. Shri Swamimaharaj is a mark of Lord Dattatreya's continuing Grace.

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Vasudeo V. Deshmukh.

** Retd. Director of Food & Civil Supplies, Government of India; an ardent devotee of Dattatreya; disciple of Yogiraj Shri Gulavani Maharaj and the author of a comprehensive Marathi treatise on Gurucharitra and its Sanskrit versions by Shri Swami Maharaj.

Publisher's Note

The main goal of Shashwat Prakashan has been to propagate the word of P.P. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swami Maharaj. Until now we have been publishing Marathi books on the life and works of Shri Swami Maharaj.

This "Compact Biography" of P.P. Shri Vāsudevananda Saraswati (Tembe) Swami Maharaj is only the second of our English publications. We have already published "Caritra Cintana" by Dr. Vasudeo V Deshmukh, a disciple of P.P. Yogirāja Shri Gulavani Mahārāja, a major disciple of Shri Tembe Swami Mahārāja. We are happy to see our association with Dr. Deshmukh growing through this book.

Our respectful thanks are also due to **Param Pujya Shri Narayan Kaka Maharaj Dhekane** whose blessings are a perennial source of inspiration to us.

In view of our relatively short experience with English language publications, we seek indulgence on the part of our readers in respect of any inadequacies. Any suggestions and comments from readers for improvement are most welcome.

Sanjay Padhye

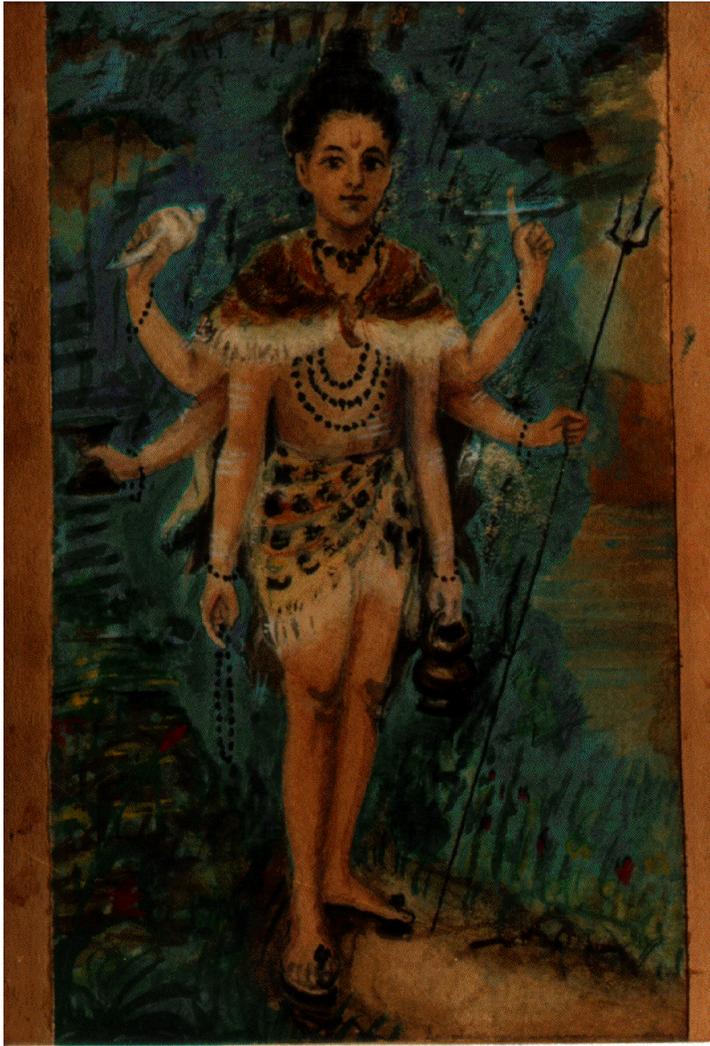
Vasai, 27th June 2006

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Shri Gurudeva Datta.



The Countenance of Shri Dattaprabhu as visualized and drawn by Yogirāja Gulavani Maharaj. (see page 109-110). This will be useful for *Dhyān* also. Page 157)

Shripad Shrivallabh.



(1298 – 1350)

Shri Nrisinha Saraswati.



(1378 -1458)

P.P. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swami.



In A Pensive Mood.

Ñasi/Ehasarasvatc (DckÀita) Svimi Mah;rja.



(1866 – 1927).

Shri Yogananda Saraswati



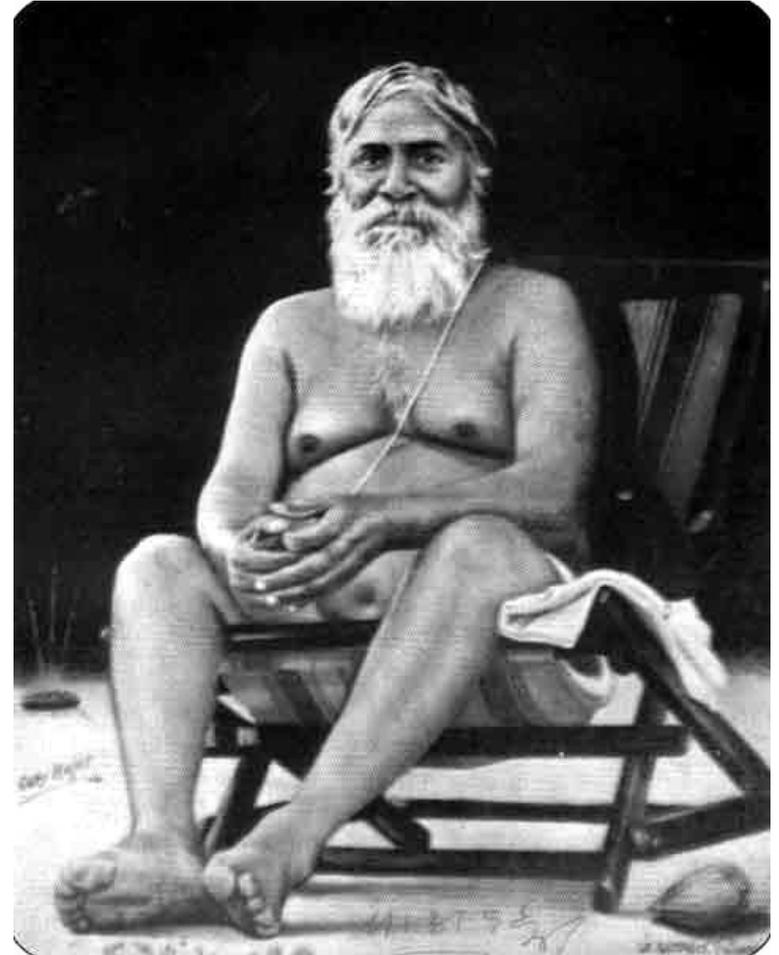
Shri Ganda Maharaj (1868-1929)

Śrīsadguru Sītārāma Mahārāja Tēmbē.



Younger Brother and a disciple of Shri Swami Maharaja.
(18?? - 1918)

Shri Rang Avadhut Maharaj.



(1898 - 1968)

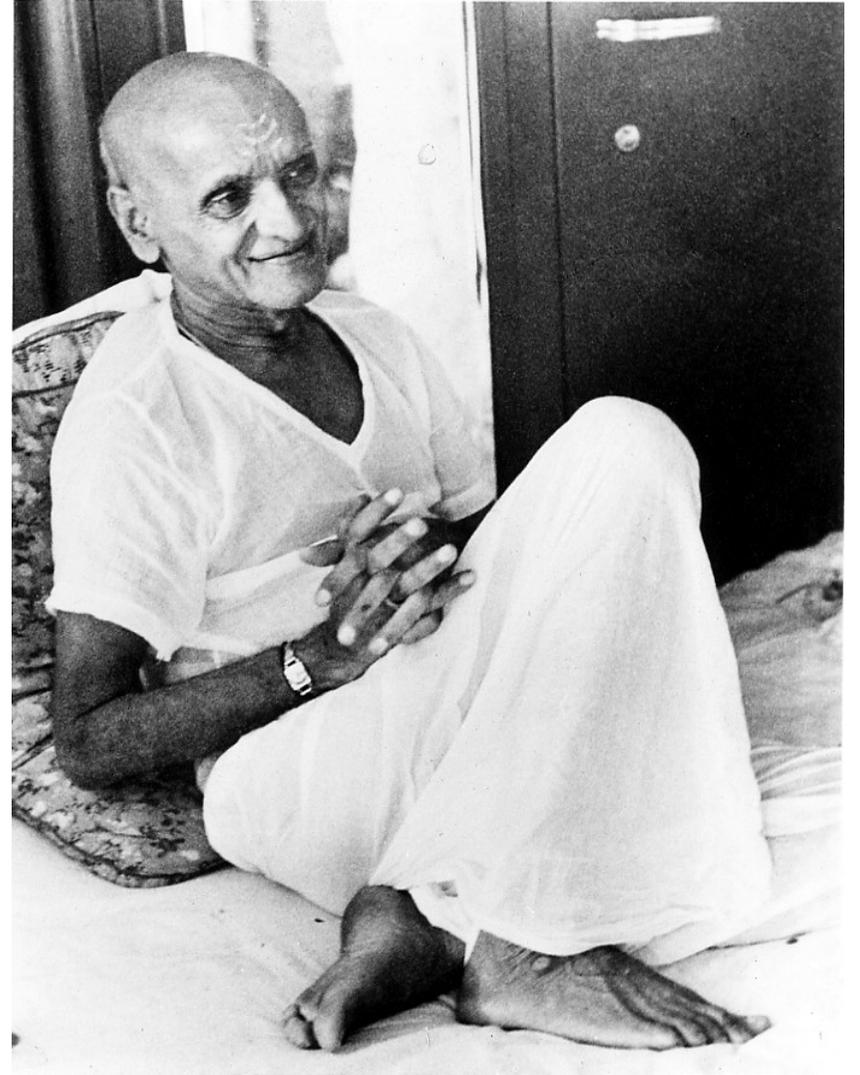
áresamartha Sadguru Nṛṅ Mahṛja Tarṅ,  kara.



(1896 – 1993)

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Paramapujya Yogiraj Gulavani Mahārāja



(1886 – 1974)

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Chapter 1 The Beginnings.

श्रीगणेशाय नमः। श्रीगुरुदत्तात्रेयाय नमः।
वासुदेव यतिं वन्दे वामनाय च सद्गुरुम्।
दत्ताभिधाय च तथा कवीश्वराय ते नमः॥१॥

The Nineteenth Century Indian society epitomized cultural confusion. The Vedic religious traditions that withstood a millennium of Islamic tyranny were shaking at their very foundations by the systematic intellectual onslaught of the British rulers. The people were losing their faith in the traditions, having forgotten the essentials of their own religion. The doctrines of Vedic religion appeared ambiguous and contradictory, the practices so diverse as to be conflicting and mythology bereft of any meaning. There was a dire need for a person who could not only make the people clearly understand these doctrines but also demonstrated, through his own dedicated life, the ideal practice of religion and finally guided them on to the divine path. Such a person indeed was Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi, the great saint and ascetic who revived the ancient Dattatreya tradition and embodied in his short life of 60 years, the ideals of *Brahmacharyashram*, *Grihasthashram* and *Sanyasashram*.

He was born in the village of Managaon near Savantwadi, then a princely state in southern Maharashtra, in a traditional, religious Brahmin family, devoted to Lord Dattatreya. His grandfather Haribhataji used to recite Shri Gurucharitra regularly. He also used to make manuscripts of the holy book to supplement his meagre income. His father Shri Ganesh Bhataji Tembe was a devotee of Dattatreya, spending long periods, sometimes years together, in the remote Ganagapur temple of the Lord in Karnataka. His mother Ramabai also used

to spend her time in religious pursuits like Jap (recitation of mantras), *Pradakshinā*¹, *Pātha* (reading holy books), *Atithisatkār* (hospitality) etc. After a particularly long stay in Gānagapur, Lord Dattatreya appeared in a dream and instructed Shri Ganesh Bhataji to return to Managaon and attend to the duties of a householder (grihastha), promising to incarnate as their son. It was after his return from Ganagapur that his eldest son Vasudeva was born on the 5th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana of A.D.1854. Tembe family was endowed with spiritual riches (*Daivi Sampat*) but had little temporal wealth. Their priestly duties were not adequate for the livelihood and Vasudeva's grandfather took to agriculture as a side business.

Elementary Education: - At the age of three years Vasudeva started attending the private school held in the Yakshini temple in the village. He had to learn writing with his fingers on a layer of dust, a very tiring and painful practice. Apart from the secular education in the school, Vasudeva also received traditional oral education from his grandpa Hari Bhataji. With his sharp intellect and quick memory Vasudeva soon mastered the basics of Sanskrit grammar and poetry.

Brahmacharyashram: - As per the tradition, Haribhataji performed the *Maunjibandhan*² of his beloved grandson Vasudeva, at about the age of about 8 years. This consists of initiation to the Gayatri Mantra and thus to the first of the four *Ashramas*, *Brahmacharyashram*, literally meaning the phase of celibacy. This period in a Brahmin's life stage devoted to the Vedic studies. Immediately after this, the young Vasudeva started the daily rituals ordained by the scriptures viz. *Sandhya* twice a day, 1000 recitations of *Gayatri* mantra, daily reading of *Shri Gurucharitra* – the prime treatise on the theory and practice

¹ Circumambulation around a holy object.

² Literally translated as thread ceremony which is marked by wearing of the sacred thread *Yajnopaveet*.

of *Guru* Worship in general and Shri Datta tradition in particular. He also completed 2.4 million recitations of *Gayatri*. He strictly followed the religious disciplines prescribed by scriptures, specifically the *Gurucharitra*. He then commenced his studies of *Vedas*, the holiest of the Hindu scriptures, under the guidance of Shri Tatyā Bhataji Ukidave. He woke up daily before sunrise and took his bath and insulated himself from all impurities and contamination during the religious practices. He only took fresh, wholesome (*sattvik*) and vegetarian food prepared by himself or by his mother and never ate outside his home. The food thus prepared, he used to offer to sacrificial fire (*Vaishvadev*), the cow (*Gograas*), to the crow (*Kaakbali*) and finally to the Lord Datta, before partaking it in the manner ordained by scriptures. During the meal any impurity in the environment led him to leave his food and observe fast for the day. He used to observe the fasts on the 11th days (*Ekadashi*) of each fortnight, without even drinking water and abjuring sleep during day and night.

Vasudeva, with his sincerity, sharp intellect and phenomenal memory, soon completed his study of the *Vedas* and became proficient in the priestly duties. As a result he became a respected and beloved figure in the Managaon and neighbouring villages and started contributing to the family livelihood.

During this period, he also studied some astrology and Sanskrit poetry with one Shri Sadhale Shastriji. However his perfection in astrological calculations soon started embarrassing Sadhale Shastriji by being more accurate than the latter's. This led Sadhale to stop Vasudeva's tuition.

Mantrasiddhi: - Vasudeva's austerities, dedicated practices and devotion soon led to his acquiring *Mantrasiddhi* i.e., supernatural powers manifested through Vedic mantras. There are numerous examples of these. Once he was travelling by foot with a fellow priest, to a nearby village through a forest.

Suddenly they saw a snake slithering ahead of their path. His companion asked Vasudeva whether he could try a mantra on it. Quickly, Vasudeva holding some dust nearby in his hand and invoking an appropriate mantra, sprinkled it in a circle around the passing snake. Suddenly, the snake was stopped in his tracks. It could not cross the circle and started moving round and round within it. The two priests went about their way. Having finished their business in the neighbouring village, they returned to Managaon, forgetting all about the snake. Only the next afternoon, Vasudeva suddenly remembered the snake and went to the spot along with his friend. To his horror, the snake was lying listless in that circle apparently totally exhausted after unsuccessfully trying to break through the circle. Quickly, Vasudeva took some more dust and reciting a remedial mantra, sprinkled it over the poor creature. The snake, as if suddenly released from the bondage, sprang away into the bushes. This so deeply affected Vasudeva – we better now address him Vasudeva Shastriji, or simply Shastriji, that he never again used any restraining mantras on living creatures.

Once at his sister's place, Vasudeva displayed his mantric prowess by turning her intractable cow docile. He also helped local police by providing an accurate description and modus operandi of a particularly evasive gang of robbers. Another time, he correctly predicted the capture of the accused by the police of another state. He also helped people in distress by relieving them of their chronic ailments. This augmented his reputation in Managaon and the surrounding area. He was now respectfully addressed as Shri Vasudeva Shastriji.

However, it must be emphasized here that Shri Vasudeva Shastriji never employed his powers for either monetary gain or to impress others in any way. He only used his powers to help the needy and to relieve suffering. We shall see that this compassion for his fellow beings continued to be a major motivation in his entire life.

Chapter 2 *Grihasthashram*

One Babaji Pant Hawaldar of Ranganagad, a nearby village, approached his teachers Ukidave and Alavani to get his rather plain looking daughter with a defective foot, married to Vasudeva. Together, they practically settled the marriage without as much as a word to Vasudeva or to his mother Ramabai. When Ramabai learnt of this, she was dismayed at her son's indifference. When Vasudeva later clarified to her that he knew nothing of the matter and nor had set eyes upon the girl. Also he explained that he did not have any plans to marry. She was then somewhat pacified. Eventually, Vasudeva had to bow to the wishes of his teachers and marry Babaji's daughter Bayo who was christened as Sou. Annapurna by Vasudeva's mother, as per the custom, at the age of 21 years. Soon after the wedding he commenced the worship of ritual fire (*smartagni*) and completed a *Gayatri purashcharan*³.

Subsequent to marriage, the need to earn some extra money took Vasudeva to Goa for a few months. He studied astrology with Shri Neelkanth Padye, a renowned astrologer of the time. Vasudeva's sharp intellect and adherence to religious discipline, earned him the affection and respect of Shri Padye. However, Vasudeva had soon to return to Mangaon because of the illness of his father Shri Ganesh Bhataji. Shri Padye had become so fond of Vasudeva Shastri that he kept his belongings to ensure Vasudeva's return. This however did not eventually materialize.

Vasudeva lost his pious and simple father at the age of 23(1877 AD). Shri Ganesh Bhataji was a spiritually evolved soul

and knew the time of his death beforehand. He was only 56-57 at the time.

Shastriji's married life was not exactly a bed of roses. Sou. Annapurna never got along well with her mother-in-law. She had to suffer a lot of verbal and at times even corporal abuse from Vasudeva's mother. Shastriji being a devoted son never even uttered a word in his wife's defence, though he sympathized with her, lest his mother be offended. Annapurna felt neglected and at times rebelled by not cooperating in the various religious rituals, which formed such a major part of Shastriji's life. These continuing domestic clashes sharpened his inherent detachment from worldly life. The thoughts of renouncing it all for an itinerant life were growing stronger by the day. One day, he left home quite determined to get initiated as a monk (*Sanyasi*) and went to Savantwadi. There, in a chance encounter, a spiritual being (*brahma-Pishāch*) told him through the medium of Shri Aanaavkar, quite unexpectedly, that his thoughts of renunciation were premature and he had still much work to do at Managaon. This made him change his mind. This particular brahm-Pishāch, on his own admission was the spirit of a learned and virtuous ancestor of Aanaavkar (a Brahmin) who had accidentally killed a cow while trying to drive her away from his garden. He never revealed this to anybody nor did he perform the prescribed absolutions (*Prāyaschitta*). On his death, the Chitragupta (Hindu angel of judgment) gave him a choice between being reborn as tiger or a brahm-Pishāch. He opted for the latter since this would preserve his memory and knowledge. According to him, these beings have a life span extending from hundreds to thousands of years. This Aanaavkar spirit was indeed very knowledgeable and was several times helpful in solving Shri Vasudeva Shastriji's problems in astrology and scriptural interpretations.

Narasobawadi:- He now started feeling the urge to travel to Narasobawadi, the place where Shri Narsimh Saraswati

3. 2.4 million Recitations of Gayatri Mantra, with strict religious conduct over a period of time.

Swāmi Mahārāj, the second incarnation of Lord Dattatreya in the age of Kali (15th Century AD), spent 12 years in austerities, situated at the confluence of Krishna and Panchaganga rivers. The Lord Dattatreya is worshipped here in the form of His feet of *Padukas* (footprints) carved in stone installed under the ancient *Audumbar* tree, alongside the riverbed. Doubtful about his mother's consent for travelling to Narasobawadi (also referred to as Wadi), he kept his thoughts to himself. One night a Brahmin appeared in his dreams and said, "Shastriji, if you are so keen to go to Wadi why you don't? Your mother will surely consent and you will get company as well as the money!" After this dream, Shastriji spoke to his mother who said, "I have no objection! Make a trip if you so wish!" The other predictions in the dream also came true and Shastriji arrived in Wadi. On the way he was instructed through another dream to contact Shri Govind Swāmi a self-realized soul then staying in Wadi.

On reaching Wadi, Shastriji, after a holy dip in the waters of Krishna, climbed up the stairs to the temple in the river bed, to behold the holy feet of Lord Dattatreya. With a heart overflowing with devotion and eyes with blissful tears after the vision of the Lord, as he climbed up to the banks of river, he thought of Shri Govind Swāmi. Even as Shastriji was enquiring about the Swāmi, the Swāmi himself approached him, addressing in an unexpectedly familiar manner, "Welcome, Vasudeva Shastri! When did you come?" The Swāmi then made arrangements for Shastriji's stay at his quarters in the Brahmanand monastery.

Shri Govind Swāmi:- Next day, Shastriji rose early well before sunrise, took the ritual dip in the Krishna River and wet and fresh from the dip, took a vessel full of the holy river water to be offered to the *Padukas* in the temple. The priests, doubting his Brahminhood, did not allow him into the sanctorum. Disappointed, Shastriji started climbing up the steps of the riverbank, when Shri Govind Swāmi, directed by the Lord

Himself, came down the same steps and said, "Vasudeva Shastri! It appears the priests haven't allowed you to bathe the Lord's feet! Come with me," With these words he handed his sacred staff⁴ (Dand) to Shastriji and took him back to the temple. Thus accompanied by the revered sage, Shastriji was naturally allowed access to the *Padukas*, fulfilling his desire to bathe and worship them with his own hands. From that day onwards Shri Govind Swāmi became the mentor and the guide of Shri Vasudeva Shastri.

One night, during his maiden stay in Wadi, Shastriji descended to the river to clean his feet. On his way back, he went to the temple and as he was circling it, he was suddenly confronted by a tall and radiant monk who admonished him, "Are you not aware of the rule forbidding visit to the temple after the night service?" Shastriji offered salutation and apologised. When he recounted this event, Shri Govind Swāmi told him that the monk was none other than Shri Narsimh Saraswati Himself. During this visit, Shastriji was initiated into the ritual worship of Shri Datta *Padukas*, in addition to the Panchayatan worship he was practicing by Shri Govind Swāmi, on instructions from Lord Dattatreya. He also performed seven-day ritual recitation (*Saptāh*) of Shri Guru Charitra as directed by the Lord.

The lunar fast (*Chandrayan krichhra*): - By the time Shastriji returned from Wadi, the renovation of his old house was nearing completion. For the house warming rituals (*Vastu Shanti*), his wife did not join him within the auspicious time due to some household squabble. Dejected by this, Shastriji exclaimed, "No householder will live here. This place will be an asylum (*dharmashala*)." That indeed is what has come to pass. The ritual was perfunctorily completed by his brother Shri Hari Bhataji...

4 . The scepter carried by the Sanyasi (Hindu Monk) as a mark of renunciation.

Such events continued to add to Shastriji's detachment and goaded him to austerities to dissipate his sins and cleanse his mind as prescribed by scriptures. Thus he set out to undertake the rigorous lunar fast. The fast is to be commenced on a no moon day (Amavasya) by totally abstaining from food. On the first day of the bright moon fortnight, one morsel of food of the size of hen's egg is taken. This is increased by daily increments, to a meal of 15 morsels on the full moon day. During the dark fortnight, one has to decrease the food intake by one morsel each day till the next dark moon, when a total fast is observed. During this period, all daily injunctions viz. three baths and Sandhya thrice a day, other worships, recitations etc. continued. Shastriji had instructed his family not to feed him anything, even water, in the event of his getting unconscious. The fast was safely concluded. However it left Shastriji so extremely weak and exhausted that he could hardly walk. Even so, he set out for Wadi along with his mother, for the birth anniversary celebration of the Lord Dattatreya.

Wadi again: - This time his stay in Wadi extended to four months. Shri Govind Swāmi urged him to undertake the path of dedication to Lord Dattatreya, which he ignored. The same night the Lord Himself appeared in his dream and bequeathed the mantra. Even as he woke up from his dream Shri Govind Swāmi called out from his bed, "Shastriji, did you get your mantra? Tomorrow, I shall explain to you the procedure (*Vidhan*).” This greatly accentuated Shastriji's reverence for Shri Govind Swāmi whom he now accepted as his Guru and Master. Next day, Shri Govind Swāmi also directed him to read Shri Shankaracharya's *bhashya* (exposition) on Upanishads.

During this period, Shastriji's urge for renunciation surfaced again. However **Shri Mouni Swāmi** told him that he had still a lot to be accomplished at Mangaon. Shri Mouni Swāmi hailed from the Solapur area. Renouncing home in childhood itself, in search of Divinity, he had travelled to holy

places traversing the country on foot from Kashi to Rameshwar several times, performing austerities and living only on neem leaves for years. At the youthful age of 25 years, he was initiated to ascetic life (Sanyasi) and given the name (Yogapatta) of Pradyumna Saraswati by his Master. However, having abstained from speech (Mouni) for several years, he had come to be known as Mouni Swāmi. Absorbed always in the contemplation of the Brahma (Godhead), he had a child-like disposition. He was greatly respected and his utterances always came true. Even Lord Dattatreya seemed to respect his word. He passed away in Wadi only. He had great affection for Shastriji.

The Idol: - Towards the end of his stay at Wadi, Lord Dattatreya communicated to Shri Vasudeva Shastri His plan to "reside in Mangaon for seven years". Soon thereafter Shastriji set out for Mangaon for the necessary preparations for the Lord's stay. After paying his respects to the Mother of the Universe (Mahalaxmi) at Kolhapur, he was passing through the market of a town called Kagal, thinking about the idol of Lord Dattatreya for the proposed temple at Mangaon. As he was looking at a sculptor's shop the sculptor himself came out of the shop offering salutations and said, "Shastriji, just give me the specifications and I shall make the idol accordingly. Please do not worry about money." The sculptor, it turned out, had received instructions from the Lord to make the idol for Shastriji. Consequently, Shastriji stayed at Kagal for a couple of days. As per his instructions, the sculptor made a brass idol about seven fingers-widths tall, sitting in Siddha posture with two arms signalling bestowal (*var*) and protection (*abhay*). The sculptor's charges amounting to about 20-25 rupees were paid collectively by some local devotees.

The temple: - Elated by the acquisition of the idol, Shastriji proceeded to Mangaon. As he was approaching his home, a vacant piece of land caught his attention, which he thought suitable for the temple. However as the land belonged to

someone else, he kept his thought to himself and kept the idol in a corner in his home. Within a couple of days the widow who owned the land had a dream instructing her to donate her land to a Brahmin. She approached Shastriji's mother for advice. On Ramabai's suggestion, the lady donated her land to Shastriji for the proposed temple. Later, she also donated some more land for the maintenance of the temple.

Having thus received the idol and also the land without much effort, Shastriji immediately started the construction of the temple. With inspired assistance from the residents in the form of material, money and labour, the temple facing east, was completed in a mere seven days. A well was dug up nearby in three days. Shastriji himself constructed the sanctum with bricks laid by his own hands. The idol from Kagal was consecrated in the new temple on the 5th bright day of Vaishakh of A.D. 1883.

As per His pledge, the Lord took residence in the Mangaon temple, as evidenced by the subsequent response of the people, their experiences and general prosperity of the place. The place became well known in a short span of time and people started coming in hordes, especially on Saturday evenings when a palanquin with the mobile idol of the Lord used to be taken out, circling the temple three times, singing the Names of the Lord, bhajans and songs in his praise. The offerings of the devotees used to be collected in heaps and distributed as prasad. The festival of the Birth Anniversary of Lord Dattatreya was also celebrated on a large scale. Around 8-10 thousand people used to partake the meal (prasad) on the occasion. People afflicted with evil spirits etc. used to attend the Saturday palanquin. Shastriji gave them the advice on the means to relief from their sufferings. Also wishes of many people were fulfilled through Shastriji's advice, which consisted mainly of some form or other of the worship of the Lord.

Since Shastriji believed this temple was an extension of the Narasobawadi temple, all cash offerings in excess of a rupee

used to be sent to Wadi. Shastriji could be persuaded to accept only a quarter of the remaining income for his household. Shastriji himself stayed alone in the temple premises and used to obtain foodstuff by mendicancy and cook himself after distributing to the guests of the temple. He used to discharge his priestly duties with great dedication, strict discipline and deep love. A couple of cows and dozens of dogs formed a part of the temple establishment and were well looked after. All major traditional Hindu festivals were celebrated in the temple as in any Hindu family.

An Audumbar tree grew in the foreground of temple. A platform was built around it and Shri Datta *Padukas* (Footprints) were installed on it and regular worship accorded to them. Everything was conducted strictly according to the scriptural code. On many occasions, Shastriji sought and received the instructions from the Lord. Smallest deviation or contamination, used to invite reprimand of the Lord and the guilty used to be punished and purification carried out.

As the temple grew in stature, people started addressing Shastriji with the respectful epithet of Buwa. Personal conduct of Buwa was ideal. Getting up two hours before sunrise, he used to practice Yoga. Then after ablutions and bath, he used to perform his personal prayers and worship and then offer worship to the temple idol. Then he used to go round to collect foodstuff by begging and also pick up firewood on the way back. After cooking the food himself, he used to offer it to the sacrificial fire (Vaishvadev) and set aside portions for the cow and guest/s and then partake the remaining food, which mostly consisted of rice and green beans (moong daal). In the afternoon, some students used to come to take lessons in scriptures, grammar, poetry etc. Some distressed persons seeking relief or some seeking fulfilment of desires or a few genuine seekers of Truth used to come and seek Buwa's advice in the afternoon. Later in the afternoon Buwa gave religious discourses. With sunset, evening

services (Aarati, mantra pushpa) were conducted. Then, before going to bed he used to read religious and spiritual books and practice yoga. He did not have any physical contact with his wife until this time.

Shri Gurucharitam (Dwisāhasri): - At this stage (about 1887 A.D.), Lord Shri Datta commanded Buwa to render the Marāthi Gurucharitra in Sanskrit. Buwa started composing the manuscript and completed it in less than two weeks. On completion he heard the voice of the Lord saying, “This sacred book has two thousand verses⁵. When Buwa counted the verses, these were substantially less than 2000. After some thinking, he recounted the verses in the manner of sacred texts like *saptashati*⁶, counting half-verses and *uvach* mantras, the count added up to 2000. This was the first major work of Buwa; his friends were surprised at this achievement. They asked him, “Buwa, you have hardly been out of Mangaon. How come you can compose such wonderful book?” Buwa replied, “I do not compose it. I just copy on paper the words I visualize!” The saintly quality of disowning all credit for any achievements was thus evident in Buwa. Once, while performing a noontime Aarati, an inspired poem gushed out from Buwa’s mouth. When he wrote it out in the afternoon, recalling the words, it was found that the poem (Aarati) comprised of the meaning of the four *mahavakyas* (the noble statements⁷), which form the basis of Vedic philosophy.

Yogic progress: - Buwa was a regular and advanced practitioner of Yoga, the ancient Indian science of union with divinity. Starting with physical disciplines viz. postures,

⁵ "संहितेयं द्विसाहस्री!"

⁶ *दुर्गा सप्तशती*. This is a sacred text depicting the feats of Goddess Durga and used in sacrifice to propitiate her.

⁷ These four statements are culled from the four Vedas and form the tenets of Vedanta doctrine. These are imparted by the Guru to the disciple at the time of renunciation (Sanyasa).

attitudes, cleansing practices, the student progresses through breath control to regulation of prana (life force)) and the mind. Complete cessation of pranic and mental activity is the final aim of Yoga, when the Yogi or seer gets established in his Real Nature. (*तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम्* Patanjali’s Yogsutra). He thus realizes his Self and is completely freed of all worldly sorrows, bonds and cravings and attains Knowledge, Bliss and the Essence of Being. For years Buwa used to go to a cave near Mangaon for yogic practice. Later he was directed by the Lord to practice yoga at the temple itself.

Due to some error in the practice of yoga Buwa was once afflicted with persistent hiccups. Lord Dattatreya directed him to a revenue officer in a village named Kapashi. When Buwa approached him, the gentleman flatly denied any knowledge of yoga. Ordinarily a genuine student of Yoga or any traditional Indian science will not reveal himself to every other curious person. The traditional knowledge is guarded as a valuable possession and revealed only to a genuine and sincere student who will use it selflessly, for the good of humanity. The purpose of this secretive tradition is to prevent the knowledge from falling into the wrong hands whereby a lot of harm can incur to the society. Buwa was not to be denied so easily, however. He told the revenue officer that he had come to seek his guidance on Lord Dattatreya’s instructions and would not leave without obtaining it. Finally, on receiving Lord’s signal, the yogi not only told Buwa the cause and cure of the hiccup, but also gave an ancient manuscript comprising of the conversation between Kabir and Dharmdas which was very helpful for Buwa’s further progress in yoga.

With constant guidance and help from the Lord, Buwa soon became an adept and a master. He soon acquired the supernatural powers (siddhis) associated with higher stages of Yoga. He started reading minds and would tell people about their problems as soon as he saw them. This went on for almost

a year when Lord Datta forbade it. In his entire life, Buwa was to later reveal, he had only rarely availed of these powers.

The Black Magic: - As Buwa's fame started spreading and his reputation growing, there were people jealous of him. Some of them established Datta temples in competition. Not only they failed to evoke any response but also some of them met with some misfortune or other and these temples soon closed down. Buwa also incurred the enmity of some perpetrators of black magic while protecting their victims. One such person targeted Buwa himself. Though fully capable of retaliating the magic, Buwa desisted from doing so as it would have harmed, even killed the perpetrator. Such was his commitment to non-violence that he preferred to suffer the consequences of the black magic rather harming its perpetrator. Thus he was afflicted with chronic dysentery and suffered from it all his life. The ailment interrupted the yoga practice and Buwa was directed by Lord Datta to consummate his long neglected marriage.

Family way: - Buwa's family was happy to get the news. A small room in the rear of the temple served as the venue of Buwa's conjugal life. Buwa continued to take his lunch at the temple. Sou. Annapurna- his wife however, used to go home for lunch and return at nightfall after finishing her household chores at home. One night, when she returned to the temple, Buwa was not in their room. She came to the sanctum looking for him where he was engrossed in reading. So she sat outside waiting for him, as ladies were not allowed inside the sanctum. After a considerable time, Buwa came out of the sanctum and found his wife in deep meditation. Calling her name and even physically shaking her too failed to break her trance and Buwa had to employ some yogic techniques to wake her up. After opening her eyes she said, "Why did you wake me up? I was in such bliss!" This is an example of God's grace leading a true devotee

to the highest yogic state even without any study or practice of yoga.

Goodbye to Mangaon: - Soon Sou. Annapurna was pregnant. Unfortunately, Buwa's mother reacted adversely to the development and was nasty to her daughter-in-law. Buwa was pained at this. Even as he was wondering about the future, one morning after the daily worship, he heard Lord Dattatreya say, "We have to leave Mangaon today!" When Buwa remonstrated that it was not yet seven years, he was assured that it was seven years by lunar calendar! He was further instructed by Lord Datta to take the idol and his wife along. Accordingly, he packed up and took leave of his mother who thought he was going on another pilgrimage to Wadi and was a bit indifferent. He then told his wife to accompany him if she wished. She immediately prepared to join him. Buwa instructed her to remove all jewellery except the *Mangal Sutra*⁸ and she complied. The Kagal idol in the sanctum and the small thumb-size travel idol insisted on accompanying. When he pleaded that he may not be able to offer elaborate worship as in Managaon, the Kagal idol replied "a bath of cold water and a smear of ashes will suffice". Thus within an hour of the Lord's order, the couple was on the way to Savantwadi. Buwa was carrying the two idols, a small box of utensils of daily worship and a metal flask for water. His wife carried a change of clothes. These were the only belongings they took while leaving Mangaon for good. He told the relatives and acquaintances who came to see them off that he had no belongings in Mangaon. They reached Savantwadi in an hour or so where Sou. Annapurna took her lunch at the house of Naropant Ukidave and Buwa cooked his meal from the foodstuff obtained by begging. Ukidave pressed on the couple some clothing and essentials for the road and by evening they resumed their journey to Narasobawadi.

⁸ The auspicious necklace of black beads worn by married women.

Chapter 3. Renunciation.

On reaching Wadi and having offered salutations at the lotus feet of Lord Datta and to the two revered saints, Shri Govind Swāmi and Shri Mouni Swāmi, Shastriji acquainted them with the Lord's command to reside in Wadi. The couple then settled down in a dharmashala (public shelter). Buwa used to beg daily rations and his wife used to cook the food that they often shared with guests. Once all Sanyasis (monks) in Wadi came to them for lunch since all the priests of Wadi were in the mourning⁹. In due course, Sou. Annapurna delivered a stillborn child.

Shri Govind Swāmi's end: - Govind Swāmi elucidated the ten major Upanishads to Buwa and gave away his manuscripts and *Shaligram*¹⁰ to Buwa. After several months, Shri Govind Swāmi became ill and asked Buwa to read to him, the *Manan* or the book of contemplation. Swāmi explained to Buwa the mystical meaning of the text, and in the end, blessed him. Buwa came to know of the imminent end of the saint one day ahead, which he spent by the Swāmi's bedside in his service. Everybody in Wadi including Mouni Swāmi grieved the eventual passing away. His holy body was immersed into the waters of Krishna as befitting a Sanyasi. Buwa was directed by Shri Mouni Swāmi to perform the last rites of Shri Govind Swāmi.

Wife's Death:-A short while after this, Buwa was instructed by the Lord to proceed to north. By this time Buwa had come to be revered and loved by the priests and devotees in Wadi. They urged Buwa not to leave. Pleading helplessness in the face of Lord's orders, Buwa took leave of Mouni Swāmi and proceeded to Gangakhed on the banks of Godavari River, via Kolhapur, Pandharpur and Barshi. At Gangakhed, his devoted wife met her end due to cholera the 14th dark day of Vaishakh, 1891 AD. Buwa nursed her in her last illness and performed the last rites. Thus, at long last he was now completely released of all family bonds. Even as he was looking forward to enter the monastic life, he had a premonition of his own death by cholera. He was deeply frustrated and angered at the capricious ways of the Lord. He blamed the Lord for not allowing him to renounce till then and threatening him with death in the inauspicious mourning period. He started cursing the Lord in anguish. However, by the Lord's Grace, the misfortune was averted and on 14th day after his wife's death i.e. after the mourning period, on the second day of the dark fortnight of Jyeshtha¹¹, Buwa took the **vows of asceticism**. The previous night the Lord appeared to him in a dream and initiated him to *Pranav Mantra*¹² and ordered him to eat only *Madhukari* food¹³ and not to accept monastery food. Next morning, Buwa went to the banks of Godavari, called learned Brahmins and performed the absolution rites (prayaschhitta). Even as Buwa was wishing for, a sanyasi

9 Hindu scriptures prescribe varying periods of mourning for the relatives of the dead according to the intimacy of relations. During this period, they are exempted from regular religious duties. Also, they are considered impure for that period. Since the priests at Wadi have descended from a common ancestor, any death in the community will affect several families for varying periods, ranging from 1 to 10 days.

¹⁰ A black stone symbolizing Lord Vishnu.

¹¹ ज्येष्ठ कृष्ण २

¹² "Om"

¹³ Madhukari is the cooked food solicited from three to seven households. For a Sanyasi the purity of food being essential, he has to beg only from the households Brahmins observing religious discipline.

appeared from across the river and administered the vows of sanyasa. Thus Shri Vasudeva Shastri fulfilled his long cherished desire to become a sanyasi. It is notable that he entered the fourth *Ashram* immediately after the termination of Grihasthashram (householder), following the injunction of the scriptures never to stay without *Ashram* (अनाश्रमी न तिष्ठेत्). It would now be appropriate to refer to him as Paramahans Parivrajakacharya Shri Vasudevānand Saraswati Swāmi Mahārāj.

Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was ordered by the Lord to go to Ujjaini and receive the **monastic sceptre** from Shri Narayananand Saraswati. Accordingly he proceeded on foot, as he always did, to Ujjaini via Washim, Umardhed, Mahur, Khandwa, Badhawai, Onkareshwar, Mandaleshwar and Balwada. Staying in a Datta temple in Ujjaini, he went to Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swāmi Mahārāj and solicited the sceptre. With the consent of his master Shri Achyutanand Saraswati Swāmi Mahārāj, Shri Narayananand Saraswati Swāmi Mahārāj ritually presented the sceptre to Shri Swāmiji and bestowed upon him the Yogapatta (monastic name) of Shri Vasudevānand Saraswati. This name corresponded with the one Lord Dattatreya had communicated to him at the time of initiation at Gangakhed. That day, on repeated entreaties of his Guru, Swāmiji accepted the food at the monastery, thus violating the Lord's orders. As a result, he started vomiting continuously. This ceased only after Shri Narayananand Swāmi prayed to Lord Dattatreya asking for His forgiveness. Throughout Swāmiji's life, he had to strictly obey the orders of Lord Dattatreya and slightest disobedience invited punishment. Swāmiji spent his first Chaturmaas with his monastic guru at Ujjaini that year.

Thus began the itinerancy of Swāmiji. The purpose of his life was revealed to him by Lord Dattatreya when he ordered him to travel all over India and preach the Ancient Vedic path and lead back the people gone astray from the *Varnashram*

Dharma. He traversed the country for the next 23 years following strictly the harsh disciplines of the Sanyasa Ashram. A brief chronology of major events in his life and an itinerary appears at the end of this book (Appendix-I).

His itinerant life was solely guided by divine will as revealed to him through visions, dreams, verbal commands and other signs. While he traversed the Indian subcontinent walking several times and came into contact with thousands of people, his life style and routine remained constant. Hence it is felt that the mission and achievements of his life can better be understood through the examination of his practices, interactions with different people and discourses rather than through the chronological account of the events. However a summary of the major events in his peripatetic life is appended to help reader ascertain the contexts of time and place of the events recounted here.

Possessions:- His **possessions** included 4 loincloths, 2 robes, the sceptre, a Kamandalu (wooden or bamboo water vessel), occasionally a woollen wrap, a book of Upanishads, a case of worship utensils, two idols of Datta and a rope to draw water and occasionally, some paper and writing materials. He had no other belongings. He washed his clothes and utensils himself and never accepted anyone's service or anyone's touch. If anybody, irrespective of caste or creed, touched him, he used to take a bath. Similarly, he used to take a bath every time he answered the call of nature.

Travel: - He always travelled on foot and never used any footwear. He used to walk fast. He used to travel along riverbanks avoiding towns and cities and preferring villages. He preferred to travel alone. He passed through dense forests, hot deserts and steep mountains, facing extremes of weather, wearing only a robe. Only once, after a dip in the icy waters of Ganges at her source (*Gangotri*), almost frozen to unconsciousness, people revived him with the heat of fire.

Otherwise he never exposed himself to fire in accordance with the Sannyasin's code. He used to stay in a temple or a monastery but never at anybody's home.. He used to unhesitatingly set out on paths long abandoned due to development of railways and roads, often against the advice of the residents of the area. There are several instances in which Lord Dattatreya or other divine beings (viz. Ashwatthama) guided him in such terrains.

He did not stay in one village for long periods. Only on a few exceptional occasions he stayed in one place for more than a week, except the two rainy months, as per the Sannyasin's regulations. This period is known as *Chāturmas*¹⁴. Most of his 23 *Chāturmas* were in small villages and remote places. Once people came to know of the site of his Chaturmaas, they used to throng the place fighting great hardships and defying epidemics like cholera and plague.

The Person: - Swāmi Mahārāj was medium built, dark complexioned and not greatly impressive till he started speaking. His speech was soft yet assertive, clear and incisive yet warm and kind, detached yet captivating, erudite and yet illuminating, brief but deeply influencing. He had flashy and piercing eyes, which appeared to look deeply into you. His austere lifestyle, deep and extensive knowledge of scriptures, his stringent adherence to religious code, his selfless approach and last but not the least his spontaneous, indiscriminate and innate compassion and genuine concern for *all* he met, won him the life long devotion of literally thousands of disciples, all across the country. In turn he provided for them an ideal, a spiritual guide, a solace and succour, a symbol and an approach to the Divine.

Daily schedule: - Shri Swāmi Mahārāj woke up early about three hours before sunrise and after the morning ablutions,

¹⁴ *Chāturmas* literally means a period of four months, usually corresponding to the rainy season. However for a Sanyasi, only two months stay is mandatory.

used to take his morning bath. He used to bathe at least thrice a day. After his bath, he used to worship the sceptre and perform the Pranav (Om) incantation and then offer ritual bath to the Datta idol and apply ashes by way of worship. Hindu monks are forbidden to pluck flowers and leaves (Tulasi, Bel) etc. Hence the idol got these offerings only when someone offered them to Swāmi Mahārāj.

The mornings were mostly devoted to teaching the students. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was a virtual living encyclopaedia of Vedic culture and used to teach seemingly unlimited range of subjects viz. Sanskrit grammar, Vedic texts, the technology of Vedic rituals, the six systems of Indian philosophy (*Sāṅkhya & Yoga, Nyāya* {logic}& *Vaisheshik, Purva Mīmamsa & Uttar Mīmamsa i.e. Vedānta*), *Āyurveda* (Indian Medicine) etc. His knowledge of these subjects was not merely theoretical but he was a Master who could guide a sincere student to the ultimate goal of all these Indian systems namely Self-realization.

He was apparently well versed in several arts viz. music, poetry, spinning, weaving etc. He even advised right moves to chess players, sometimes without watching the game, though he never played himself. No sincere student was ever turned away by him. It was impossible to gauge the range and depth of his knowledge. Once at Narasobawadi, an old Brahmin, proud of his accomplishment in Samaved (the third of the Vedic quartet) came to Shri Mahārāj and insisted on chanting the Mantras from Sāma Veda, in spite of the latter's suggestion to chant before the Padukas. Suddenly his memory failed and he could not recall even a single Mantra. Shri Mahārāj then rendered a *Mantra*, with the proper intonations, convincing the Brahmin of Swāmiji's omniscience and deflating his own pride.

At noon he used to set out to solicit food (*Bhiksha*). A Sanyasi cannot cook his food and hence has been ordained to solicit cooked food (*Mādhukari*). Swāmi Mahārāj used to accept food only from three to five homes of Southern Brahmins,

practicing the scriptural code. There were periods in his life when travelling through certain parts of India, Southern Brahmins were scarce, and he had to subsist on coconuts, groundnuts and other 'dry' food. This often worsened his dysentery and caused much physical suffering. However this did not affect his schedule, pace, activity or the ceaseless travel. If anybody bowed to him on his way to Bhiksha, he used to fast on that day. Sometimes such a fast used to follow the mandatory fasts of the *Ekādashi* (11th day). On the day of fast he used to take only a glass of buttermilk or a fruit. This did not seem to affect him in any way at all!

A Sanyasi, as indeed any seeker of truth, should eat only to support life and should be totally indifferent to taste. Swāmi Mahārāj provided a shining illustration of this rule. After obtaining the food, he used to dip the sack of food in river water and hang it for water to drip out and with it all the taste! The food was then offered to Lord Dattatreya, and divided into three portions. After giving one portion each to the River and Gomata (cow) he consumed the remaining portion. He thus literally observed the rule of Sanyasi eating only eight morsels of food, that too only once a day.

In the afternoon, he used to receive people. Few of them were genuine seekers of knowledge and truth while a vast majority sought his advice for temporal problems. He gave all a patient hearing and offered guidance that benefited everyone. After evening bath it was time for discourses on Puranas or scriptures. He had an excellent style of discourse, explaining the subject clearly with illustrations and authenticating his statements with appropriate scriptural quotations. Though he did refer to Vedic *Mantras*, he considered it a sacrilege to utter a Vedic sentence during public discourse. Not only did he follow this canon himself but also insisted on adherence to it by others. There were occasions when he walked out of a discourse when the speaker uttered a Vedic Mantra.

After the discourses, depending on the inclination of the people present, there used to be Bhajans and Kirtans, followed by some more personal interviews. It was well past midnight before Shri Swāmi Mahārāj could lie down for a few hours of rest. How he managed such a heavy schedule with so little food or so little sleep is beyond human comprehension.

Chapter 4. Loksangrah.

(Garnering of people, towards the divine)

Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was a Master, an Adept, and a liberated and self-realized soul. He had no desires or aspirations of his own. His only motivation in life was to obey his Lord and Master Shri Dattatreya. All his actions were directed by the Lord's will. Inherently reserved and reclusive, he was forced to spend long periods of his life amongst crowds. Sometimes he deliberately chose to spend his *Chāturmās* in remote inaccessible places like Narasi, Kurugaddi etc. However, people sought him out before long and gathered in large numbers. He thus used to be surrounded by people almost continuously with hardly any privacy. All people had equal access to him. There was no discrimination in spite of his personal strict code of purity. The only criterion was the sincerity of the visitor. People of all castes and even those following non-Vedic religions viz. Muslims, Parsis etc. were the recipients of the grace of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. He used to advise them some practice or other consistent with their faith. For examples, Muslims were often asked to repeat certain Quranic verses and used to benefit from it. Proselytisation was a word not found in his dictionary. Having realised the essence of all faiths, he guided everyone on their respective predestined paths, all of which, he knew to lead to the One Reality. No one got a private audience or any special treatment. Even royalties had to mingle with ordinary folks while visiting him.

There were many other occasions on which Shri Mahārāj conceded to be touched by one and all. After Narasi at the end of *Chaturmaas*, one Chunilal Marawadi expressed the desire to touch his feet. There was a crowd of hundreds of people present. For the satisfaction of Chunilal, Mahārāj stood there transfixed

as it were, and let everyone present touch his feet, irrespective of caste etc.

It was the mission of the holy life of Shri Mahārāj, to demonstrate in his own life, the ideal practice of Vedic religion, which many considered impracticable. Thus he imposed a very strict code for himself and painstakingly observed it. He did impose to some extent this code on his devotees, not through any physical force, but only the moral force of his own example. If he discriminated between the castes, it was only to goad them to the proper practice of the respective code of conduct compassionately prescribed by the scriptures for them, for their own ultimate good. Thus, a Brahmin or a Brahmin widow sporting hair was not permitted to see him. If any such person approached him he would leave the place or turn away from them, instead of asking *them* to leave. However, almost all of these, after a single contact with him, realized their erroneous ways, repented and performed the required ablutions to qualify for an audience with Shri Mahārāj. Thousands of people thus were retrieved to the Vedic path in this way.

Observance of strict code of purity by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj has been confused with untouchability and even caste/race discrimination. Nothing could be far from truth. It is true that, following the discipline of Sannyasin, Swāmi Mahārāj scrupulously avoided touching anyone, irrespective of caste or creed. If anyone, even a Brāhmin in a religiously 'clean' state, touched him, he used to take bath. He is never known to have been angry or upset at any such eventuality. Similarly, there have been occasions when he has let himself be touched by even the so-called "untouchables". A very touching example of a trumpet player of Pavani is revealing. During the *Chaturmaas* at Pavani, a trumpet-player of an 'untouchable' caste used to come to the temple where Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was staying and soulfully play the trumpet for an hour or so. He rendered this service religiously for the two months of the stay of Shri Swāmi

Mahārāj. Though he strongly yearned to touch the holy feet of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, he knew it to be impossible. Yet he hoped against hope and kept up the service. On the day of the departure of Mahārāj, he came and offered his daily service. Swāmi Mahārāj, surrounded by the crowd of Brahmins and high-caste people proceeded to the river where a boat was ready to carry him across. The trumpet-player followed. Continuing to play the trumpet, watching Shri Swāmi Mahārāj ride the boat, this was manned by Brahmins. The trumpet-player jumped into the river swimming after the boat to the farther bank. Even as Swāmi Mahārāj alighted from the boat, the trumpet-player swam out of the river and looked pleadingly at Shri Mahārāj. Sensing the intensity of his devotion, Mahārāj conveyed his permission with a glance. The trumpet player threw himself at the feet of the sage and wetted them with his warm tears of joy! The surrounding Brahmins were aghast and protested that he was an untouchable! Shri Mahārāj only said, “I let him touch me to make him happy. Now I shall take a bath to make *you* happy!”

However, he was rather strict with Hindus, especially Brahmins. He expected them to observe certain minimum religious conduct and frowned upon those wantonly neglecting the same. A Brahmin sporting a crop cut instead of *Shikha-Sutra* or a widow wearing long hair was not allowed in his presence. If any such person approached him, he used to turn his face away or leave the place altogether. Only a suitable change in their demeanour and prescribed ablutions, rendered them eligible to meet Shri Mahārāj. Once a person repented and wanted to make amends, Shri Mahārāj used to offer his personal guidance to him, teaching even the most elementary religious practices.

Of course, there were those who either wanted to judge or in their erroneous thinking, ‘expose’ Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. He usually recognised their attitude in advance and totally ignored them. Once he told a personal secretary of a ruling Mahārāja to go home and live happily and not waste time in this ‘gathering

of lunatics’. If a person persisted in confronting him, he refused to speak. Once an Aryasamaji started arguing with him and finding no response from Shri Mahārāj, began shouting at him. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj quietly said “Why are you so angry? If you wish to hit me, go head and satisfy your urge”. Further incensed, the fellow was about to slap Shri Mahārāj when a lady devotee nearby screamed and he ran away. Another such acolyte once entered into a similar one-sided argument, insulting Shri Mahārāj in exasperation. One attending disciple of Shri Mahārāj cast a spell making the contentious person speechless. After a while, taking pity on the fellow, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj got him released from the spell.

Apart from caste or community, the people coming to Shri Swāmi Mahārāj could be classified as: -

1. Those seeking relief from distress.
2. Those seeking the fulfilment of a wish.
3. The seekers of Truth.
4. Realized souls.

The first two categories are in reality one in the sense that both of them seek to change the circumstances of their worldly life, either by removing a painful one or by adding a desired one.

Relief to the distressed: - (आर्तत्राण) Maximum number of people sought relief from some suffering or the other. If we even cursorily view the life of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, the amount of suffering he himself underwent is phenomenal. He never seemed to resist it at all. As narrated by him, he was afflicted “once by plague, thrice by cholera, twice by leprosy, once by leukoderma, twice by snakebite and lifelong by dysentery”. However he never took any medicines and placed himself utterly at the disposal of the Divine will. His family life was full of tensions and tribulations. He neither complained nor made any efforts to alter it. In fact he utilized these adversities to intensify

his detachment. There are several events that illustrate his indifference to physical suffering.

Once, towards the conclusion of the Narasi Chaturmaas, after the ritual shave (शौर), at the suggestion of a devotee, the barber inspected the feet of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and removed twenty thorns stuck in there! Shri Swāmi Mahārāj himself had never even given any indication of this.

During one of his long stays at Brahmāvart, Shri Mahārāj used to stay in a hut on the bank of Ganges. That being the summer season, the river stream was thin and far receded from the bank. Because of dysentery, Shri Mahārāj had to frequently relieve himself. Each time he used to take a bath, treading the 500-metre stretch of scorching hot sand to the stream, in the manner of a person walking in moonlight, and return in the same leisurely fashion afterwards. The Late Shirlokar Swāmi, Shankaracharya of Karavir and Sankeshwar seats, who was with Shri Mahārāj then, used to express his sense of blessedness at having set eyes on such a holy person, so totally immersed in the Divine and so indifferent to the physical suffering.

In glaring contrast, Swāmi Mahārāj was very sensitive to the suffering of the others. He not only listened sympathetically to the people bringing their sorrows and pain to him, but also provided counsel which if followed would almost invariably remove or relieve their sufferings.

According to the Vedic tradition all sufferings arise from three sources. *Ādhyātmic*, *Ādhibhoutic* and *Ādhidaivic*.

Ādhyātmic afflictions are those originating in the physical body. These consist of the thousands of ailments. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj had an extensive knowledge of **herbal remedies** which he employed to cure literally thousands of patients. He not only prescribed the medications but also took considerable trouble to make these available. During epidemics, he used to organize mass production of the required remedies to be distributed to the needy. He did pass on this knowledge to a

few selected students like Shri Ganesh Satavalekar of Kolgaon, Shri Gangadharpant (Baba) Vaidya of Nisarapur and others.

In selected cases, he used to advise **yogic practices** to cure ailments. A Brahmin suffering from loss of appetite and pain in abdomen was asked to do the head-down position (*viparitakarani*). This not only relieved his pain but also improved his appetite so much as to make his wife complain about it. Shri Mahārāj then asked the Brahmin to discontinue the practice that made his appetite manageable. Once Swāmi Mahārāj made Shri Gulavani Mahārāj¹⁵ practice peacock position (*Mayurasan*) to cure his fever.

Even after his Mahasamadhi (dissolution of physical body), an artisan working on the ongoing construction at Garudeshwar developed an infection of foot that disabled him completely. He was sorely disappointed at being unable to participate in the sacred work and was planning to return home. One morning, an ochre-robed monk appeared to him and pointed to a shrub to be crushed and applied to his sore foot. On complying with this, his foot got well the very next day and he could join his work. Later, when shown the picture of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, he recognized him as the Baba who had pointed out the shrub!

Of course many an apparently physical illness is caused by supernatural beings and in such cases Shri Swāmi Mahārāj used to advice the relevant remedies (*vide infra*).

Ādhidaivic misery is the one induced by the supernatural entities. This term is employed here to refer to the entities with superhuman powers viz. *Vidyādhara*, *Siddha*, *Chāraṇa*, *Asura*, *Rākshasa*, *Gandharva*, *Yaksha*, *Nāga*, *Kinnara* and *Pishācha*, other spirits. These could be either evil or good. These are supposed to dwell in the higher spheres of Universe and are endowed with subtle bodies. Human beings attain these forms of conscious beings depending upon their Karma. The Devatas like

15 A major disciple of Shri Swami Mahārāj and a renowned Yogin.

Vidyādhara, *Siddha*, *Chāraṇa*, *Gandharva* and *Yaksha*, are the benevolent spirits dwelling in Swargalok i.e. Heaven while Asuras, Rakshasas, Naagas dwell in the Patal and other netherworlds. Some sinful actions and disturbed states of mind lead a person to the *Pishācha Yoni* (evil spirits), dwelling in the lower sphere *Bhuvanloka* adjacent to the mortal *Bhuloka*. These evil spirits have a strong link to human sphere in the form of some unfulfilled longing, a vengeful urge or a profound feeling of guilt etc that blocks their way to further evolution to higher spheres.

Devatas or the benevolent entities (?Angels) function as deputies of the supreme God carrying out well-defined functions and endowed with divine powers. The interaction of Devatas with human beings are dictated by the Karmic stock of the individual, the Devatas impartially dispensing ill-effects of sins and the rewards of good deeds, Thus an individual will suffer a particular blemish in his life, for example poverty, because of his Karmic flaw, the respective *Devata* controlling its dispensation. The individual can, within limits, mitigate such blemishes in his life by propitiating the particular *Devata*. Since all *Devatas* are manifestations of the One Supreme Being (read God), propitiating Him in the form of family deity (*Kul-Devata*) will also benefit the person. However, most people are not aware of the reasons of their miseries and even if they could guess these, they would not know the remedy. If by some stroke of luck, they somehow deduced the way, ordinary human beings will find it near impossible to execute the remedial rituals. That is where the role of saints like Shri Swāmi Mahārāj comes. They not only clearly visualize the causes of the particular flaws in the human life, but also know the way/s to remedy those and have the capacity to help the people implement it. It is indeed a great good fortune to come into contact with such a saint! People with chronic and incurable diseases; men facing ruin in their life because of career or financial problems; women with marital

problems, infertility, abortions or stillbirths; parents of handicapped children; in short all imaginable travails of human life, came to Shri Swāmi Mahārāj.

In those cases where he perceived the problem to be mainly of *Ādhidaivik* origin, he would advise the individual/s prayers or services to propitiate the particular deity. These services could be a specified worship, *jap* (verbal or mental chanting of a mantra), *Saptah* (seven-day ritual reading of a sacred book) of Shri Gurucharitra, circumambulation of the sacred Audumbar tree¹⁶, or a temple, or sacred book. The duration and scale of these practices were proportionate to the severity of affliction. A gentleman from Savantwadi once came to Shri Mahārāj at Chikhalada. He could not hold food in his stomach and had become very weak. Shri Mahārāj told him that this was the consequence of interruption of the services to *Kul-Devata* and gave him *Datta Mantra* and *Devi Mantra* for *Jap* and also some medicine.

During his stay at Narasobawadi in 1910, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj directed the priests there to offer *Abhishek*¹⁷ to the Padukas as a measure to restrain an imminent epidemic of cholera. When people asked him, “how does *Abhishek* help prevent an epidemic?” Shri Mahārāj explained, “Death is also a manifestation of the God and the epidemics are his *Shaktis* (powers or consorts). By propitiating God through the services prescribed in scriptures, his *Shaktis* are also pacified.” Accordingly the *Abhishek* was performed and the epidemic averted.

One Shri Vasudeva Thakur of Indore came to Wadi and sought the help of Shri Mahārāj regarding his wife’s health. Shri Mahārāj told him that this was the consequence of the *Samādhi* (memorial) of his saintly ancestor being neglected. Shri Thakur

¹⁶ *Ficus glomerata*.

¹⁷ Ritual incessant bathing with water, milk or other fluid, of the idol accompanied by holy chants.

went to his hometown and sought out the *Samādhi* and made arrangements for its upkeep and regular worship. This brought about the improvement in his wife's health. Similarly a visitor, whose offspring did not survive, bore thriving progeny after he followed Shri Mahārāja's advice to perform *Mangala* (Mars) *Vrata* (propitiatory fast).

Ādhibhoutik distress (*tāpa*) is the one caused by five elements of nature, Space (*Ākāsha*), Wind (*Vāyu*), Light (*Teja* or *Agni*), Water (*Āpa*) and Earth (*Prithvi*). Some of the examples are earthquakes, floods, fires, lightning, storms etc. One lady devotee of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, deserted by her husband, was living by tending a small farm. Once, when the harvest was reaped and stored in a heap out in the open, off-season rainstorm threatened to wash her produce, which was her only source of livelihood. She had treasured the dust from the feet of Shri Mahārāj in a small container. She spread the dust around the harvest and prayed to Shri Mahārāj to protect her food promising to feed the priests in Wadi. A heavy rainstorm did follow but not a drop fell on her grain.

Many other devotees experienced his grace in form of such miracles. During his last *Chāturmās* at Garudeshwar, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and hundreds of devotees were celebrating *Gokulāshṭami* (Lord Shrikrishna's birth anniversary) and singing Bhajans on the bank of Narmadā. Suddenly the sky was filled with dark clouds and a rainstorm burst out on the other bank of the river. Shri Mahārāj reassured the devotees to carry on with the Bhajans and not to worry about the storm. The Bhajans proceeded uninterrupted till midnight. On conclusion of the ceremonies, even as everyone came indoors, the storm burst out in vengeance. Shri Mahārāj commented, "That is the storm we escaped!"

At Mangaon, during his householder days, on a *Gurudwādashi* day, just as hundreds of people were to sit for *Prasāda* (meal), a heavy rain threatened to disrupt the

arrangements. Shri Mahārāj remarking "He has also come for the *Prasāda*!", instructed his disciples to offer a large serving of food (*Naivedya*) to the rain god. Accordingly, a large plateful of food was served and offered to the rain God. The feast went off unhindered even as heavy rains lashed the surrounding area. Similar incidents have taken place at least twice more in the life of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj.

Again at Garudeshwar, once the only large cooking pot slipped from hands while washing in the river *Narmadā* and started floating away. When the worried ladies apprised Shri Mahārāj of the mishap, he went to the riverside and touched the water with his sceptre, saying. "What would Mother *Narmadā* want the pot for? Why will she get in the way of her children's nourishment?" As soon as Shri Mahārāj said this, the large metal pot now flowing down the river stream, started moving towards the bank and was recovered.

A self-realized soul, the scriptures say, becomes one with the nature and enjoys its amity.

Evil spirits: - Known as *Pishācha* or ghosts, the evil spirits cause of some of the worst sufferings to human beings. When the soul leaves the physical body at the time of death, it is furnished with an interim ethereal body, prior to the one matching his Karma e.g. angelic forms (*Devatā*) for those with meritorious Karma; or infernal (*Nāraki* or *Yātanā Deha*) forms for those with sinful Karma. Most of the Hindu funeral rituals are meant for helping the departed soul to tide over this critical phase in his journey to the other world/s. In the absence of, or due to defects or inadequacy of these rituals, this progress is hindered; the individual soul gets trapped in this transitional form. The result is the evil spirit.

At a place called Pichhora in central India, one Bhaskar Rao approached Shri Swāmi Mahārāj to seek relief from epileptic fits. Shri Mahārāj found it was caused by an evil spirit. When he communicated with the spirit, it told him that having

died without any progeny, his funeral rites were not performed, leading to his present state. On Shri Mahārāja's advice, Bhaskar Rao performed the funeral rites for the spirit and was relieved of his fits.

While in Managaon, Shri Mahārāj once encountered a 'priestly' ghost (*Brahmasmandha*) in Savantwadi. He communicated through his descendent, a practicing lawyer named Ānāvkar. He possessed substantial knowledge of scriptures and astrology, and on several occasions, even provided useful advice. He told Shri Mahārāj that he was cast into this evil state having accidentally killed a cow in his human life but having died without performing any atonement.

Many other situations that can lead a person to this evil state are described in scriptures. For example, if a person's mind is filled with hateful or vengeful thoughts at the time of death; or a person is afflicted with intense desires (money, sex etc.); addictions, theft, plunder, murder, adultery, flouting religious commands etc. Also persons propitiating evil spirits, practitioners of witchcraft also become ghosts. Suicides, sudden violent deaths as in accidents, are prone to become spirits; a murder victim, possessed by vengeance is particularly likely to get into this evil form.

In his householder's life at Managaon, the Queen of Savantwadi state was brought to Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, then known as Shastriji. The spirit of her cook who had died leaving some money deposited with her was tormenting her. His intense attachment to money had arrested his migration to higher spheres. Hindu scriptures describe many rituals to release such lost souls. After some such rituals and prayers the queen was rid of the ghostly affliction.

Only human beings have the potential to enter this 'species'. *Pishāchas* are considered impure *Devayoni* (angelic species). Having only subtle ethereal (*vāyaveeya*) bodies, they possess many superhuman powers and knowledge. The

Pishāchas usually retain physical semblance to their former earthly form, with some frightening distortions, particularly of mouth and eyes. They also keep their mental makeup, but are very cruel, vengeful and capricious. They are forever tormented, with agitated minds and eternally and insatiably lustful, hungry and thirsty. Possessing no organs, they can only partially satisfy these urges by 'occupying' a human body. However they are not free to possess anyone at random. Their 'access' is strictly limited to the person having some '*Karmic* linkage' with the 'host', usually afflicting subjects that are related to them, and/or are in some way responsible for their wretched state. Sometimes they are opportunistic taking advantage of individuals inadvertently and unintentionally offending them. For example, Bhaskar Rao in the foregoing example was not in any way connected to the spirit. However, he once urinated near the fig tree where the spirit 'resided'. The unclean state immediately following defecation, maturation, menstruation etc are supposed to create a temporary weakness in the *Pranamaya* body of the person. This is restored after the prescribed ablutions. The religious code of cleanliness, which many of us find tedious and neglect is in fact a security code for our own protection from the evil forces. In general, a person leading an upright moral life, religious conduct and devotion is unlikely to be assailed by the evil spirits.

These evil spirits, endowed with superhuman powers can cause a variety of disorders that may not be easily recognized as spirit-related. Only persons with special ability can recognise and deal with these spirits.

One common manifestation, of course is physical ailments. At Havanur, a young married lady, suffering from stiff joints and loss of sight, was brought on a stretcher by her brother to Shri Mahārāj. As Shri Mahārāj sprinkled some water from his *Kamandalu*, and asked his brother to apply it to her head and feet, the spirit started shouting that it was ready to leave the lady.

With an assurance from Shri Mahārāj of release from the evil state, it left the lady. Immediately she got up and walked to her home, apparently cured of all her ailments. Such miracles took place in several other places also.

In another instance, a rich man brought his afflicted wife to Shri Mahārāj. The ghost had kept a deposit Rs.1200 with his father, but died before redemption. He was told by Swāmi Mahārāj to spend the money on feeding priests, which brought relief to his wife.

At Banvasi, in Karnataka, a man complained that every time he built a house, an evil spirit destroyed it with prior warning. On carrying out some religious services as advised by to Shri Mahārāj, he succeeded in building the house.

One Shripad Shastri Iyer brought his sister to Shri Mahārāj with complaints of recurrent fainting, not responding to any treatment. When Shri Mahārāj diagnosed her case as *Pishācha* affliction, the Shastri doubted it saying he believed in the existence of ghosts but did not think they could affect human beings. Shri Mahārāj proposed an experiment. He gave Shastriji a brick with a mantra inscribed on it and asked Shastriji to recite the mantra 21 times a day burning some incense in front of it. As predicted by to Shri Mahārāj, the ghost started speaking through the medium of Shastriji's sister herself after 21 days, stating the reasons for his acquiring the *Pishācha yoni* and "seizing" Shastriji's sister. Conceding his inability to further stand the onslaught of Shri Mahārāj the spirit released Shastriji's sister.

The evil spirits often interfere with conception and even cause abortions and stillbirths. One Bhairav Prasad from Mandalamahapur had lost five sons when he came to seek the grace of Shri Mahārāj. He was advised to carry out the last rites of the spirit (*Nārāyanabali*), read *Vishnusahasranām* regularly and perform some atonement rituals.

There are hundreds of such cases that came to Shri Mahārāj throughout his life. Those who followed his advice got

complete or partial relief. Sometimes, people failed to carry out the advice of Shri Mahārāj or transgressed the prescribed code of conduct succumbing to the evil spirit. The evil spirits are wily and always try to divert their victims from the virtuous path. Only those who are steadfast succeed in getting rid of the spirit.

While in Managaon, one benefactor of the temple sent his servant suffering from severe pain in stomach to Buwa. Finding it to be caused by a spirit, Buwa asked him to circle the temple chanting prayers. This relieved his pain over a period of a couple of months. One night the servant dreamt that his master was sick and needed him in Savantwadi. When he told Buwa about it next morning, Buwa advised that since the dream was induced by the spirit, the servant should not leave Managaon. The fickle-minded servant left for Savantwadi flouting Buwa's orders. He was surprised to find his master in good health and cheer. Even as he was returning to Managaon on master's instructions, the spirit caught up with him causing severe pain in stomach leading to death.

Rationale:- Thus, it is that Shri Mahārāj, in a selfless, impartial and unreserved exercise of all his knowledge and powers, strived to mitigate the sufferings of all supplicants and bringing happiness and fulfilment to their lives. Only a few representative events have been narrated here. Throughout his life and even after the dissolution of his physical shell, thousands of such episodes have been recorded. This may appear a bit puzzling to some people. Why should a *Sannyāsi* having renounced the world with realization of the ephemeral nature of life and having transcended all desires and aspirations, should care so much for the little joys and sorrows of fellow human beings? Shouldn't he impress upon them the need to follow his example and strive to detach themselves from the petty and illusory vicissitudes of life, rather than pandering to them? In fact, one accomplished Vedanta scholar whom Shri Mahārāj also regarded highly, Shri Eksambekar, asked him as much. Shri

Mahārāj evaded directly answering the question then. However, we do find an explanation of this conduct of Shri Mahārāj, in his major work, “Shri Gurucharitam” also known as “*Dwisāhasri*” the Sanskrit rendition of the Marāthi “*Gurucharitra*”.

ईदृश्यो लौकिका लीलाः कृता भक्तिविधित्सया।

भजेयुर्मा कथमपि लोका इत्याशयोऽस्य तु ॥९-४९॥

लोके प्रत्युपकारित्वं समीक्ष्य भगवान्विभुः।

लौकिकानन्दजनकां चमत्कृतिमिहाकरोत् ॥९-५०॥

हेतुनानेन तल्लोका भजन्ति भगवत्पदम्।

भजनादेव निर्धूतमला यान्ति मुमुक्षुताम् ॥९-५१॥

“Such popular (favouring the devotees) acts are performed (by the Lord) for establishing the path of devotion, the main purpose being to inspire faith amongst people and persuade them to seek me (Shri Guru), by love or by temptation. For, unless they come to me, there will be no release from this recurring cycle of life and death and consequent chain of sufferings. As the people engrossed in sensual pleasures do not have any inclination to the Path of God, the Lord, sensing their grateful disposition, performs the miracles to make them happy. This will induce them to strive for His Grace and follow the path of Devotion which alone can purge their souls of the impurity accumulated over the endless series of lives and engender an intense urge to liberate themselves.” These stanzas are followed by an account of the stages on the path of Self-realization.

Thus, it becomes clear that the main purpose of these exertions of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, to improve the worldly lives of the supplicants, was to induce in them a faith in God and build it into loving relationship and eventually to Self-realization.

Chapter 5.

Seekers of Truth (जिज्ञासू)

The sincere seekers of Truth were of course much smaller in number. In the long run, all followers of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj eventually graduated to the aspirant stage. However, this evolution can extend over several lifetimes. Those who came to Shri Mahārāj primarily in search of God, were indeed blessed! For, what better goal can one set for oneself than the realization of Self, which is the very essence of existence? And they could not have hoped for a Guide more perfect than Shri Mahārāj! Well versed in the theory and the practice of the various disciplines of Indian spiritualism, he could assess the seekers accurately as to their spiritual constitution, stage of development and inclinations, and accordingly assign the appropriate path and guide them on to it. Being an accomplished Master, he continuously protected them on their path and expedited their progress with his own potencies.

Sannyasi disciples:- Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was very discriminating and conservative when it came to initiating disciples into the ascetic order of Sanyasi. He thus initiated only one of his disciples, *Shri Narasinh Saraswati (Dixit) Swāmi Mahārāj*; that too after a rigorous test of his devotion. However, several of his disciples entered the order after his *Mahāsamadhi*. Chief amongst them are *Shri Yogānanda Saraswati* (formerly *Shri Gānda Mahārāj*) and Shri Shirlolkar Shastri who ascended the seats of *Shankarāchārya of Karavir and Sankeshwar* monasteries. Besides these, **Brahmānand Saraswati of Nellore** was a devotee of Swāmi Mahārāj. The Sanyasis of the various orders established by Shri Adi Shankaracharya pursue the Dnyan Yoga or the path of knowledge. The emphasis in this path is on analytical enquiry of the Self. Only the seeker who is completely detached from sensual pleasures (*vairāgya*), quietened the turbulence of desires (*Shama*), acquired a control over his sense

organs (Indriyas) (*Dama*), is unreservedly devoted to his Master whom he serves and obeys implicitly (*Guru'pasatti*) and has intensely burning aspiration to realize the Self (*Mumukshā*), is eligible to join this path. The Master imparts the knowledge to him through the *Mahāvākyas* and after a critical listening (*Shravana*), he reflects on it (*Manan*) and finally meditates continually (*Nididhyāsan*) on these till he is established fully in the Truth.

The eight-fold yoga of Patanjali:- We have already seen endeavours of Shri Mahārāj in this field. He has initiated many disciples into the elementary practices of purification (*Shuddhi kriyas*) and guided them through the advanced *Asanas* (postures), *Prāṇāyāma* (control of life force), *mudrās* like *Khechari* and deeper and deeper stages of meditation (*Dhyān*) to *Nirvikalp Samādhi*, the ultimate goal of Yoga. Some of the prominent disciples who in turn themselves became Yogic Masters include, *Shri Gāndā Mahārāj* (*Shri Yogānanda Saraswati*); *Shri Sitāram Mahārāj Tembe* (younger brother of Sri Mahārāj), *Shri Yogirāj Gulavani Mahārāj*, *Shri Rang Avadhut Mahārāj* *Shri Narahari Diwan* of Vathār (near Kolhapur), also known as Datta Mahārāj of Ashta (all *Naishthic Brahmacharis* or avowed celibates); *Shri Bālāsaheb Vaidya*, *Shri Govind Pundit of BheLasā* (MP) and many other householders.

Karma Yoga: - Literally translated as the path of action, this means aligning one's life to the dictates of the Scriptures so that no new adverse Karma (*Kriyamān*) is generated; the Karma of the present birth or *Prārabdha* (that part of past Karma which is assigned towards the current life) has to be suffered patiently, with neither protest nor resistance; and the rest of Karma (*Sanchita*) accumulated over the innumerable previous births, is to be dissipated through selfless service to the Divine manifest in

all living beings. The human actions are classified as those ordained by Scriptures (*Vihita*), those forbidden (*Nishiddha*) and those that are motivated by desires (*Kāmya*) but permitted. The last two categories have to be eschewed. This is followed by gradual purification of mind that then becomes capable of realizing the Self. Karma Yoga is thus not a direct means of Liberation but is an essential prerequisite to it. Obviously, a thorough knowledge of Scriptures and strict discipline are the mainstays of Karma yoga.

A populist interpretation of Karma Yoga tends to validate all secular activity as Liberating, without closely examining the motivation. Thus for example doctors, lawyers and other professionals, even politicians claim to be Karma Yogis, when in fact, however perfect and dedicated their actions, these are motivated by *Artha* (money, wealth), *Kāma* (sex and other desires) and *Lokaishana* (urge to gain public adulation). These only serve to strengthen their mortal identity and distance them from the Eternal Self.

Shri Swāmi Mahārāj expected his followers to strictly follow the religious conduct prescribed in the scriptures appropriate to the *Varṇa* and *Ashram* of the individual. He considered the Vedas (Shrutis) and Smrutis to be the Divine commandments. He expected Brahmins to be particularly strict in this respect, being placed at the top of the *Varṇa* hierarchy. They needed to be exemplary in their religious conduct as the other *Varṇas* would naturally look up to them and follow their lead. That is why he did not grant audience to a Brahmin sporting western hair style at the expense of *Shikhā*. He insisted on Brahmins to perform the five-fold sacrifices (*Panch Mahāyadnyas*). He accepted food offered by such a Brahmin only. He was instrumental in bringing back to religious path many Brahmin families led astray by the Western education. In fact, he brought about a great revival of Vedic religion in India.

One vaccinator named **Shri Keshavarao** of Sārangapur provides an illustrative case. During the first year of donning ochre robes, Shri Mahārāj spent a few days in Sarangapur on way to Brahmavart near Kanapur. Keshavarao, at the instance of his mother, came to Shri Mahārāj to invite him for Bhiksha (food). Noting that Keshavarao did not display any marks of Brahminhood, Shri Mahārāj declined the invitation. Keshavarao explained that he was a Karhada Brahmin from Pune and though not regularly practicing any religious services, he offered to hire a priest to carry out the rituals for that day. This only further upset Shri Mahārāj who asserted that he would shun the very sight of such a Brahmin, leave alone partaking of his food. As Keshavarao left, the onlookers told Shri Mahārāj that Keshavarao was an evil person and wouldn't return. However Shri Mahārāj only said, "wait and see! Keshavarao has to return".

Stung by the harsh censure from Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, Keshavarao reached home and narrated the episode to his mother who, rather than sympathising, scolded him further. She considered the refusal of Shri Mahārāj to accept their *Bhiksha* a blot on their Brahminhood. This caused Keshavarao to repent and return to Shri Mahārāj with folded hands. Prostrating before Shri Mahārāj, he begged forgiveness for his conduct and beseeched him to accept their food, promising to obey Shri Mahārāj in future and to observe the daily religious services. His mother followed him and entreated Shri Mahārāj to train her son in Brahmin's rituals. Shri Mahārāj relented and undertook to teach Keshavarao; and only after he had learnt and started religiously practicing the duties of a Brahmin, accepted food at Keshavarao place.

He taught Vedas and Scriptures to all sincere seekers and composed a plethora of literature for the posterity. This has been described in more detail separately. Once two Vedic Brahmins at Pathri, expressed their desire to study *Āranyakas*, Shri Swāmi

Mahārāj spent 17 days with them and instructed the scriptures to them. Shri Ram Shastri Prakāshkar of Shinor (Gujarāt) was his disciple who was trained by Shri Mahārāj in the eight styles (*Vikruti*) of Vedic incantation. A learned scholar Shri Jogalekar shed his pride of knowledge of sacrificial altars (*Kundas*) after being corrected by Shri Mahārāj with citations from scriptures.

Bhakti: - Shri Mahārāj propagated the path of devotion and Love on the largest scale. In this path, the seeker establishes an emotional relationship with the Lord and progressively focuses his mind on to the Divine. The relationship can be any, e.g., Father, Mother, Son, Brother, Master, Lover, Husband, Friend etc. As the seeker advances, this relationship grows in intensity and obscures all other relationships. Finally, the whole world becomes unreal and the seeker's mind gets immersed in the Divine and finally merges into it. This path can be followed by all human beings and has the maximum latitude in terms of conduct. What matters is the intensity of Love for the Divine and unconditional surrender to the Divine will. Actually, in most cases, the path of Bhakti starts as supplication to the Divine for some desire or longing (*Sakām Bhakti*). Thus, the above-described instances of relief from distress or fulfilment of desire are actually examples of *Sakām Bhakti*. This will intensify the faith of the seeker propelling him on to the Path of Devotion sans desire (*Nishkām Bhakti*). As mentioned earlier, this path is open to all, men and women, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, race, education or the lack of it. In Puranas, there are examples of even non-human Bhaktas. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point.

A fisherman, named **Jāgalā**, ran away from home to evade marriage. He came to Shinor staying there for two years, totally indifferent to physical discomforts and harsh climate. One day as Shri Mahārāj was returning from the river after bath Jagala stood in front of him, spreading his arms as if blocking the way. Swāmi Mahārāj just looked at him once and said, "So

you are staying here? Come to Markandeya temple at nightfall!” and proceeded to the temple. He then informed all devotees that from that day, there will be nightly discourses on Gitā at the temple. At the nightfall, the people gathered for the discourse. Jagala too came and sat in a corner. Jagala attended regularly up to penultimate chapter (Ch.17) of Gitā. He said that he did not want to listen any more and left. Jagala died two months later.

A penitent prostitute named **Saraswati Bāi** came to stay in Narasobawadi. She used her musical talent to sing *Karunātripadi* before the Padukas at the instance of Shri Dixit Swāmi Mahārāj. Once she sang the prayer in the presence of Shri Mahārāj. Pleased by her sincerity and devotion, Shri Mahārāj composed a hymn in praise of Shri Guru (*Gurustotra*) especially for her and imparted some Yogic training. The lady spent the rest of her life pursuing the path of devotion and leading a pious life.

Chapter 6. Realized souls and Shri Mahārāj.

‘प्रसन्नान्मानः प्रशान्ता निर्बन्धा द्वैतवर्जिताः।
स्वात्मारामाश्चरन्त्यत्र जडोन्मत्तपिशाचवत्’

This is how Shri Swāmi Mahārāj describes the individuals who have attained the goal of human life by realizing their true Essence, their Self. They have immersed their individuality into the Universal Soul. Their physical shells may remain distinct and apparently separate, but they themselves do not perceive any duality. They are freed from the eight bonds of human existence, namely revulsion, shame, fear, doubt, aversion, and vanity of birth, character and race. Having broken the knot (of ignorance) in the heart, they have overcome all doubts; and are thus always peaceful and happy. Continually absorbed in the Self, these sages dwell in this world assuming stupid, insane or ghostlike demeanour (to shun popular botheration). Thus they continue till their residual Karma is expended, which they endure without resistance or protest. Such noble souls can be recognized only by other realized souls.

Shri Mahārāj came into contact with several such souls, in addition to Shri Govind Swāmi, Shri Mouni Swāmi, and Shri Narayanand Saraswati who were his Gurus. Their interaction is indeed beyond ordinary human comprehension. However, one can still benefit from observation of these interactions. One has to keep in mind that such great souls have merged their minds with The One Reality and through It, unified with each other. The very concept of interaction is probably invalid in this context. In fact, there are instances where Shri Mahārāj and the other Saint have met and just sat together without exchanging a word, apparently rejoicing in each other’s proximity. This was

the case with a Paramahans¹⁸ who passed by the hut where Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was staying in Brahmavarta. Lord Dattatreya had told Shri Mahārāj to expect him. Another Paramahans spent a whole night with Shri Swāmi Mahārāj at Sandhya Matha near Tanjavur.

As a youth, when he was still a bachelor, Shri Mahārāj accompanied his mother on a pilgrimage to Nasik on the banks of Godavari. They went to the renowned saint **Shri Deo Māmaledar**. The saint asked Vasudeva about his education. When Vasudeva replied he was not much educated, the saint remarked to others, “Here is a learned person” and offered him some money in recognition of his learning. Vasudeva, however, refused to accept it.

Shankarācharya of the Shāradā Peetham:- The then reigning Shankaracharya of the Sharada Peetham, **Shri Rājarājeshvar Swāmi** was an ardent admirer of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, ever since they met at Haridwar and spent the Chaturmās (Shri Mahārāja’s 3rd), together. At the instance of the Shankarācharya, Shri Mahārāj gave discourses on Adi Shankara’s Bhashya on Upanishads.

Shankarācharya of Shringeri Peetham:- After his 17th Chaturmaas at Tanjavur, while travelling along the Kaveri River, Shri Mahārāj learnt that the Shankaracharya of Shringeri Peetham, **Shri Nrisinh Bharati** was staying at Shrirangam and proceeded there to pay obeisance to him. The Pontiff was overjoyed to see him that he could not stop laughing for quite a while! Shri Mahārāj composed hymns in praise of Sharadamba and Shankaracharya. The Āchārya responded with a stotra in praise of Shri Mahārāj. He arranged for the Bhiksha (lunch) of Shri Mahārāj and later honoured him in following words, addressed to his disciples:

¹⁸ One who has attained the highest level of Self-realization and is so much absorbed in the Blissful Self that he is totally oblivious of the external world including his own body.

“You have not recognised the great Swāmiji who has arrived today. He is Shri Datta Prabhu himself incarnated by the intense devotion and great virtue of his parents. His continuing endeavour of revival of Vedic religion is comparable to that of Shri Adi Shankarāchārya. Strictly living by the Varnāshram Code of Vedic religion, he has been responsible for religious and spiritual uplift of a large number of men and women. Travelling on foot from Setu (Kanyakumari) to Himālayas, he has educated the seekers in the paths of Action, Worship and Knowledge, according to their eligibility. We pray to God to grant him a full life to enable him to further his work of the revival of Vedic religion.” In reply Shri Mahārāj said that he did not deserve the high praise His Holiness had so gracefully showered on him; he also added that Shri Nrisinh Bharati had added to the grace of the Shringeri Seat. The two saints constantly kept in touch with each other through their disciples and Shri Mahārāj used to send copies of his works to the Shankaracharya at the latter’s instance.

Shri Shāntāshram Swāmi:- In those days, there used to stay a great Sanyasi in Benares Known as Shri Shāntāshram Swāmi. Hailing from Karad in Maharashtra, he had performed weekly revisions (Saptāh) of Shrimad Bhāgavata Puran continuously for 40 years in Kāhi. By his constant austerities and the devoted study of Bhāgavata, he had attained communion with the God. It is said that when on occasions he overslept and did not wake up at the usual hour of 4 a.m. in the morning, the Lord of Kāshi himself used to knock at his door to wake him up! Though not formally educated in either Sanskrit or the Scriptures himself, Shri Shantashram Swāmi used to be consulted by the highest authorities in Kashi for the interpretations of certain abstruse passages in the Bhāgavata Puran. He had heard about Shri Mahārāj, then staying at Brahmavart (1913 AD), for three continuous years, and was looking forward to seeing him in Kashi. When in spite of several requests of different personages

from Kashi, Shri Mahārāj did not visit Kashi, Shri Shantashram Swāmi decided to visit Brahmavart himself. When the two saints met, it is recorded that both of them were so overwhelmed with Love that tears started flowing incessantly from their eyes! Enchanted by the ambience of the place and the various religious services, discourses etc. going on there, Shri Shantashram Swāmi stayed there for four months.

Vaijanāth:- Strange are the ways of saints. Having attained the highest Spiritual Goal, they adopt bizarre life styles to shield themselves from the crowd of people with worldly desires. They may display a childlike (Baal), a crazy (Unmatta) or a ghostly (Pishāch), behaviour just to avoid crowds. One such saint was **Vaijanāth** of Shri Narasobawadi. He was known to be a very straightforward person with a childlike simplicity. He never performed any religious service, spending the morning just carrying a *lota* (vessel) around. In the name of bathing, he used to brush himself with mud in the river for hours. He never went to the temple nor worshipped the Padukas. If anyone questioned him about this, he would claim to be possessed by a ghost who would not let him perform any Puja etc. When invited for meals, he never accepted more than two paisa as Dakshina¹⁹. He kept all his money with a trusted person but kept the account himself. He thus had a balance of all of eight rupees! Once when Shri Mahārāj was camping in Wadi, Shri Ganda Mahārāj, a major disciple accompanying Shri Mahārāj, suggested to Vaijanath that he should perform a Mahapuja with part of that money. Vaijanath gave his stock reply that he had saved the money for a visit to his brother and won't hear of spending it! The people from Wadi told Shri Ganda Mahārāj that this was just a ruse and in the several years that Vaijanath was in Wadi, he had never once been to his brother.

Finally they escalated the matter to Shri Mahārāj. Shri Mahārāj told them that they did not understand Vaijanath

correctly; by being possessed by the ghost, he meant Divine possession and by visit to his brother, he meant the dissolution of his body to be one with the Reality. His savings were thus set aside for his last rites. He was a Self-Realized soul whose language was cryptic for ordinary folk. Shri Mahārāj then requested Vaijanath to spend seven rupees on Mahapuja and keep one for “the visit to your brother”. Vaijanath readily agreed but expressed his inability to perform the Puja, as “the ghost” won't let him. Shri Mahārāj further urged him to “request the ghost to relieve you for one day”. This having agreed upon, Shri Mahārāj proceeded to invite the entire town of Wadi to partake of the *Prasād* at the Mahapuja of Vaijanath. Many were worried how seven rupees would suffice to feed the entire town. Inspired contributions of foodstuffs by many devotees made it possible to serve food to thousands to their heart's content. Shri Mahārāj went around the feast in the company of Vaijanath supervising the arrangements.

The Swāmi Mahārāj of Akkalkot:- Once, on his way to Pandharpur from Wadi (1905 AD), at a place called Kamalapur, a tall man with hands extending to the knees appeared to Shri Swāmi Mahārāj in his dream and asked him, “You travel all over and also compose poetry. How come you pay no attention to me?” On waking up, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj enquired with the Lord about the personage. The Lord answered, “He is The Swāmi Mahārāj of Akkalkot and he desires you to visit Akkalkot and write his life in verse.” Shri Swāmi Mahārāj said, “My tongue (pen) is dedicated to the feet of Lord Datta. If you command and the (relevant) information is available, it (the life) may be composed.” The Lord asked Shri Swāmi Mahārāj to visit Akkalkot on the way to Pandharpur. Accordingly Shri Swāmi Mahārāj paid his respects to Swāmi Samarth at Akkalkot. Shri Swāmi Samarth of Akkalkot is considered an incarnation of Lord Dattatreya and has even now a massive following in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

¹⁹ monetary offering accompanying a ritual meal.

Shri Sāi Baba of Shirdi was a contemporary saint, also considered an incarnation of Lord Dattatreya by his devotees. A major disciple of Shri Sāi Bābā and a saint-poet in his own right, Shri Dāsaganu Mahārāj, met Shri Swāmi Mahārāj during his stay at Rājāmahendri in Andhra Pradesh. After offering a Kirtan service to Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, the latter enquired from Dāsaganu Mahārāj about his plans. Dāsaganuji told Mahārāj, he was on his way to Shirdi to see his Master Shri Sāi Bābā. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj gave a coconut to Dāsaganu saying, “Please give this to my brother”. Dāsaganu accepted the coconut and left for Shirdi, with his party.

On the way, the party halted at Kopargaon station, where Dāsaganu Mahārāj went away to perform the religious services in the morning. His companions, feeling hungry, proceeded to eat some snacks they had packed. It turned out the snacks were rather too spicy and hot. Everyone was thirsting for water, which, on that hot summer day was not readily available. Some resourceful members decided to break the coconuts in the baggage to satiate their thirst. Among these coconuts, the one from Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was also broken and consumed. The snacks and the coconut were offered to Shri Dasaganuji too on his return. When they reached Shirdi, Dāsaganu was dismayed by the cold reception he got from Shri Sāi Bābā, who turned his back on the party and shouted abuses at them, “thieves and scoundrels!” This was markedly in contrast to the loving reception Dāsaganu used to get from Baba. He was stricken with remorse and threw himself at the feet of Bābā begging forgiveness. Baba shouted at him, “Where is the coconut my brother gave me? Get me my coconut first!” Dasaganu, unaware of its disposal, asked his companions for it. It was only when they confessed to having eaten it that he came to know of the sacrilege. Having impressed upon Dāsaganu and others of the esteem he had for his “brother’s” coconut, Sāi Bābā gave up his feigned anger and rebuked them for the sacrilege.

Thus, though the two saints never met each other in person, they have, through this episode, made evident, their innate spiritual unity. Outwardly Swāmi Mahārāj was a highly orthodox Brāhmanical monk and Shri Sāi Bābā was a most unorthodox mendicant refusing to conform to any religious tradition. But for this incidence, most observers would feel that they represented two opposing doctrines. However a close examination of their life and teachings would reveal that their differences were more in form than in essence. Both these saints were motivated by an intense desire to mitigate the sufferings of all persons coming into their contact, irrespective of his caste, creed or persuasion. Thus the so-called “Brahmanical” Swāmi Mahārāj had several Muslims, Parsis, Lingayats, and Jains among his devotees. He never preached them to deviate from the religion of their birth. He asked Moslems to chant Āyats from Kura’an, for example. Similarly Sāi Bābā also directed his Brahmin devotees to practice their religion and recite their holy books viz. Gurucharitra and Vishnushasranāma. This is truly in the great Indian tradition of saints who have always advocated reconciliation amongst the various faiths and have strongly discouraged conflicts.

Not only was there no hatred for any religion, but instead there was an implicit recognition of unity of the final goal of all religions. As rightly observed by many Western observers (e.g. Rigopoulos: personal communication) this attitude, common to all Indian spiritual traditions, but especially fostered by the Datta Sampradaya, “*wonderful examples of mutual coexistence and inter-religious harmony and peace*”. This is not to say that inter-religious harmony or racial/caste discrimination, social untouchability being a particularly grotesque manifestation of the latter, do not exist in India. If these are so painfully prevalent in India, indeed all over the world, it is certainly not due to, but in spite of the relentless efforts of the saints like Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and Shri Sāi Bābā.

Shri Gajānan Mahārāj of Shegaon in the Vidarbha region of Mahārāshtra was another great contemporary saint whose birth and previous life are shrouded in mystery. He just appeared one day in Shegaon and immediately started attracting devotees with his miracles. His real name is not known. He is called Gajānan Mahārāj because of his constant chant “Gana Gana Ganat Bote” which is considered to symbolize the popular deity Ganesh or Gajanan. During his sojourn through Vidarbha (1905), Shri Swāmi Mahārāj visited Shegaon. On the previous day Shri Gajanan Mahārāj instructed his devotees, “My learned brother, a Karhada Brahmin is coming to visit. He is a strict puritan. Don’t let any bits of cloth strew his path!” When Shri Swāmi Mahārāj arrived Gajānan Mahārāj was snapping his fingers absentmindedly. On seeing Swāmi Mahārāj, the snapping suddenly stopped and the two saints started staring at each other smilingly with joyous faces. There was hardly any verbal communication. They just seemed to enjoy each other’s company. Shortly afterwards, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj took his leave. Gajanan Mahārāj just said, “Very nice!”

After Shri Swāmi Mahārāj left, the devotee and host of Shri Gajānan Mahārāj Shri Bala Patil wondered how a strict Brahmin Sanyasi could be a brother to a personage with no restrictions like himself. Gajānan Mahārāj told him that the differences were only apparent and in essence they were one having merged with the Universal Being beyond all names and forms.

Another contemporary saint from Vidarbha, **Shri Gulābarao Mahārāj** once conveyed his desire to “see” Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. Gulābarao was blind since childhood but was one of the most learned persons of the time, though born in a farmer family. He was an aspirant of Madhura Bhakti, seeking Lord Shrikrishna as a paramour like the Gopis (milkmaids) of Vraja. Deeply immersed in his divine love, he considered himself a woman and also dressed like women. As the

Sannyasin’s code did not permit him to see him, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj sent a word that “We share inward love; there is no need for an outward meeting”. Shri Gulābarao Mahārāj told his disciples to take him to a spot from where he could watch Shri Swāmi Mahārāj without being seen. His wish was thus fulfilled and he expressed his sense of blessedness at having had the “*Darshan*” of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj.

Chapter 7. Divine Encounters.

The Supreme Lord (*Parameshwar*), say the scriptures, created the universe from Himself. That is to say the Lord is the maker as well as the stuff of the Universe. This is one of the major tenets of Shri Shankara's non-dual doctrine. Thus the Lord pervades the whole world. This is the essence of the so-called pantheism the Hindus are often accused of. However, the Hindus, even the least educated ones, are very clear in their minds about the unity of all deities that they worship in the forms of Rivers, Mountains, Trees, and Snakes etc. They are well aware that all these subsidiary deities, right up to the Trinity of the Creator, the Sustainer and the Destroyer (*Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Mahesh*) are ultimately rooted in the One and the Only Supreme Being. In actual practice, the belief in these deities, like most religious beliefs, is engendered and fostered by the experiences of Saints and holy persons. Such humans that have purified their minds by austerities, services and devotion to the God in one of His multifarious forms, do encounter the all-pervading Divinity in some form or the other. The lives of such people are full of these encounters, which ordinary folk, weak in faith, find difficult to believe. However, there are thousands of such instances in the recorded history of mankind, that can be verified and display a remarkable consistency. Thus the least we can do is to keep our minds open. If we are so lucky as to have faith, we can even benefit from such accounts.

To the one who actually has these experiences, these are a part one's reality and no cause for alarm or wonder. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was such a person. He almost constantly came into contact with divine beings from his earliest life. We have seen how at Wadi, he was admonished by Shri Narasinh Saraswati for contravening the injunction to visit the temple after

the Lord was put to bed (*Shejāratī*). There are many such instances. Let us recall here a few representative ones.

The loftiest manifestation of divinity is Mother Nature herself. Vedic deities consist of *Vāyu* (Air), *Agni* (Fire), *Varuna* (Water) etc. Lord *Varuna* rules the element of water and the deities of Sea (*Samudra*) and Rivers. These various deities are believed to reign over the different bodies of water. Thus each river is ruled by a specific deity. We find these river goddesses appearing to and communicating with Shri Mahārāj on a regular basis.

Once while returning from Wadi, in his householder days, a celestial lady appeared before Shri Mahārāj and said, "Please do not proceed without first christening me". Recognising her as the River flowing by Mangaon, Shri Mahārāj named her **Nirmala** after which she disappeared. The name has now been widely accepted.

The two incarnations of Lord Dattatreya in the present age of Kali, have shown a special inclination to the **River Krishnā**. The first one, Shripad Shrivallabh spent most of his earthly life in *Kurugaddi*, which is an island, about a mile across, enclosed by the two streams of the River. In his second earthly sojourn, the Lord appeared as Shri Narasinh Saraswati Swāmi Mahārāj and spent 12 years at the confluence of Krishnā with *Panchanadi* (five rivers) at Narasobawadi and 23 years at Ganagapur, near convergence of River Bhima, a tributary of Krishnā and Amarajā. Thus Krishna occupies a special place of reverence in the Dattatreya tradition. Naturally Shri Swāmi Mahārāj held Krishna in the greatest regard. For years, the priests of Wadi had been requesting Shri Mahārāj to compose **Shri Krishna Lahari**, a hymn to Krishna in *Shikharini* metre on the lines of similar Lahari hymns composed by major poets like Shankara and Jagannath Pundit in praise of Ganges and other rivers. Shri Mahārāj himself has also composed Shri Narmadā Lahari. On his way to Ganagapur, Mother Krishnā appeared to

Shri Mahārāj and directed Shri Mahārāj to compose Krishnā Lahari. In an inspired outpouring, Shri Mahārāj composed 51 stanzas in a very short time when the Mother Krishnā said, “Enough!” and disappeared.

A touching incidence illustrates the special bond of devotion that existed between the two. After the *Chāturmas* at Tanjāvur, Shri Mahārāj, travelling along the banks of Krishnā, arrived at a small place on the 14th bright day of Phalgun. The next day being the full moon, Shri Mahārāj, as per the rules of Sanyasi, had to get the ritual tonsure. When he started to look for a suitable place to stay in that village, the villagers, instead of helping him, started asking irritating questions and in general teasing him. Tired and hungry, he went to the Mother Krishna and complained, “Oh Mother! Of what avail is my regard for you? Don’t you reciprocate it in even a small measure? If I have to go without a tonsure tomorrow, I shall never again perform one and renounce the monastic sceptre too! It appears futile to obey you in future!” That night Mother Krishnā appeared to Shri Mahārāj in his dream and assured him that she fully reciprocated his regard and the tonsure would be arranged. The same night she appeared in the dreams of several prominent villagers in her fearsome form and admonished them for ill-treating the great Sanyasi. She further warned them that unless they sought the forgiveness of the saint and arranged for his tonsure, a great calamity would befall on them and destroy them all. Disturbed by the frightening dream, these villagers related the same to each other and realized that they all had a similar dream. Scared further by the strange coincidence, they came seeking Shri Mahārāj and prostrated before him begging his forgiveness. Needless to add that the tonsure was duly arranged and Shri Mahārāj accorded great hospitality and respect. At the insistence of the villagers he stayed there for a fortnight.

On his return from a two-year sojourn in the Himalayas, Shri Mahārāj was staying at Brahmavarta on the bank of the

Ganges. Mother Narmadā wanted him to spend some time in her vicinity and she conveyed her wish to Shri Mahārāj in a dream, which he ignored. A curious incidence followed. A certain Brahmin afflicted by a skin disease was advised to drink the *Pāda-teerth* (washings of the feet) of Shri Mahārāj. As Shri Mahārāj never let anyone have his *Pāda-teerth*, the Brahmin surreptitiously approached from behind when Shri Mahārāj was writing with his feet folded back. The Brahmin quickly poured some water over the feet and drank the washings and also applied to his body. Startled, Shri Mahārāj asked the Brahmin the explanation for his behaviour. Brahmin related his misery and begged his pardon. This upset Shri Mahārāj very much and in spite of a bath in Ganges and hymn composed in her praise, he contracted the Brahmin’s ailment and developed a rash all over his body. That night he was directed by the Lord to bathe in *Narmadā* for three days to get relief from the disease. Shri Mahārāj, then travelled to Nemavar, considered the Navel of Narmadā, and prayed to Mother Narmadā and composed the hymn, *Narmadā Lahari* in her praise.

Thus began the long and loving relationship between Shri Mahārāj and Narmadā Mata. Not only did Shri Mahārāj spend maximum number of *Chaturmas* on the banks of Narmadā but also found his eternal resting place, Garudeshwar, in her sacred environs. Narmadā Mātā used to look after Shri Mahārāj like her own child. Thus, she counselled him about the mantra to relieve the sprain in his back thus enabling him to proceed for his *Bhikshā*; directed him to the proper village where enough Southern Brahmins lived, to ensure proper Bhiksha (food) for him; returned the cooking vessel flowing down her stream; caused her threatening waters to recede at the touch of the staff of Shri Mahārāj. These are only some of such instances which have been recorded.

In the hot summer of 1907 AD, while he was travelling along the banks of *Pinākini*, Pennār river in Tamilanādu, the full

moon of additional (*Adhik*) Chaitra month approached. The river was so dried up that it was not possible to take a dip in her stream after the mandatory tonsure. The local Brahmins discerning the difficulty of Shri Mahārāj promised to dig a hole in the riverbed deep enough for a dip. After the tonsure, even as Shri Mahārāj approached the river, the waters started rising and came up to the chest of Shri Mahārāj, thus enabling him to immerse himself in the river water and complete the bath. Following verse spontaneously issued forth from the mouth of Shri Mahārāj: -

याऽधिसवशाच्चैत्र्यां कृतक्षौरस्य मेऽल्पका ।

स्नापनाय क्षणाद्बद्धा साद्धा सेव्या पिनाकिनी ।।

“ She who from her small form due to extra month of Chaitra/ In a moment, augmented her stream, to bathe my tonsured self / Pinakini ought to be worshipped by all.”

Thus, the rivers whose banks Shri Mahārāj frequented were, at least to him, conscious, sentient, divine beings. Each river, or for that matter each temple or holy place (Teerth) he visited, he has composed a hymn dedicated to the particular place or its presiding deity. These hymns can be accessed on our site www.shriVasudevaanandsaraswati.com .

Shri Nar-Nārayāna Muni: - In his fourth Chāturmās, Shri Mahārāj was on his way to Badri Nārayāna, when he came across a peak overlooking a steep chasm blocking his path. Even as he was wondering whether to proceed or no, he saw two men climbing down the peak. They advised him to go back since the path was fatally dangerous. Shri Mahārāj answered that he had come to the place to visit Nar and Nārayāna (ancient seers worshipped as incarnations of Lord Vishnu) and did not mind losing his life in the attempt; hence he would not hear of returning! Suddenly the two men disappeared and Shri Mahārāj had the vision of Shri Nar-Nārayān Muni (seer) s.

When travelling from Chikhalada to Garudeshwar, towards his final Chāturmās, Shri Mahārāj had to pass the dense and dangerous forest named after Shoolpanīshvar (the Lord holding a spear i.e. Shankara). There wasn't even a discernible trail to lead him. Shri Mahārāj met a tribal on his way who offered to guide him and signalled Shri Mahārāj to follow him. As the temple of Garudeshwar appeared, he pointed it out to Shri Mahārāj and started leaving. Suspicious of his demeanour, Shri Mahārāj asked the tribal to reveal his true identity. “I am Ashwatthāmā”, the latter replied and beat a hasty retreat. **Ashwatthāmā** is a legendary character from Mahābhārata, believed to be one of the seven immortals in Hindu tradition.

In places where visitors are not allowed to touch the idol of presiding deity, Shri Mahārāj was miraculously allowed to approach the Deity and worship by touching it. Badri Nārayāna and Tirupati Balaji are two such examples. At Tirupati Shri Mahārāj stayed on till the priests sought him out, on a command from the Lord Venkatesh Himself, and escorted him to the sanctum, allowing him to touch and worship the Lord.

There are innumerable accounts of Shri Mahārāj communicating with divine beings, even the deities of epidemics and evil spirits and helping his devotees with these communications. Perhaps our knowledge of these incidents is only the proverbial tip of the iceberg; Shri Mahārāj in all probability experienced such encounters daily. The space does not permit inclusion of all such occurrences.

The most intimate and almost constant communion Shri Mahārāj had was with Lord Dattatreya, his Personal (Isht) God, Master and Guide.

Chapter 8. Shri Gurudeva Datta.

We shall now try to examine and try to understand the relationship between Shri Mahārāj and his chosen form of the Godhead i.e. Lord Dattātreyā whom he dedicated his life unreservedly and as completely as humanly possible. It will be essential to equip ourselves with an outline of the identity of Lord Dattātreyā, his incarnations and the Datta tradition, before we can explore this

At the beginning of the universe the Supreme Being Shri Vishnu engendered Brahmā the Creator and ordered Him to create the world. Amongst first creations of Brahma were the Seven Great Seers (*Saptarshi*). One of them was *Atri* meaning bereft of (beyond the influence of) the three (basic aspects or *Gunās* of Maya – the power of *Brahman* the Supreme Being). *Atri* is the Seer of the 5th Mandal of Rig-Veda and is credited with the first correct prediction of solar eclipse. He is also one of the earliest physicians in Indian tradition and the composer of *Ātreya Sanhita* the earliest medical treatise. He was married to *Anasuyā* (the one without malice) renowned for her chastity and devotion to her husband (*Pātivratya*). Jealous of her fame as *Pativratā*, the consorts of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh persuaded the three Supreme Lords of the Universe to visit the Ashram (abode) of *Atri* and deflect *Anasuyā* from her steadfast religious path. Disguised as hungry mendicants (*Atithi*), they presented themselves at the door of *Atri*'s Ashram at noon soliciting food. Scriptures stipulate that a guest arriving at mid-day should be served as God. Welcoming the three guests ceremoniously, she washed their feet and offered them seats. Apologizing for the sage being away for daily austerities, she asked how best she could serve them. The three Gods pleaded to be very hungry. Knowing the sage's fondness for religious

services. they feared the Rishi may be long delayed. Hence they urged to be served food urgently. Complying with their wish, *Anasuyā* placed their plates and offered them with the usual sacraments.

However the disguised Lords refused to consume the food unless she served it naked! Momentarily shocked by this strange and offensive request the great *Pativrata* reasoned to herself that these mendicants could not possibly be ordinary folk. They had to be some very exalted persons or possibly even Gods, testing her steadfastness on the religious path. She was confronted by a dilemma wherein she will have to choose between two prime duties of a housewife, service to the *Atithi* (guest) and the bridal chastity. She thought to herself, being the consort of the great seer *Atri*, *Kāma* or the Angel of sex, dared not aGītāte her! Thus feeling confident that her chastity would be inviolable, she decided to guard the religious virtue of honouring and serving the guest. *Anasuyā* took off her clothes and mentally evoking her holy husband with water in her hands, approached the guests and sprinkled the water over them. The power *Anasuyā*'s *Pativratya*²⁰ transformed the three Gods into newborn babies. *Anasuyā*'s inherent maternal instinct caused her breasts to overflow with milk as if she herself had just delivered these infants! Moved by their hunger, getting quickly dressed, she started feeding them on her breasts by turn, singing lullaby to soothe them.

Atri, returning from his austerities, learnt about the miracle from *Anasuyā* and recognizing the Divine Trinity rejoiced greatly. He prayed the Supreme Lords and apprised *Anasuyā* of her great fortune. The Three Lords appeared before the couple in their original form and commended them at their

²⁰ The virtue of chastity, loyalty and steadfast devotion to husband. Alas, English language does not have words to translate this and many other words like these! Even these very concepts are alien to Western culture. Isn't it a pity?

spiritual excellence and offered a blessing. At Anasuya's suggestion the Rishi wished the Gods to stay on as their sons with them. Granting the wish, the Gods departed to their abodes even as their infant forms stayed on in Atri's Ashram. The learned Seer assigned meaningful names to the three sons. He named Shri Vishnu, who gave himself as Datta (the given one), Shri Brahmā as Chandra (One who pleases) and Shri Mahesh as Durvāsā (with coarse attire or tough exterior). Chandra, the Moon-God went to his abode (sphere) and Durvāsā went to forest to practice austerities. They reassured their parents that Datta would stay with them incorporating the quintessence of the entire three. He would come to embody the Supreme Trinity in One. Thus came into being the *Ādi* (Primal) Guru, the Eternal Incarnation of the Supreme Brahman, forever working for the spiritual uplift of all sentient beings throughout all the ages.

There is a plethora of literature recounting the life, philosophy and worship of Dattatreya, including Upanishads (Shāndilya, Jābāladarshana, and Dattātreya etc), Purānās (Shiva, Vayu, Brahma, Brahmaṇḍ, Vishnu, Kurma, Markandeya, and Bhāgavata etc.), and Mahābhārata, Shatarudriya Sanhita. As noted earlier Sage Atri, father of Dattātreya is considered the Seer of the 5th Mandala of Rig-Veda. Rāmāyana describes the visit of Rāma and Sitā to the Āshrama (hermitage) of Atri and Anasuyā, on their way to forest. Thus there is enough literary evidence to conclude that Dattātreya deity has been worshipped since the earliest Vedic times. Most Purānās authenticate the above story of his birth and consider Dattātreya an incarnation of Lord Vishnu prior to Parashurāma and Rāma²¹.

Lord Dattātreya, from his incarnation in the Satya Yuga (the Age of Truth), the first of the four Ages, has been bestowing the True Knowledge, which in essence is the direct cognition with the experience (*Aparoksha Dnyan*) of Self, as against didactic understanding sans experience (*Paroksha Dnyan*), that

frees one from the bondage of Māyā, the apparently never-ending cycle of birth, death and rebirth, which is the root cause of all misery. He not only guides and helps disciples like Kārtavīrya, Parashurām, Yadu, Āyu, Prahlād and Alarka, but also, through such disciples as Vishnu Sharma, established traditions of spiritual knowledge to help all sincere seekers. The word tradition is used here to refer to the continuous chain of Masters, each initiated by his predecessor, thus comprising a perennial source of spiritual knowledge. The existence of several such live traditions is the unique asset that endows India with the potential to be the spiritual lighthouse of the world.

Even in the more recent times, Lord Dattātreya has been the source and sustenance of the major spiritual traditions like the Mahānubhava, Nātha and Vārkarī. Shri Gorakhanāth, who was initiated by Dattatreya, was the Guru of Gahinīnāth, the Guru of the elder brother and Guru (Nivruttinath) of the renowned saint Dnyāneshwara who founded the Bhagavat Varkarī tradition in Maharashtra. Dattātreya is considered Adiguru in Mahānubhāva tradition. The main Datta tradition, particularly prevalent in Āndhra, Karnataka, Mahārāshtra and Gujarāt, was established and propagated in this age of Kali, by the two incarnations of the Lord, Shripādvallabha and Nrusinha Saraswati.

The Nature of Dattatreya according to Shri Tembe Swāmi Mahārāj is summarized here as outlined in *Shrigurustuti* in *Dvisahasri*. (The sequence of some verses has been rearranged)

Dattatreya is the Eternal, Immutable One that assumes the auspicious forms of Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesh, Surya (Solar God), Shakti and others like Indra, Agni etc.. Even though Infinite, Indefinable, Formless, with neither desires nor activity, He created the universe and the being consisting of sixteen factors (five elements, five senses, five organs and mind). His infinite form with innumerable heads, eyes and limbs, can be

²¹ Shri Dattatreya Dnyanakosh by Dr. P. N. Joshi, 2000.

seen only with the eyes of knowledge. It is in this form that the fourteen spheres of existence are embedded. He is the seed of all divine incarnations, manifestations like Brahma and other celestial beings as well the Devatas, Humans, beasts and other countless sentient creatures. Even though all that is perceived is created by this Supreme Being and is inseparable from it, identification with various forms (ego) leads to illusory diversity with feelings of affection and hate (This leads to good and bad actions setting in motion the Karmic cycles of births and deaths). This is the phenomenal world which is populated with countless *Jiva-s*.

Further in the same *Gurustuti* (verses 66-74) Shri Swāmi Mahārāj praises the Lord thus. “Transcending the world of name and form (i.e. human conception), indivisible and detached, You are One Supreme Soul with no other. The names and forms are conceived by the gross human intellect in an attempt to grasp Your transcendental Essence, just like the conceptions of small and large spaces (space of house, space of pot etc.) within one infinite space, only reflect the limitations of these objects.

The Incarnations: - The Supreme Lord and Essence of all beings, even though immune to birth and decay, causes Himself to be born in different ages, submitting to His own Maya²², to defend the pious ones²³. Study of the deeds of His incarnations releases one from the bondage of Karma; those engrossed in the actions motivated by worldly desires, their hearts diverted from my deeds, remain captives of the bonds of Karma²⁴. Those who recognize Him as the detached originator of four Varnas on the basis of qualities and respective actions, obtain relief from the bonds of their Karma.²⁵

²² अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् । प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय संभवत्यात्ममायया ॥

BhagadGitā (BG):4:7

²³ परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् । धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ॥ BG:4:9

²⁴ जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः । त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोऽर्जुन ॥ BG:4:9.

²⁵ चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः । तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम् ॥ BG:4:13.

The Eternal Being assumes these forms to destroy His antagonists and having accomplished that, dissolves the same, as a thorn stuck in foot is extracted with another one and then that too is thrown away. One such form of great magnificence is known as Datta and is the fountain of grace and appears to devotees merely by remembrance. The incarnation of Datta is Eternal because of the interminable nature His function. The Eternal and Formless Lord assumed the appellation of Datta because He gave Himself as son to Anasuya and Atri. Beyond form and conception, propitiated by simply remembering, Datta ought to be worshiped by all.

Even as He creates the Universe, He remains formless; and even though the beings are located in Him and sustained by Him, He is not located in them²⁶; such is the Might of His Yoga! Even the situation of all beings in Him is an illusion caused by His Maya²⁷. Wholly free and independent though He is, with voluntary submission to Māyā, He creates the Universe again and again²⁸. (Or it could be said) the *Prakṛiti* (Divine power) creates the Universe under His auspices; but the world does not recognize the Chaste Creator. Ignorant of the Divine Essence of His human forms assumed by Him to protect the righteous, the wicked ones disregard Him who can be realized only by Yoga²⁹.

“Your multiform Māyā eludes human cognition, O Master of Universe! Engrossed in her *Guna-s*, the individual soul identifies his self with them. This perpetuates the revolution of this phenomenal world. These (deluded souls) do not know that You, the Latent One, are their ultimate destiny. All the spheres up to Satya (*Bhūh, Bhuvah, Svah, Mahah, Janah, Tapah,*

²⁶ मया ततमिदं सर्वं जगदव्यक्तमूर्तिना । मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि न चाहं तेष्ववस्थितः ॥ BG: 9:4.

²⁷ न च मत्स्थान भूतानि पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् । भूतभृत् न च भूतस्थो ममात्मा भूतभावनः ॥ BG:9:5

²⁸ प्रकृतिं स्वावष्टभ्य विसृजामि पुनःपुनः । भूतग्राममिदं कृत्स्नमवशं प्रकृतेर्वशात् ॥ BG:9:8.

²⁹ मयाध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः सूयते सचराचरम् ।... अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् । परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥ BG:9:10-11.

Satyam) are temporal and their inhabitants prone to descent. Hence blessed are those who attain your eternal abode.

“Your nature cannot be realized by logical deduction alone, but through the comprehensive exercise of human faculties. Even amongst the humans, oh Transcendental Lord, only those with minds purified by the contact with your beloved devotees and discrimination, may aspire, through patient enquiry into, contemplation of and meditation on scriptural statements. Hence I pray you, Oh Lord, to grant me the pure sight (intellect) to realize the goal of human life.”

Furthermore (80-84), “You are neither Rishi nor do you have any Varna (race), Ashram or gender, having created the entire universe through your progeny (*Brahmadev* and others). Deluded by your *Māyā*, pursuing the sensual pleasures, these evil souls do not recognize you and go astray. You are the creator, supporter and destroyer; the real essence; you are indeed the all-pervading Brahma, the Prime Soul (*Ātmā*). This world sprouts forth from you, rejoices in you and finally dissolves into you. You appear to pervade this world through the eight icons (five elements of earth, water, fire, air and space; sun, moon, soul). Eight custodians of the regions³⁰ (*Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirruti, Varuna, Vāyu, Soma* and *Ishvar*) and rulers of the spheres (Brahma et al), all that is seen and learnt about, all the animate and inanimate beings in this world are your organs.”

“Assuming the playful form and the name of Datta, the Lord has incarnated in Atri’s home. He may feign to be crazy or devilish; be a child, a youth or an old person; or appear as a sage with matted hair; show himself as a Yogi or sensualist, caring or detached, well dressed or naked; happy and well-fed or gaunt; beggar or monk; celibate or householder; Sanyasi or Vānaprastha; sometimes observing the Varnāshram code,

sometimes flouting it. Such are His strange ways which defy the intellects of Gods and Rishis.”

Worship of Dattatreya: - “There is no comparable form for liberated souls, seekers and ordinary mortals to contemplate upon, appearing to all on remembering and fulfilling their desires. Protection of devotees is his delight, remembrance His service and mental offering of own food His worship. He bestows exceptional reward on His devotees who remember Him.

“He who sleeps in Māhur (Matapur), bathes in Ganges (at Kashi), performs Sandhyā at Karhād, wears perfume at Pandharpur, begs for food in Kolhapur, consumes it in Pānchāleshwar and performs evening *Sandhyā* on Western coast; may that Lord Dattātreya ever abide in my heart and always preside over my thoughts and actions!”

Incarnations of Datta in Kali :- Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasinh Saraswati are considered the two incarnations of Lord Datta in the age of Kali. Both were the result of the Lord Dattatreya granting the wishes two virtuous ladies (Sumati and Ambā) to endow them with a revered and wise son like Him. Since there is no other like Him in the universe, He had to incarnate each time to fulfil the blessing. Another similarity between the two incarnations is that they both renounced worldly life at a tender age, possessed inherent scriptural knowledge, never married and performed a pilgrimage of India, initiating Yogis and seekers, directing populace on to the righteous path and establishing the edifice of Vedic religion, before settling down in a chosen place (Kurugaddi in case of Shripad Shrivallabh, and Ganagapur in the case of Shri Narasinh Saraswati) on the banks of Krishna or her tributary, to carry on their work. Both have “disappeared” from public view with no records or witnesses of their physical death.

Gurucharitra: - Their biographies are recorded by Shri Saraswati Gangadhar, the great-grandson of a major disciple of

³⁰. East, South-east, South, South-west, West, North-west, North and North-east.

Shri Narasinh Saraswati, Sāyandeva, in the Marāthi book entitled *Shri Gurucharitra*, considered sacred by the followers of the Datta tradition.

One of the major contributions of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was translation and interpretation of this gospel of the Datta tradition. The first one *Shri Gurucharitam* is an abridged Sanskrit version composed by Shri Mahārāj in his householder days in Mangaon, at the bidding of Shri Datta Prabhu, who christened it as *Dvisahasri Sanhita*, since it consisted of 2000 verses. The epithet *Sanhita* signifies the holiness of the book, equating its verses to *Mantras*. In fact, Lord Dattatreya has inspired some devotees to perform *Havans* with the *Mantras* of this *Sanhita*. Shri Mahārāj also wrote a commentary on this work about ten years later at *Dwaraka* during his 9th *Chaturmaas*. This is the first authentic commentary on the gospel of Gurucharitra and elucidates the doctrine and practices of Datta tradition in a comprehensive way. *Dvisahasri* and the commentary together thus form a pivotal scripture of the modern Datta tradition as revived by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj.

The other Sanskrit translation of *Shri Gurucharitra* was inspired by Shri Datta Prabhu at Brahmvarta in 1902. This is a verse-to-verse translation in simple Sanskrit. Shri Mahārāj has also composed *Churnikas* (prose synopsis) of these two translations. He has also composed a compact summary of *Gurucharitra* in Marāthi verse. In this summary, if third letters of each verse are sequentially arranged you get the 15th chapter of *Shri Bhagavad-Gītā*. Another compact Sanskrit version of *Shri Gurucharitra* was composed by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj in 300 beautiful Sanskrit verses (*Gurukāvya* alias *Trishati Gurucharitam*) exemplifying a variety of meters, similes, allegories and other literary and poetic embellishments. Apart from summarizing the holy book, these also provide a valuable text for studying Sanskrit poetry. Apart from these major compositions, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj has also composed hymns

like *Dattabhavasudhras Stotram*, *Guruchritradhyay-saransh-shloka* etc. We have listed these works here only to highlight the significance of *Shri Gurucharitra* in the life, mission and works of Shri Mahārāj. While traditionally, the original *Gurucharitra* should be read only by Brahmin men, all the Marāthi and Sanskrit versions by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj are open to men and women of all castes.

Chapter 9. Shripad Shrivallabh.

The first of the two incarnations in this Kali Age, was Shripad Shrivallabh, born in Peethāpuram, a town near the seacoast in Andhra Pradesh. This place is one of the 108 ancient Peethas (seats) of Shakti and is also known as Vishnupādagayā. There lived in Peethāpuram towards the end of the 12th century, a learned and religious Vedic Brahmin called Āpala-Laxminrisinha-Rājā (referred to in Gurucharitra as Āpalarājā and in Dvisahasri as Rājā) with his devoted and virtuous wife Sumati. Both were greatly devoted to Shri Dattātreya. Though prosperous and happy the couple had one misery; of the two sons they had, one was a cripple and another blind. Considering this to be the result of the past Karma, the couple continued to render their religious services with forbearance and courage. Pleased by their diligent devotion, Lord Dattātreya once decided to test the virtue and discrimination of Sumati. He appeared at their door in the form of a mendicant, asking for food on Shrāddha³¹ day. Norms of Shrāddha require that the food should not be served to anybody before the Shrāddhiya Brahmins are fed. Thus Sumati was faced with a dilemma, since offering food to any mendicant coming at noon is also obligatory for the householder. With her mind purified by sincere and diligent religious conduct, Sumati's judgment was so refined that she had no hesitation in serving the food to the Lord in disguise. Dattātreya, pleased with the discernment of Sumati, revealed Himself to her. Addressing her as "mother" in the fashion of a Sanyasi, the Lord offered her a wish. Sumati asked him to substantiate his address and bless her with a son who will be

³¹ The ritual typically performed on the death anniversary of father, mother etc., in which food is offered to ancestors through Brahmins. It literally means a deed of faith.

"worshiped like you." The Lord granted the wish with a caution that she should never oppose her son's wish and disappeared.

Since there is none other like Lord Dattātreya, He Himself incarnated as the son of Apalaraja and Sumati on the day of Ganesh Chaturthi (1298 AD³²). He was named Shripāda as his feet bore the auspicious marks of Lord Vishnu, *Vajra* (the bolt of Indra), *Ankush* (a hook-shaped goad), *Dhwaja* (flag) and Lotus. He was educated by his father and assimilated the knowledge of Vedas and Shastras at an early age. His eminence as a learned Shastri spread far and wide. Apalaraja started looking for a suitable bride for Shripad, but the latter diverted him saying, "My bride is *Vairagya Shri* (renunciation)", signifying his intention to renounce worldly life. Hence the epithet *Shrivallabh* came to be applied after his name. His mother remonstrated with him that he being the only able son, it was incumbent upon him to stay at home and look after his parents. At this point Shripad revealed to her the form she had earlier been the privy to, reminding her of the caution not to counter his wish. This vision uplifted his parents making them indifferent to the material world. He called his disabled brothers and placing his hand on their heads, made them instantly whole and learned. Asking them to serve their parents like deities in accordance with the householder's code. After pledging his parents to appear to them whenever they wished, he set off on his pilgrimage.

Not too much is known about the long life of Shripad Shrivallabh. We know that he travelled north to *Badarikashram* and other holy places. Returning to South he spent a year in *Gokarna Kshetra* on the west coast and then settled down in

³² Though the date of Shripad's birth is recorded in Gurucharitra, the year till recently was surmised from his date of disappearance, which can be ascertained from the astronomic specifications in Gurucharitra. Many earlier historians surmise that he may have been short-lived, dating his life from 1345 to 1350.

Kurugaddi, a small island in River Krishna. The rocks on eastern border of the island bear to this date the imprints of his feet. A single imprint of his body, as if prostrating, is also seen.³³

Two important events at Kurugaddi link this Incarnation with the second one. A learned Brahmin in the nearby village died young leaving behind his widow and a retarded son. Exasperated at the treatment by the community, the pair decided to commit suicide by drowning themselves in the River Krishna. There they saw Shripad and went to seek his blessings. He dissuaded the widow from this terrible act. "If only I had an able son like you!" she said. Shripad advised her to observe the Pradosh fast to propitiate Lord Shiva, recounting a story from the Puran. She felt reassured and agreed to observe the fast but asked how could she to survive with this worthless son? Shripad placed his auspicious hand upon the boy's head making him instantly wise and capable. The widow lived happily, observing the *Pradosha* fast and worshiping Shripad as Shiva on each *Pradosha* day. This set the stage for reincarnation to fulfil the promise made to the widow.

During the stay of Shripad Shrivallabh in Kurugaddi, a washer man used to visit him regularly, offering his salutations and service. One day he saw a king passing through the river with his paraphernalia. Impressed by his affluence and material pleasures, the washer man yearned for the same. Divining his desire, Shripad asked him whether he wanted to be king. Recovering from the initial shock the washer man conceded that his mind did waver. "One should satisfy one's desires, so they don't interfere with his spiritual progress." replied Shripad, "You will be reborn as an emperor". The old washer man died soon after and was reborn as the king of Bidar (Karnataka).

Even after Shripad Guru disappeared, his devotees continue to "see" or otherwise experience him and receive his grace in the form of relief from miseries and fulfilment of wishes, Gurucharitra narrates the story of one Brahmin devotee Vallabhes merchant by vocation. Once, commencing his tour, he pledged to feed 1000 Brahmins at Kurugaddi to propitiate Shripad Shrivallabh if his tour is especially profitable. Having made profit far beyond his high expectations, he was on his way to Kurugaddi with sufficient money to fulfil his vow, when some thugs, posing as pilgrims joined him and killed him for the money. Suddenly, a bearded Sadhu, wearing ashes and Rudraksha and wielding a spear appeared from nowhere and killed the thugs. One of them pleaded for mercy protesting his innocence. Knowing him to be so, the Sadhu spared him and giving him some ashes, asked him to attach the severed head of the Brahmin to his neck, and apply ashes to it. Even as he followed the instructions, the Sadhu dematerialized and Vallabhes got up as if from sleep. He then proceeded to Kurugaddi to fulfil his vow. "Even today," Gurucharitra assures, "those who worship Shripad with pure heart, either in Kurugaddi or elsewhere, will receive His grace and be rewarded with happiness in both worlds."

³³ Only recently a detailed life of Shripad Shrivallabh in 51 chapters in Telugu has been recovered from the descendents of the author, but not yet published. (Pathak M.S. (2005) Shri Vasudeva Nivas April 24, 2005, Pune).

Chapter 10. Shri Nrisinha Saraswati.

The Brahmin widow who was blessed by Shripāda Guru was reborn in a Brahmin family as Ambā in Karanjā in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Her marriage was arranged by her father at an early age as per the prevailing custom to one Mādhava in the same town. The couple was devoted to Shiva and observed *Pradosha* fast. In due course they had a son who uttered “Om” at birth instead of crying (1378 AD). This was a sensation in the town and people crowded in front of Mādhava’s house, though the parents did not expose the baby, who was christened Narahari. Narahari was a sweet child and grew up well. Ambā, sensing her milk was not adequate for the baby, requested her husband to look for a goat or a foster mother. The baby in her lap, as if responding to this, touched the breasts of mother which started suddenly overflowing with milk!

As the baby boy grew up to be around 4 years and was not still speaking, the parents got worried and started trying all remedies, consulting physicians, astrologers etc. In spite of these the child would not speak. However when spoken to, the child responded with “Om”. This puzzled everyone. Time passed swiftly. Narahari was 8 years old and still not saying a word other than “Om”. The father was in a quandary as to whether Narahari’s *Maunjibandhan* (thread ceremony) should be performed or not. Once the worried father said to him, “Why are you not speaking?” To this, the son replied in gestures that he would speak after Maunji. Sensing the disbelief of his father Narahari went inside the house and brought out an iron rod, which turned into gold even as Madhav and Ambā were watching.

Encouraged by this omen, Madhav made arrangements for the *Maunji*. Narahari went through the ritual without a word

and duly received the initiation of *Gāyatri Mantra*. After that the *Batu* (the boy to be initiated) is instructed to be a mendicant by his mother from whom he has to receive the first three *Bhikshās*. When Narahari approached his mother for the first *Bhikshā*, he chanted the first Mantra of *Rig-Veda*, with clear diction and perfect intonations. Even as the stunned crowd was watching he solicited the second *Bhikshā* accompanied by the chant of *Yajurveda*, and the third by Samaveda, thus revealing his perfect knowledge of the Vedas and scriptures.

Even as the parents were containing their overwhelming joy, he begged their permission to leave on a pilgrimage as mendicant, as instructed by his mother. Ambā was shocked. She had given the commands just a part of the ceremonial ritual. She protested and pleaded with him, but to no avail. Narahari then recalled the memory of her past life and revealed himself as Shripāda Shrivallabh. Narahari instructed her about the ephemeral nature of human life, the primary goal of which was Self-realization. He further assured her that they would have four more sons and a daughter. Imparting divine knowledge to the parents, he made them acquiesce in the eventual departure of their only eight year old son! However Ambā prevailed upon her son to stay on till the birth of at least one more son. Accordingly he stayed at Karanjā for one year dispensing the treasure of knowledge to the seekers who thronged from far and near. At the end of one year, his mother delivered twins. Three months later, he took leave of his parents, promising to visit them after 30 years. He further assured them to appear whenever they wished to see him. He told them that they would have a long and happy life culminating in their liberation at Kāshi.

Renunciation: - After leaving Karanjā, the young boy proceeded to Kashi. Camping near *Manikarnika*, commenced his austerities, bathing three times and practicing higher forms of Yoga, spending most of his time in *Samadhi*, sitting in

Padmasan (lotus position) with *Khechari Mudra*³⁴. Impressed by his intense and advanced Sadhana, the Sannyasins of Kashi approached him and requested him to revive the Sannyāsa Ashram by joining it. Acceding to their request Narahari received his initiation from the senior-most Sannyasin in Kashi Shri Krishna Saraswati. The lineage extends through Vidyāranya Swāmi, Adi Shankarāchārya, Vasishtha, Brahma, Vishnu and Shankara. He was given the name of Shri Nrisinh Saraswati. After entering the Sanyasa order he started spreading the age-old science of Self-realization all over India.

Back to Birthplace: - Travelling through the Northern and Eastern India, initiating hundreds of disciples, he returned to Karanja at around forty years of age, to fulfil his promise to his parents. He received a very warm and overwhelming welcome from the residents of Karanja. He offered his salutations to mother and was worshiped by his father³⁵. He assumed multiple forms accepting worship from many devotees simultaneously. After spending a few weeks at Karanjā, he proceeded southwards along the banks of Godavari. At Bāsar Brahmeshwar, he noticed a Brahmin about to commit suicide and brought him over through his disciples. When asked the reason for the desperate act, the Brahmin said that he was suffering from excruciating pain in abdomen whenever he eats even a small portion of food. Unable to endure the pain, he wanted to end his life. At the same time as Shri Guru was assuring him of cure, Sāyandeva³⁶, an officer of the king,

³⁴ An advanced *Yogic* procedure in which tongue, elongated by practice and released from its attachment at base, is upturned and passed into nasopharynx to reach *Ajnyā chakra*, enabling the Yogi to raise his *Prana* to *Sahasrār chakra*.

³⁵ A Sanyasi, who belongs to the highest Ashram in Vedic hierarchy, is not supposed offer obeisance to anyone, but is enjoined by scriptures to offer one to mother. All others, including father are required to offer worship to a Sanyasi.

³⁶ Great grandfather of the author of Gurucharitra.

happened to approach Shri Guru to pay his respects. Shri Guru asked Sāyandeva to offer sumptuous feast to the Brahmin. When Sāyandeva expressed his fear that this may result in the Brahmin's death, Shri Guru reassured that nothing untoward would happen since he had a cure. Sāyandeva then invited Shri Guru and his disciples also for the meal. The Brahmin found himself cured and had a good meal. He lost all interest in worldly life and with Shri Guru's blessings went away happily. Sāyandeva apprised Shri Guru of the summons received from his Moslem superior who intended to kill him. Shri Guru reassured him and asked to go fearlessly and meet the tyrant. When as predicted by Shri Guru Sayandev returned safely, he asked permission to accompany him as disciple. Shri Guru told him to continue the King's service and join him at Ganagapur after retirement.

Sending away all the accompanying disciples, Shri Guru stayed alone in Parali Vaidynath for about a year. He then appears to have shifted to the banks of Krishna River and resided under an Audumbar tree across the temple of Bhuvaneshwari Devi at Bhilawadi village. An interesting event during this year is recorded in Gurucharitra. A dim-witted son of a learned Brahmin, frustrated at his inability to learn came to Bhilawadi to propitiate Bhuvaneshwari. Getting no response from the Goddess, he offered his tongue as sacrifice. Still receiving no sign of Devi's grace, he started to chop off his head as offering. Suddenly he lost consciousness and saw the Devi directing him to seek the grace of the monk across the Krishnā. Accordingly, he crossed the river and prostrated mutely before Shri Guru Nrisinh Saraswati Mahārāj. Shri Guru placed his blessing hand on the head of the boy, restoring his tongue and endowing him with worldly as well as esoteric knowledge. This place has now developed into a pilgrimage site known as Audumbar.

Narasobawadi:- Shri Guru then proceeded along the banks of the Krishnā River to its confluence with Panchanadi

(five rivers viz. *Saraswati*, *Shivā*, *Bhadra*, *Kumbhi* and *Bhogawati*), where he settled down opposite to the Amareshwar temple (Aurawad), in an uninhabited forest, under an Audumbar tree. He spent twelve years there, performing austerities, hardly ever leaving his seat even for soliciting food. Some of the Brahmins in Aurawad, wondering how this Sanyasi survived without food, kept a watch on him. However as the midday hour approached they were seized by an uncanny fear and ran away to home. Per chance, a farmer in the nearby field saw Shri Guru leaving his seat and approaching the river, which opened up to give him passage. Enthralled and drawn by the miraculous sight, he followed Shri Guru through. He saw Shri Guru being welcomed by the 64 celestial ladies (*Yoginis*), leading him to a throne, where they offered him worship and food. Even as the farmer was watching with rapt attention, Shri Guru, after a heavenly repast returned to where he was standing. "Who are you?" enquired Shri Guru, to which he replied "I am but a farmer called Gangānuja. I saw you going through river and followed!" He fell on the feet of Shri Guru begging his pardon for the intrusion. Shri Guru reassured him and warned not to reveal this episode to anyone till Shri Guru had left the place.

On one of the rare occasions when Shri Guru did go to Aurawad for Bhiksha to a poor Brahmins place, the lady of the house served him some cooked bean-pods from a plant in the courtyard, for want of any other food. On his way out after the meal, Shri Guru uprooted the bean plant which was a major source of food for the poor family, upsetting the lady. As the Brahmin, pacifying his irate wife, proceeded to dig up the roots of the plant, he struck a gold treasure! Realizing this to be Shri Guru's grace, the couple went to the confluence to worship Shri Guru and express their gratitude. They too, were warned by Shri Guru to keep the whole episode secret.

When Shri Guru prepared to leave Wadi at the end of twelve years, the 64 Yoginis remonstrated. He promised them

that though his physical form would leave, he in His subtle form would for ever dwell at this sacred confluence in their company and the site would grow into a populated holy place where crowds would flock to seek relief and fulfilment of their desires. He installed the stone foot-prints (Padukas) and asked an old Brahmin Bhairambhat to offer regular service to them. When the latter pointed out that he had no progeny and there would be no one to carry out the worship after him, Shri Guru blessed him with the plentiful fruition of their family tree just like the Audumbar tree standing there. The place is a living witness to the verity of Shri Guru's words and bustles with thousands of devotees seeking and finding divine succour.

As an illustration, Gurucharitra narrates the story of a Brahmani from the nearby village, Shirol, whose offspring did not survive. When she sought the advice of local Brahmins, they attributed the malady to the evil spirit of the Brahmin whom she owed some money in her previous life and advised her to pay the amount to a Brahmin of his *Gotra*. and perform his last rites. Unable to procure the money, the lady offered penance to the Padukas as advised by the priests. She was relieved of the affliction and was blessed with twin sons.

On the eve of his thread ceremony, the elder son died. Mad with grief the lady refused to give him up for cremation. After a whole day passed, with nobody taking food in the village, a monk came there and asked the grieving mother to carry the son's body to the pāduka temple. Following this advise she went to the temple and in desperation repeatedly hit her head on the Padukas, bathing them with blood and fell asleep. Shri Guru appeared to her in the dream and assured that he had "reinstalled" the life force in her son's body. On waking up she found her son living and hungry. She called her husband and they rejoiced and prayed Shri Guru whose presence is thus experienced by all true devotees.

Ganagāpur: - Shri Guru then proceeded to Ganagapur and spent the rest of his known life there. Initially he stayed at the Sangam³⁷, visiting the town only for Bhiksha (food) which he preferred to take only from a virtuous Brahmin with good religious conduct, even if poor. Once, a Brahmani requested Shri Guru to wait till her husband returned home with food. Noticing a buffalo in her courtyard, Shri Guru suggested that he be served its milk for Bhiksha. Brahmani explained to him that the buffalo was barren. Ordered by Shri Guru, she was forced to milk the buffalo and greatly and pleasantly surprised to get copious milk, part of which, after warming, she served to Shri Guru.

The news of the barren buffalo turning productive spread through the town and the king (read chief) of the town went to Shri Guru and requested him to come and stay in Ganagapur. Shri Guru accepted the chief's invitation and came to the town ceremoniously, riding a palanquin and was installed in a monastery. When a Sanyasi, Trivikram Bhārati of the nearby village, Kumasi, came to know of this, he considered this conduct violative of Sannyasin's code and deplorable. Divining Trivikram's mental abhorrence, Shri Guru went to Kumasi with all paraphernalia and revealed his Vishwarupa (Universal Figure). A repentant Trivikram became the disciple of Shri Guru.

Two learned Brahmins went to the Moslem king of Vaidurya Nagari (Vijapur? Bidar?) and proclaiming themselves accomplished in all four Vedas challenged him to produce the best of the Brahmins in his kingdom for a contest. Since all wise Brahmins considered such an arrogant contest to be sinful, none came forward and the duo was proclaimed as "the kings of Brahmins". They then obtained the permission of the Moslem king to go round the country challenging all erudite Brahmins to establish their supremacy. On their way, coming to know of the

renown of Trivikram as a scholar, they confronted him. In spite of his reluctance, they insisted that he either enter into a contest or give a written letter of defeat. Trivikram took the two Brahmin contenders to Shri Guru in Ganagapur. When the pair would not heed Shri Guru's advice to refrain, He called a passing Chāndāla (lowest caste) and asked him his name, caste, job etc. He then asked his disciples to draw seven lines between him and the Chāndāla and asked him to cross the lines one by one, repeating the questions after each crossing. To everyone's surprise, his answers changed at each line. He claimed to belong to a higher caste every time. At the 7th line, he professed to be a learned Brahmin teacher. Shri Guru instructed certain disciples to smear holy ash all over his body and also place some on his tongue. Then ordered the transformed Chāndāla to debate and vanquish the Brahmins. The Brahmins surprised, shocked and terrified and developed excruciating pain in the chest. They fell at the feet of Shri Guru, begging for forgiveness. Shri Guru told them that since they had offended so many Brahmins with their arrogance and even annoyed the Sanyasi, they would become Brahmarākshasa (ghost of a Brahmin) though only for a period of twelve years in view of their repentance.

After the departure of Brahmins, the Chāndāla-turned-Brahmin was reluctant to go back to his family and requested Shri Guru to assimilate him into the Brahmin community. Even as Shri Guru was explaining the impracticality of his wish, his wife and children came seeking him. He refused to own them asking them to go away. Shri Guru then got the Chāndāla bathed by an avaricious Brahmin merchant, which resulted in his losing his memory of past lives and thus restoring him to his family.

On Trivikram's query as to why such a learned Brahmin descended to a low birth of Chāndāla, Shri Guru replied that the Brahmin had abandoned his parents, which cursed his fall; Shri Guru further narrated to Trivikram the various sinful acts that cause such descent.

³⁷ Confluence of Bhima River, a tributary of Krishna, with Amaraja, a few miles from Ganagapur.

Trivikram was also curious as to how the Chāndāla was restored by a simple bath. Shri Guru explained to him that the enlightening of the Chāndāla was due to the holy ashes applied all over his body. The bath removed the holy ashes and thereby knowledge mediated through these. Shri Guru then elucidated the value of holy ashes (*Bhasma*), venerated even by Lord Shankara, their spiritual significance and the procedure of their preparation and application, exemplifying with Puranic stories.

The young son of one Gopināth of Mahur, being afflicted with consumption, was brought by his wife Savitri, to Ganagapur in the hope of recovery by the grace of Shri Guru. However just as they entered the town, the husband passed away. The wife attempted to stab herself but was prevented by accompanying persons. Even as she was grieving, a Sadhu arrived on the scene and comforted her. He preached her about the duties of a wife while the husband is living and after his death. He explained to her that she could choose either to accompany her husband as *Sati* or to stay back and follow the widow's code. She opted to perform Sati. Prior to that, as per the advice of the Sadhu, she visited Shri Guru. Shri Guru blessed her with a long and happy married life with eight sons. Learning that she is on the way to funeral pyre, Shri Guru got the body of her husband in his presence and placed some Tirth (holy water) in his mouth. The husband got up as if waking from sleep and people praised the glory of Shri Guru.

Next day Sāvītri enquired of Shri Guru regarding the Sadhu who had comforted her and given her Rudraksha beads³⁸ and holy ashes to be worn before cremation. Shri Guru told her that told her that it was He himself in disguise. He then proceeded to elucidate the sanctity of Rudraksha exemplifying it with Puranic episode of a prostitute devotee of Shiva who used to adorn her pets, a cock and a monkey, with Rudraksha beads; this caused their rebirth as princes. He also explained to Sāvītri

the potency of the Rudra chapter of Yajurveda which was chanted to sanctify the Tirth which resuscitated her husband. Sāvītri sought a Mantra from Shri Guru. However Shri Guru declined, citing the Puranic story of Shukrāchārya, the high priest of Daityas; his Sanjivani (resurrection) Mantra lost potency because he imparted the same to his daughter Devayāni. Shri Guru instructed Sāvītri to observe the vow of Monday fast, citing the example of Seemantini who had regained her husband lost in river waters, through the merit of this vow.

There lived in Gānagapur a Brahmin practicing strict religious conduct. He never accepted meals offered by the many devotees coming to Ganagapur to fulfil vows to feed Brahmins. His wife, tired of the coarse food at home, was very much frustrated as no one invited her alone. Once she came to Shri Guru complaining about her husband's harshness and requested him to instruct her husband to accept the recent invitation and relieve her misery. Shri Guru called the Brahmin and asked him to accept the meal. Reluctantly the Brahmin obeyed. As the couple was eating their lunch, the lady noticed that they were being served food polluted by the bites of dogs and pigs. She told her husband and they left the meal and came to Shri Guru recounting their experience. Shri Guru advised her always to obey her husband in future. The Brahmin asked Shri Guru whose food ought to be accepted and whose not. Shri Guru elaborated this to him quoting the scriptures, On the Brahmin's further inquiry, Shri Guru instructed him about a Brahmin's daily religious conduct in detail as laid down in the scriptures.

Next follows a story of a poor, simple Brahmin who came to Ganagapur to offer food to Shri Guru, in fulfilment of a vow, bringing with him provisions for three persons only. Seeing the Math crowded with hundreds of devotees, he could not summon courage to ask Shri Guru. As months passed by, he became the butt of everyone's joke. Noticing this Shri Guru called him one day and asked him to cook the meal. The simple

³⁸ A berry considered holy and used in rosaries.

Brahmin obeyed and the food for three was ready in a short while. On learning this, Shri Guru asked him to invite all devotees and all the Brahmins in the town with their families. Food, meant for three, was covered with Shri Guru's robe and served from under it. It sufficed to feed the entire population of Ganagapur to their heart's content and the left-over were flown into the river for fishes.

Ganga, wife of Somanāth, a sixty year old lady used to worship Shri Guru every day. Once He asked her what her desire was. She expressed the wish to have progeny, at least in the next birth since she was past childbearing age. Shri Guru assured her that she would have children in this very birth if she worshiped the *Ashwattha* (holy fig-tree) at the Sangam. She expressed her scepticism since she had already worshiped fig-tree all her life without any result. Shri Guru proceeded to explain the basis and practice of the worship. She then performed it once more on Shri Guru's command and was blessed with a daughter and a son.

A Brahmin with *kushtha* (skin disease white discoloration), came to Shri Guru to seek cure. Shri Guru gave him a dry stick of Audumbar wood and asked him to worship and tend it, assuring him that as soon as it sprouted, his skin would become healthy. The Brahmin carried out the instructions with implicit faith accompanied with fast, unmoved by the contrary advise of people. After a week of this penance, Shri Guru learning of his plight went to the Brahmin and sprinkled a little water from his *Kamandalu* over the piece of wood, and all of a sudden, tender Audumbar leaves sprouted forth attended by instant restoration of the colour of Brahmin. His heart full of gratitude and joy, the Brahmin rendered a hymn in the praise of Shri Guru.

The next three chapters describe the visit of Sāyandeva, who had now retired from the Moslem King's service. He insisted on staying in Shri Guru's service, undeterred by Shri Guru's caution that it would be very arduous. Once when at

Sangam, Shri Guru caused untimely heavy rain storm stranding the two, even as they were wet and shivering with cold. Shri Guru asked Sayandev to fetch some fire from the town, some 5 kilometres away. He also told Sayandev not to look on either side on his way. Braving the rain and darkness, Sayandev trekked through the jungle in the middle of night and fetched the fire in a covered vessel. On his way back he could not resist looking to one side. He was horrified to see a large hooded snake was after him. Even as he turned to the other side another similar snake came to his sight. He started running frightfully till he reached the Sangam and saw Shri Guru. The two snakes quickly bowed their hoods to Shri Guru and left. Shri Guru asked Sāyandeva as to why he looked so frightened and explained that the snakes were sent for his protection. Thus having demonstrated the arduous nature of service to Shri Guru, Shri Guru gave Sāyandeva the example of Visvakarma grandson of Brahmadev, who could procure miraculous gifts to his Guru and his family as *Dakshina*, after winning the grace of Lord Shankara, by performing the onerous Kāshi pilgrimage. Even as Shri Guru was describing the Kāshi pilgrimage, Sāyandeva could see it as if he were there in person. Sāyandeva was asked to go to his home and bring his family who were blessed by Shri Guru. Sayandev spent the rest of his life serving the lotus feet of Shri Guru.

A humble weaver in Ganagapur was devoted to Shri Guru so much that he refused to accompany his brethren on the Shivratri pilgrimage to Shri Shailya. Learning this Shri Guru carried him to Shri Shailya instantaneously and brought him back. His brethren did not believe his story that Shri Guru brought him that same morning and thought he had secretly followed them. The townspeople also thought that he was lying. When the pilgrims returned after two weeks, everyone was convinced of the amazing truth.

One Nandi, Yajurvedi Brahmin, being afflicted by depigmentation of skin (श्वेतकुष्ठ), performed penance at Tuljapur seeking relief. After three years of penance, the Devi (Tulaja Bhavani) instructed him to go Chandalā Devi. After a penance of another seven months she directed him to Shri Guru in Gānagapur. It upset him that a goddess should refer him to a mere human monk and he refused to comply, persisting in his penance to Chandalā Devi. She asked her priests to throw Nandi out of her temple. Reluctantly, after offering concluding worship to Devi, he came to Ganagapur. Shri Guru directed Somanath (Ganga's husband *vide supra*) to take Nandi to Sangam and bathe him, discard his clothes and give him new clothes. Even as Nandi's old clothes were thrown, his skin became clear and the soil where the clothes were thrown turned white. When Nandi was brought back to Shri Guru he asked him to check his skin thoroughly. To his consternation there was a patch of vitiligo in his groin. He begged Shri Guru to rid him of the same. Shri Guru told him that this was the result of his lack of faith since he thought of Shri Guru as a mere human being. As a remedy he was asked to compose a hymn praising Shri Guru as Paramatma (Supreme Being). Nandi expressed his inability since he could not even write, leave alone compose an evocative poetry. Shri Guru put some holy ashes on Nandi's tongue, thus enabling him to compose and sing the hymn that cleansed his skin completely. Shri Guru honoured Nandi as a great poet, bestowing the epithet of *Kavishwar* upon him.

Compositions of Nandi became popular and came to the notice of another poet, Narahari, in nearby Kalleshwar. Narahari, a devotee of Kalleshwar temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, used to daily compose five new verses dedicated to Kalleshwar. He considered Nandi's poetry praising a mortal as base. One day, when Shri Guru was in Kalleshwar, Narahari, fell asleep during his worship of Kalleshwar and saw Shri Guru in place of the Lingam. In the dream itself, he composed five fresh hymns

eulogizing Shri Guru. Waking up later and realizing the unity of Shri Guru and Kalleshwar, surrendered to Shri Guru begging to accept himself as a disciple. Narahari was finally accepted by Shri Guru as disciple and honoured as *Kavishwar*.

One day, seven disciples of Shri Guru came inviting him for Diwali festival, from different places outside Ganagapur. Even as they started squabbling amongst themselves, Shri Guru called them separately and assured each of them solemnly of his presence at the festival. He celebrated that Diwali at all their places, assuming seven forms, without leaving Ganagapur.

A farmer, Parvateshwar by name, whose land was on the path to Sangam, used to clear it of stones, thorns etc. and used to prostrate before Shri guru every day. One day Shri Guru asked him his wish. He prayed if Shri Guru would only cast his sight on his farm nearby, he would get a bumper harvest. Shri Guru went to the farm and saw the immature crop of millet. He told the farmer, if he had faith in Shri Guru, he should reap the crop before his return. The farmer obtained his landlord's written clearance to reap the crop promising to pay double the regular rental. Hiring some help he started to reap the immature millet. His wife learning this came running to the farm and tried to stop him. He drove her off the farm and finished his work waiting for Shri Guru. The latter, on seeing this exclaimed, "You have indeed done what I said lightly! What will you eat now?" The farmer replied, "Verily, you are my provider and you are my succour." Saying, "As your faith, so will be the fruit!" Shri Guru went to Math. The farmer went on with life as usual, calmly listening to the taunts and laments of his wife and folk. Eventually, there was a severe drought that year and all the crops in the area failed. However untimely rains revived the farmer's crop and the yield was a hundredfold. The farmer's faith in Shri Guru was thus vindicated.

Once Shri Guru called everyone in Gānagapur and invited them to accompany him on a pilgrimage. When people started making

preparations he stopped them saying, “We are not going far. The Tirthas (Holy places of pilgrimage.)

are here only.” He then took them to Sangam and showed eight holy Tirthas from there, equivalent to Kāshi, Gaya, Dwārakā, Gokarna etc., along the Bhima River, towards Ganagapur. When they reached Pāpanāshini Tirth, Shri Guru’s sister Ratnābāi arrived, seeking relief from vitiligo (? leprosy). She was advised to bathe in the Tirth for three days. Cured of the skin disease after she thus bathed, she spent her remaining life there.

The next chapter describes the arrival of the Moslem king of Bidar seeking relief from the intractable ulcer on his thigh. The ulcer just disappeared at the sight of Shri Guru and the king recalled his past life in which he served Shripad Shrivallabh as the washer-man. Recognizing Shri Guru as his former master’s incarnation, he became a disciple and took him to his palace in Bidar and after a public welcome and worship dedicated his kingdom to Shri Guru who passed it on to the king’s eldest son and asked the king to join him at Shri Shailya.

In the concluding chapter Shri Guru takes leave of his devotees in Ganagapur, assuring them that he is leaving Ganagapur only in form. He promises that he will always be in the Matha and answer their sincere prayers. Those with pure heart would see him as before. He then proceeded to Shri Shailya with four chosen disciples who prepared a seat of flowers as per his instructions. Riding on the floral seat he crossed Pātālagangā, once again assuring the disciples that he always dwelt in their hearts and asked them to expect flowers as a sign of His grace. Accordingly, four flowers of *Sevanti* (Marigold) came floating across the river and were received by the four disciples including Sāyndeve and Siddha Saraswati who narrated Gurucharitra to Saraswati Gangādhara

Chapter 11.

Some Interesting Parallels.

. We have earlier seen that Shri Swāmi Mahārāja had set for his life the seemingly impossible model of the ancient Vedic way of life as documented in Gurucharitra. Thus it is no coincidence that we witness the exemplification of Gurucharitra in his life. As if in divine recognition of his success in this respect, many miracles recorded in Shri Gurucharitra were replicated in his own dedicated life. Let us briefly review some of these here.

Inborn Knowledge: - Both Shripad Vallabh and Nrisinha Saraswati were born with knowledge. They displayed extensive knowledge of the Vedas, Shastras Puranas etc without any formal education. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj did get some formal education in the traditional system, mostly in Mangaon and its environs, which included rudimentary Sanskrit. He received practically no higher education, nor had any access to any library. Yet he composed mature, evocative, poetic and profound Sanskrit rendition of Gurucharitra at the age of 24 years. Even after leaving Mangaon, he was an itinerant all his life, hardly ever visiting a city or a library, observing strict austerities, braving desert heat and Himalayan cold, fighting illnesses without medication, missing meals for days or even weeks! He displayed throughout his life extensive and thorough knowledge of all branches of traditional Indian sciences and many a learned pundits sought his guidance in their respective faculties. His discourses were erudite and illuminating. He has left a formidable body of Sanskrit and Marāthi works imbued with traditional wisdom, reflecting his thorough knowledge of almost all faculties, ranging from the Vedas, Shastras, Puranas, grammar, literature, *Ayurveda*, astronomy, astrology. One cannot but marvel at the range and depth of his knowledge, for which there is no logical explanation.

Bestowal of Knowledge: - The first incarnation of Lord Dattatreya, Shripad Vallabh while in Kurugaddi dissuaded a Brahmin widow and her son from suicide and advised her to worship Lord Shiva on Pradosh days to be blessed with a son revered by all, like Shripad himself. When the widow piteously asked him as to how to live the remaining life with her dim-witted son, Shripad placed his hand on the boy's head and the son suddenly became a learned Brahmin. There are two similar incidents in the life of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. One **Gopal Rajadhyaksha** of Ratnāgiri came to Shri Mahārāj in Brahmavart (1902). Once he prayed to Shri Mahārāj to fulfil his earnest wish to render *Kirtan*³⁹, though he had no training in music or in oration. Shri Mahārāj not only blessed him, but composed a *Kirtan* and also gave necessary instructions. Rajadhyaksha surprised everybody by rendering a brilliant performance the very first time. After further training and guidance from Shri Mahārāj, he became an accomplished *Kirtanakār* and composer.

Restoration of Speech: - We have seen how Shri Nrisinh Saraswati, during his brief stay at Audumbar restored the amputated tongue of a Brahmin youth. During his Havanur *Chaturmaas* (1910), young students were reciting Puranic verses during a feast, as is the custom in religious meals. Noticing a deaf-and-dumb boy sullenly eating his food, Shri Mahārāj said to him, "Would you also not recite a verse? Go on, recite!" To everybody's consternation, the boy started reciting a verse! In 1901, when Shri Mahārāj was staying at Mahatpur, one young Kirtanakar Sakhārām Kānadkar came seeking his grace. The poor youth, having a mellow voice, was making his livelihood by performing *Kirtans*. His enemy gave him a poison that vitiated his voice. He begged Shri Mahārāj to help him out. Shri Mahārāj gave him a *Mantra*, which he wrote on Sakhārām's

tongue with an herbal juice, and asked him to recite the same during the forthcoming solar eclipse. Sakhārām diligently carried out the instructions of Shri Mahārāj with faith and devotion. As a result his voice regained its melody and he came to be known as *Kirtanāchārya* Kānadkar.

Miraculous Cures: - There are at least three examples of the cure of *Kushtha* in Gurucharitra. These could be leprosy or vitiligo. One **Vasudeva Marathe** was afflicted by leprosy which spread all over his body. He even lost a few fingers. Having exhausted all medical treatments, he finally came to Shri Mahārāj. One day while in Narasobawadi, Shri Mahārāj advised him to bathe at the Krishna-Panchaganga confluence, rubbing the sand therefore all over his body. After following this advice, Marathe's skin became healthy. About six months later, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj cast his graceful sight on him and his fingers were restored. The doctors attending him were astonished with his recovery.

Shri Nrisinh Saraswati is credited with having miraculously cured a non-healing ulcer of the Moslem Emperor of Bidar, by merely casting a rejuvenating glance at him. One surgeon **Dr. Vishwanath Tātake** of Guna Camp was a devotee of Shri Mahārāj. Once he developed a bone lesion (? tumour) which resisted all treatment. Finally he sought the grace of Shri Mahārāj who gave him a *Mantra* to recite, some medication and also advised a poultice. This resulted in Dr. Tātake's complete cure. This converted the non-believing doctor to a deeply religious person.

Augmentation of Food: - The story of Vaijanath narrated earlier is reminiscent of the story of Bhāskar Brahmin in Gurucharitra who prepared food for three and Shri Guru made it sufficient to feed all 4000 residents of Ganagapur.

Assumption of Multiple Forms : - Like Shri Guru, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj has appeared simultaneously in multiple forms to several people. During his second visit to Wadi as a monk,

³⁹ Musical discourse based on episodes from *Purāna* or the lives of saints.

Shri Swāmi Mahārāj went into a trance two days before Gurudwadashi. He practically spent the entire day in that state in his room on the first floor in Brahmanand monastery. However around noon, he appeared to a lady waiting to serve him food, accompanied by some devotees. After obtaining the food, he was seen going in the direction of monastery and then suddenly disappear. At about the same time, he was seen by some devotees at the gate of Wadi and giving *Prasad*. In the evening, when Shri Mahārāj waking from his trance proceeded to the river for evening service, Shri Gāndā Buwā accompanying him, enquired about these incidents. Shri Mahārāj expressed complete ignorance, protesting that he was all day sitting in trance “right in front of you!”

Resurrection: - Finally the greatest of the miracles, the resurrection from death! In Gurucharitra, there are three incidents of bringing back the dead to life. Shripad Vallabh revived his devotee killed by thieves. Shri Nrisinh Saraswati restored the “life-breath” of the son of his devotee after nearly 24 hours of death, in Shirol. Also, the husband of the saintly Sāvitrī was raised from the cremation stretcher. There are three similar incidences associated with Shri Swāmi Mahārāj.

During his stay at Tanjāvur (1907), one lady wrapped the body of her dead child and secretly left it near the place where Shri Mahārāj was staying. When all the visitors left, someone noticed the child and finding it dead, brought it to Mahārāj. Divining the mother’s desperation, Shri Mahārāj took pity and told the person, “No, no! The child is not dead. His negligent mother must have gone somewhere. Just rub these ashes on his body.” On rubbing the ashes, the child started crying and the mother came forward to take it. She then confessed to having resorted to this device, as she had lost two previous offspring. Shri Marathe was one of the witnesses of this incident which engendered a deep faith in Mahārāja’s divinity in his heart.

One Amabadas Kāyar of Gond (near Hingoli) performed a *Mahārudra* sacrifice under the auspices of Shri Mahārāj. One *Chaudhary* of nearby Pathri was managing the ceremony. Just as the sacrifice was near completion (*Purnahuti*), **Shamrao Chaudhary**’s daughter suddenly died. Shamrao was supposed to distribute the *Dakshina* (monetary offering) to the Brahmins. Chaudhary stayed put near the corpse of his two-year old daughter. As soon as Shri Mahārāj came to know of this mishap, he came there and sprinkled the holy water from his *Kamandalu* over the body. Suddenly the girl started breathing and the sacrifice was concluded happily.

Chapter 12. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and Lord Dattatreya.

We have reviewed briefly the history of Shri Datta tradition to set the backdrop for an attempt to understand the relationship between Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and his Lord and Master Shri Datta Prabhu. This enquiry is indeed beyond human capacity and is undertaken here, not with any hope of success but as an exercise in purification of the enquirer's heart, advancing him on the path of Self-Realization.

The wooing: - We have seen that Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was born of parents who were ardent devotees of Shri Datta Prabhu and had filled their lives with service to the Lord and their minds with loving devotion to Him. Thus Shri Swāmi Mahārāj inherited these qualities and was well advanced on the path of devotion even as a child. He started regular recitation of Shri Gurucharitra immediately after Upanayan. Since his childhood only he was drawn to Narasobawadi. This pull became stronger after his imposed marriage. We have to conclude that this attraction was mutual since the Lord did prod him with a dream to overcome his doubts about his mother's consent and even arrange for his passage, expenses and companion. Thus it was the divine will that made him go to Wadi where he was destined to meet his spiritual mentor, Shri Govind Swāmi.

Shri Datta Guru also saw to it through the medium of Shri Govind Swāmi, that the objections of the priests were overruled and Shri Mahārāj (then Shri Vasudeva Shastri) could offer bath to the Padukas. The Lord appeared to Shri Mahārāj, during the very first visit to Wadi, with the excuse to admonish him for the untimely visit to the temple! Also, in the same visit, Datta Prabhu initiated the reluctant Vasudeva Shastri to Dattopāsana (worship of Datta) in the dream. All these events

suggest that at this stage, it was the Lord wooing his devotee rather than the other way round. This culminated into the Lord inviting Himself to Mangaon for a long seven-year stay!

The Master and the Disciple: - The seven years in Mangaon, Shri Datta Prabhu closely guided Shri Mahārāj in every respect, be it daily worship, family problems, scriptural knowledge or yogic practice. During this phase, we find their relationship predominantly a Master-Disciple one.

The Lord directed every action of Vasudeva Shastri and the slightest disobedience invited harsh punishment. Examples of such disciplining are numerous. Once when Shastriji was forced by his mother to accompany her to Gokarn for pilgrimage, he was bitten by a viper on the way and felt better only when the pilgrimage was abandoned. Once he tasted a sweet at the instance of mother against the Lord's wishes. This led to Shastriji developing a stroke which was relieved only by the mother's prayer to the Lord for forgiveness and a promise not to force Shastriji to disobedience. Shastriji's father-in-law, Babaji Pant once forced Shastriji to take some medicine for a prolonged fever urging that the medicine was pure. As soon as Shastriji took the medicine, he threw up and fell unconscious. The terrified Babaji Pant confessed to have lied and prayed for the pardon of the Lord. This led to Shastriji's quick recovery; but he had to perform absolutions afterwards.

Whenever in doubt Shastriji used to pray to the Lord and he used to receive instructions either in the dream or in waking state as a spoken word. Step by step, the temple of Mangaon evolved into a pilgrimage place for the devotees of the Lord; and simultaneously Shastriji grew in spiritual stature, attaining perfection in Yoga and in Vedic knowledge even as his devotion became more and more intense and steadfast.

On occasions, the Guru Raj used to test him. Once Shastri Mahārāj had a vision of a man with a palanquin, asking Shastriji to get into it since his life on earth had come to an end.

As unperturbed Shastriji complied, the vision disappeared. On another occasion, he was forewarned during meditation of his imminent affliction by leprosy. On waking up, a hand and a foot of Shastriji were numb. This continued for four days. Shastriji accepted it as *Prārabdh*. However, he was soon cured of the malady. When he enquired about the incidence, the Lord said, “Just tested your determination!”

In seven years, Shastriji’s preparation was complete and so was his utter surrender to the Lord’s will. Thus the “guest” from Wadi returned home taking along his host.

During the year in Wadi Shastriji served his mentor Shri Govind Swāmi in the latter’s terminal illness and received important scriptural instruction. The Lord put him through a severe test after leaving Wadi in the form of premonition of death within a few days of his wife’s demise. His frustration and verbal tirade against the Lord was a sign of his deep desire for a monastic life and service to people. This had in fact been the Divine design throughout. Perhaps Datta Guru wanted to test Shastriji’s commitment. Once this was ascertained, Lord himself initiated Shastriji to Sanyasa at Gangakhed.

The Apostle: - This was another turning point in this complex relationship. From now on Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was an authorized agent, the messenger, His empowered delegate; to wit an Apostle of the Lord! Datta Prabhu controlled all the activities of Shri Mahārāj viz. his travel, itinerary, discourses, literary compositions, and the sites of Chāturmās and so on. Again, Shri Mahārāj was penalized for the slightest deviations. After the Mahatpur Chāturmās, Datta Prabhu ordered Shri Mahārāj to leave immediately for Brahmavart. Since a solar eclipse was imminent, Shri Mahārāj stayed on intending to complete the ecliptic services there. This led to his being bitten by a highly poisonous snake and in spite of almost continuous yogic Samādhi he suffered for ten days. He fully recovered only after he left Mahatpur.

On another occasion Shri Mahārāj was forced to extend his stay by a day by the local devotees who threatened fast to sink all food into the river and fast. The same day, the Lord appeared to him in dream and slapped hard in his face. The next morning, not only that side of face was swollen, but the corresponding eye was also blinded. Shri Mahārāj, recognizing this as the punishment for the disobedience, prayed, “Oh Lord! I have not defied your orders for any personal reason. I just meant to spare the Brahmins from going without food. If you still disapprove, your may blind the other eye too!” Datta Guru just smiled and Shri Mahārāj regained his eyesight.

Even while travelling, if Shri Mahārāj did not take the direction commanded by the Prabhu, there would be a loud and painful banging in his ears till he corrected the direction. Once, after the Muktyala Chaturmaas, Shri Mahārāj took a jungle path to avoid crowds and settled down at Manthankaleshvar on the bank of Godavari. Datta Guru instructed him to move on since the Chāturmās was still not due. On Shri Mahārāj protesting that there will be too much throng of people ahead and he would like to have a quiet Chāturmās in the jungle. Shri Guru again urged him not to stay in the uninhabited forest for Chāturmās. When Shri Mahārāj appeared to be adamant, Datta Prabhu suddenly appeared in the form of a European officer riding a horse and flourishing a cane and threatening to lash him if he did not move on instantly. Beholding the anger and the fierce demeanor of Datta Prabhu, Shri Mahārāj praised him in Marāthi verse, “तव कोपा वंदूं रुद्रा। तव चापा वंदूं भद्रा।” (Salutations to the rage of Rudra, salutations the arch of Ram). This pacified the Lord and Shri Mahārāj moved on.

Numerous people reformed their ways and started following the Vedic path under the influence of Shri Mahārāj. Though firm in their faith, when confronted with the criticism of family and friends, they found themselves inadequate to justify their way of life. Many such followers once requested Shri

Mahārāj to write an article to help them counter the verbal assaults of their critics. As soon as Shri Mahārāj started writing the article he developed fever. This recurred every time he resumed the said piece. Finally the Prabhu said, "You need to be permanently kept in this state (fever) to stop this wayward writing." Thus realizing that Shri Guru did not approve of it, Shri Mahārāj gave up the composition. Similarly, at the instance of some devotees, Shri Mahārāj sat down to write an article against remarriage, a burning controversy those days, he heard the Lord's words, "Put down the pen!" Shri Mahārāj stopped all writing for one year. Then he picked up a small stick and started scribbling some names of Lord on a piece of paper. Suddenly recalling the Lord's injunction, he put the stick down. At that time, Shri Guru Raj clarified to him that the injunction applied only to writing that article and thus Shri Mahārāj resumed writing.

The Protector and Provider :- Implicit in the insistence on strict obedience is the assurance of full protection and constant sustenance of the devotee. This is best exemplified by two events. When Shri Mahārāj commenced his Chāturmās at Pavani (1909 AD), thousands of devotees and disciples started arriving from all over India. As many of these areas were afflicted by the epidemic of plague, people feared the spread of the epidemic to Pavani. An incident of a dead rat falling in one of the temples created panic in Pavani. When apprised of this, Shri Mahārāj prayed to Shri Datta Prabhu, "O Lord! I have embarked on the present Chaturmās at your behest and all these children of yours have assembled here. If any of them happens to succumb, it will only tarnish your glory. Hence I am compelled to cut short the Chaturmās and move on." The Lord reassured Swāmiji that nobody would be harmed till the conclusion of the Chaturmās. Shri Mahārāj conveyed this to all soothing their fears. Eventually, Chaturmās passed off uneventfully. However, as soon as Shri Mahārāj set his foot out of Pavani, the town was assaulted by the epidemic taking a heavy toll.

Shri Mahārāj spent his last year or so at Garudeshwar. During this period also, there used to be a continuous flow of visitors with hundreds of persons camping every day. The expenses towards the arrangements of food and provisions were met from the money people used to offer Shri Mahārāj, who himself never even touched it. This money, referred to as the "Lord's treasure" was kept in a box. One Sabnis looked after these arrangements. Once Sabnis noticed that there remained only three rupees in the box, after paying for the provisions. A bit anxious, Sabnis brought this to the notice of Shri Mahārāj who only said, "Everything happens by God's will; why should we worry? Even assuming that no cash flows in, there is always plenty of water in Narmadā to drink!" After about 8-10 days Shri Mahārāj asked Sabnis to pay up a supplier. As Sabnis opened the box, he was pleasantly surprised by the sight of gold coins spread all over the box. On investigation, he found that a devout couple from Varhād had put those coins worth 3000 rupees in the box, as an offering.

The Conflicts: - We have seen how there arose situations where the Lord and His Devotee were set against each other. During the Pavani Chaturmās, the priests from Wadi came to Shri Mahārāj to seek relief from a chain of calamities that then befell them. Faced with the reluctance of Shri Mahārāj, they forced the issue at lunch, refusing to partake of the same, unless Shri Mahārāj promised to come to Wadi to help them. Shri Mahārāj, on seeking direction of Shri Guru, was told to proceed to Wadi after the Chaturmās instead of going to North. When this was conveyed to the priests from Wadi, they proceeded with their lunch. At the time of evening discourse, Shri Mahārāj was possessed by the Lord and he, flushed with anger uttered the following words, "(should we) go to Wadi to set up shop?" Thus it became apparent that the Lord was annoyed at the coercive behaviour of the priests at the lunch. When after the Chaturmās, Shri Mahārāj started his journey to Wadi, the Lord ordered him to

return. Shri Mahārāj prayed to Prabhu, “It is by your order that I promised the priests to come to Wadi. Now I must keep my word come what may! If you do not approve, this body is at your disposal. But it is not right to break a promise, especially one made to the priests!” For this defiance on part of Shri Mahārāj he was afflicted with rheumatism making it painful even to stand up or sit down. When in spite of this suffering Shri Mahārāj continued his journey for about 25-30 km in the direction of Wadi, he started passing blood in stools. Braving all these odds, Shri Mahārāj went to Wadi to fulfil his promise! There is no record of the Lord’s reaction, but no doubt he must have been very proud of his disciple.

One more point of contention between Shri Mahārāj and the Prabhu was about visiting Kashmir. On several occasions Shri Mahārāj ignored the Lord’s directions to proceed to Kashmir. Once when the Lord was insistent, Shri Mahārāj prayed him to physically transport him in the manner of Tantuk-the weaver in Gurucharitra. That was the end of the controversy.

One more very touching incident comes to mind. When leaving Mangaon, the Kāgal idol insisted on accompanying Shri Mahārāj. When Shri Mahārāj told that it might not be possible for him to offer Him all the services while on the move, the Lord (idol) said He would be content with just water and ashes. The idol stayed on with Shri Mahārāj and he offered regular worship. Once at Brahmavart, a learned scholar questioned his idol worship, Shri Mahārāj said he was ready to give it up, but the idol wouldn’t leave him. On the scholar’s insistence he put down the idol into the stream of Ganges. However, as soon as they came out of the water, the idol reappeared before them and the scholar repented and became an ardent devotee of Shri Mahārāj.

In 1894 AD, after the Chaturmās in Petlād, Shri Mahārāj came to Chikhaladā and stayed on till Deepavali, at the instance of many devotees and seekers who wanted to learn yoga as well as scriptures. On the eve of the first day of Deepāvali, the Lord

reminded Shri Mahārāj of the festival and demanded He be offered Mangal Snān (auspicious scented hot water bath). Shri Mahārāj remonstrated that being a Sanyasi, he could neither touch (use) fire nor obtain any scents and perfumes. He further reminded the Lord of His promise to be content with water and ashes.

Next day, Shri Mahārāj bathed the Deity with cold water and applied ashes as usual and proceeded with his routine. At noon, after the Bhiksha, when Shri Mahārāj approached the Lord to offer the solicited food (*Naivedya*), he heard a loud sound like an explosion followed by the voice of the Prabhu, “How dare you offer me food on a Deepāvali day without the auspicious bath? I am sitting in the Narmadā! I don’t want your *Naivedya*.” When Shri Mahārāj came to the riverside, he heard a child’s cry. Following the direction of the sound he went into river, when a mystical light guided him to the location of the idol. Overwhelmed with love, Shri Mahārāj dived into the river and clutching the Lord to his heart, returned to the bank, his eyes filled with tears and voice choked with emotions. In the meanwhile the devotees of Shri Mahārāj had already gathered to find out why Shri Mahārāj went to the river at the lunch hour. On learning the Lord’s wish, they brought hot water, perfumes and other requisites and Shri Mahārāj worshipped the Lord with pomp and ceremony. Shri Mahārāj composed the following verse commemorating the Lord’s Leela (play): -

मित्र मित्र जरी भांडती। तरि पुन्हां एक होती ॥१॥
दंपतीचा हो कलह। लवमात्र न तुटे स्नेह ॥२॥
देवभक्तांचें भांडणें। पराभक्तीचें तें ठाणें ॥३॥
वासू म्हणे हा विनोद। देतो दत्ता परमानंद ॥४॥

“Even though friends may fight,/ They soon enough reunite
/When consorts do skirmish/ Their love doesn’t an iota diminish./
With the Devotee the Lord’s conflict/ Is a signpost of love
transcendent. /Says Vāsu such merriment / Gives Datta deep
enjoyment.”

The Medium and the Mediator: - One more interesting aspect of this multifaceted relationship becomes apparent in the role Shri Mahārāj played in the reform of priests of Narasobawadi. Lord Datta Himself had promoted the prestige and influence of Shri Mahārāj in Narasobawadi. Shri Mahārāj himself revered Wadi as the primal seat of the Lord and the priests there as servants of the Prabhu. Once, in Indore, a priest from Wadi arrived just at the time when the devotees there were planning to take out a procession of Shri Mahārāj atop an elephant. As soon as he saw the Wadi priest, Shri Mahārāj insisted that the priest be honoured in his place. The priests of Wadi also had come to recognize with experience the Divine mandate of Shri Mahārāj and respected him greatly. Gradually, a bond came into being whereby the priests would approach Shri Mahārāj with their problems and request him to intercede with the Lord on their behalf. The Lord in recognition of this, often communicated with the priests through Shri Mahārāj. We have had an occasion to examine an episode of this mediating role of Shri Mahārāj under “The Conflicts.” Another illustrative episode is narrated here.

After spending three consecutive Chāturmas in Brahmavart, Shri Mahārāj arrived to Wadi in 1898 at the instance of the Lord. One evening, after the regular obeisance to the Padukas during the Palanquin ceremony, Shri Mahārāj started climbing the steps to his room. Suddenly he went into the trance and the Kamandalu fell from his hand on the stone steps. However, it miraculously escaped any damage at all. Still in the trance, Shri Mahārāj continued to walk and sat down on the platform outside the temple of Shri Narayan Swāmi. “Call the priests of the four lineages⁴⁰!” exclaimed Shri Mahārāj in a forceful voice. Soon the priests gathered and Shri Mahārāj continued to speak thus: - “The Lord is very weary of your

present conduct and has brought me here to amend the same. You are not following the precedents laid down by your ancestors. If you do not still improve, you will invite further punishment, far severer than what you have been suffering these last three years.” The terrified priests prayed most humbly for forgiveness and guidance. After a couple of hours in the trance, Shri Mahārāj returned to the normal state. When someone asked him as to the ways to pacify the anger of Shri Datta Prabhu, he answered, “I am just one of you. I don’t know anything.”

Shri Mahārāj was in Wadi in the Deepāvali festival of 1906 AD. In the five days of the festival, the Padukas are bathed with hot water. On the first day (the dark 14th of Ashvin), the priests gave Shri Mahārāj hot water bath along with the Lord. However, the priests did not check the temperature of water poured over the Padukas. This resulted in Shri Mahārāj passing blood in urine. When Shri Mahārāj queried Shri Datta Prabhu about this, the Lord said, “If a single hot water bath has caused this to you, imagine what I must be suffering while the priests are pouring scalding water over me every day!” When he questioned the priests, they confirmed that nobody checked the temperature of water before bathing the Lord. Shri Mahārāj told them that he was receiving the punishment for their negligence. On his advice the priests placed a coconut before the Lord and asked for pardon, pledging to always test the temperature of the water in future. This relieved the suffering of Shri Mahārāj.

In a similar incidence in Kurugaddi, Shri Datta Prabhu caused some dead sparrows, eggs and other dirt to fall in the hands of Shri Mahārāj. Even as he was throwing these away in disgust, he heard Lord’s voice, “We have thrown these things on your body just to make you realize how we are suffering such filth soiling our place.” The next day, Shri Mahārāj actually noticed a sparrow killed by a bat on the Padukas. He

⁴⁰ The priests of Wadi descend from a single ancestor (Bhairambhat) and divided into four branches (Phad).

then made arrangements to repair the gaps in the roof of the Kurugaddi temple and got a door fitted to the sanctorum.

It should be mentioned here in the passing that, Shri Mahārāj was instrumental in reviving some major places of Shri Datta worship like Kurugaddi and Peethāpuram. At Peethāpuram the local residents were even not aware of the actual birthplace of Shripad Shrivallabh till Shri Mahārāj pointed it out to them. Similarly, the birth place of Shri Nrisinh Saraswati was also revealed by Shri Mahārāj. He has also installed several Datta idols in different parts of India.

Love: - The Supreme Being referred to as the Brahma in Vedic literature, is beyond human concept and articulation. Its attributes like the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer refer to its relation to the world but say little of Its essential nature. The Shrutis (Vedas), after striving to define the indefinable, end up saying, “not so, not so”! Only three major attributes emerge consistently from the subjective experience of the Seers, viz. Truth, Consciousness and Bliss (Sat, Chit and Anand). These seers could only say that It Exists (Asti), It is Conscious (Bhāti) and It is Beloved (Priya). Thus the Existence, Knowledge and Love are the aspects of God that are common to all religions and form the basis of all approaches to Him. Hindu tradition, from the ancient Rishis to the Saints, has placed love above wisdom in the pathway to God. This love, referred to as Bhakti, forms the very essence of the fascinating relationship between Shri Mahārāj and Shri Datta Prabhu. All the facets of this bond we have so far studied are firmly and deeply rooted in love. It is this deep love that enabled Shri Mahārāj to transcend the limitations of human body, mind and ego; it is this love that motivated the tremendous efforts he put in, austerities he practiced, sufferings he underwent; it is because of this love that he could so completely, unreservedly dedicate his whole life, nay, his entire being to God.

The heart of Shri Mahārāj was always filled with this Divine love. Sometimes even the utterance of Divine Name sufficed to trigger an outburst of this passion, choking his voice, causing a profuse flow of tears and even leading to a trance lasting for hours! In the 1906 visit of Shri Mahārāj to Wadi, he used to perform his evening rituals at the Sangam (confluence) after which he used to explain Shri Krishnā Lahari. Once just as he was speaking, the temple bells started ringing as usual for the evening worship accompanied by burning of incense before the Lord. Suddenly Shri Mahārāj became speechless and tears started incessantly flowing from his eyes. Recovering after a short while, Shri Mahārāj said, “Behold our great fortune and rejoice! The Lord, the Ocean of Compassion, has come to abide here for the benefit of His devotees! His grace towards his children is indeed inexpressible.”

Once while teaching grammar to some students in Brahmavart, Shri Mahārāj encountered the word “Krishna” which led him into a trance. Such trances were frequent occurrences with Shri Mahārāj. He used to lose all awareness of the outside world during such trances. Once at Wadi, when he went into a trance lasting for a couple of hours, the priests formed an enclosure around him with sheets of cloth for his protection. Later on he told them this was neither necessary nor desirable for such a trance could occur in jungle or other deserted places; secondly, the sight of such a trance can be an uplifting and purifying experience to devotees. In Wadi again, even as he remained in the trance for almost all day, he appeared at noon on the streets of Wadi soliciting Bhiksha!(vide supra). Listening to Bhajans at times induced such trances, as happened at Sadalge, a village south of Wadi, while he was listening to an Abhang of the Saint Tukaram. The trance lasted three hours.

These are some of the obvious expressions of the deep ardour that ever filled the heart of Shri Mahārāj. The following incident at Narasi reveals that the emotion was mutual and the Lord returned his love in equal measure. Once when Shri Mahārāj had gone to the river alone for his midday bath⁴¹, a lady from the village happened to come there to collect water. She saw Shri Mahārāj sitting under a tree with a six-month-old baby in his lap, sucking its left toe and incessantly gazing at Shri Mahārāj returning the loving gaze. She was so dumb-struck by the sight that she forgot filling her pot and just stood there watching in a daze. In a little while Shri Mahārāj happened to notice her when the child disappeared and the lady lost her consciousness. Shri Mahārāj went to her and revived her by sprinkling some water and told her she was fortunate to have witnessed the holy sight and told her to keep it secret. She filled her pot with water and returned home. However she could not keep the experience to herself and the story finally did spread around.

The One and the Same: - The more one's understanding of this spiritual bond gets deeper, the less perceptible becomes the distinction between the two and the more convinced one gets of their essential unity. Did not Lord Dattatreya Himself tell Shri Ganesh Bhatiji that He would incarnate as his son? The Lord instructed several devotees that He was dwelling in the form of Shri Vasudevānanda Saraswati.

An evil spirit possessed one Shri Alandikar's wife as she put on some jewellery gifted by some bandits in return of Shri Alandikar's priestly services. Alandikar tried several means to relieve his wife of the affliction for ten years without any success and finally landed in Ganagapur. After a few days of service there, he was directed by the Lord to leave Ganagapur immediately and go to Garudeshwar on the banks of Narmadā where the Lord said, "I am residing under the name of Shri

Vasudevānanda Saraswati." Following the Divine instruction, Alandikar went to Shri Mahārāj at Garudeshwar and his wife was rid of the evil spirit by the grace of Shri Mahārāj.

Again at Garudeshwar, Shri Mahārāj instructed one demon to go to Narasobawadi and serve Lord Dattatreya. The demon replied, "The Lord Datta of Wadi is here, what is the point in going there?" Shri Mahārāj ordered him to shut up and sprinkled a little water over the possessed lady, at once releasing her from the demon, and the latter from that mean state.

One Tukaram went to Ganagapur and performed penance in the service of Lord Datta, living only on fruits for three years, with a keen desire to be blessed by the vision of the Lord. The Lord ordered Shri Mahārāj, then in Pandharpur, to go to Ganagapur and stay there for three nights. After reaching Ganagapur, he was directed to see Tukaram and fulfil his desire and compose for him, a hymn in the praise of the Lord.

The most authentic first hand account of Shri Mahārāj being Lord Dattatreya incarnate comes from one of his major disciples Yogiraj Shri Gulavani Mahārāj. In the month of June, Shri Vāman Rao Gulavani, then 23 years of age, had come to Ganagapur to complete seven *Saptah* (seven day ritual reading) of Shri Gurucharitra after having completed seven at Wadi. After the sixth *Saptah*, he met a *Ramat*⁴² astrologer who predicted that if Vāman Rao did not meet his Master (Shri Mahārāj) within the next six months, he would never meet him again. Shocked by this prediction, Shri Vāman Rao was stricken by an irresistible urge to meet his Master. Completing the seventh and final reading in one day and giving away his umbrella to the priest towards the expenses of the concluding ritual (*Samapti*) of the *Saptah*, he set out on foot to seek out Shri Mahārāj. His two-month pedestrian search for Shri Mahārāj, with practically no money, in the hot summer over a

⁴¹ Sanyasis are required to bathe thrice a day.

⁴² Science of prediction by reading the fall of dice.

dry, dusty terrain, is in itself a saga of indomitable perseverance and penance which was rewarded not only by his union with the revered Master at Hāvanur on the banks of Tungabhadrā river, but also by a ten-day stay in his august and holy company. During this period, he was blessed by exclusive discourses by Shri Mahārāj on all the 18-chapters *Bhagvad Gitā*; *Santhā*⁴³ of *Shri Vishnu Sahasra Naam* from Shri Mahārāj; instructions on yogic Pranayam and Ajapa Jap, and the continuous grace flowing from Shri Mahārāj.

After ten days of this blissful sojourn, Shri Vāman Rao had to leave as the first anniversary of his father's death was approaching. Starting early, he went to the bath in Tungabhadrā River in the sacred company of Shri Mahārāj who bathed Vāman Rao with his hands. They went to Mādhukari together and at lunch Shri Mahārāj offered a portion of food from his plate to Vaman Rao as *Prasād*. As the time of departure neared Vāman Rao could not control his anguish at the prospect of separation from Shri Mahārāj. Finally, the moment of parting came. Shri Mahārāj was sitting in his customary Siddha position, with a coconut, sacred ashes and *Prasād* by his side, on a small platform. Shri Vaman Rao prostrated before him. Shri Mahārāj blessed him with customary "Nārāyana" and gave the *Prasād*, coconut and sacred ashes asking him to take care. Shri Vāman Rao, with tear-strained face and a heavy voice asked, "When shall I see you again, Master?" Shri Mahārāj, with an upward shake of his head pointed to himself and said, "Just remember this as it is, that is all!"

At this moment, the physical form of Shri Mahārāj appeared to become transparent and Shri Vaman Rao saw the figure of Lord Dattatreya clad in tiger-skin, with His feet at the heart of Shri Mahārāj, smiling benevolently at him. Shri Vaman Rao prostrated again and as he got up, he saw the usual form of Shri Mahārāj asking him hurry up so as not to miss the train.

Shri Vāman Rao, luckily for us, was an accomplished painter and not only mentally captured the enchanting image of the Lord but also reproduced it in an exquisite miniature which he placed in his sacred book of Shri Guru Charitra. When Shri Vāman Rao went to stay with Shri Mahārāj at Garudeshwar, he, on the latter's instruction put a metal frame on it. Shri Mahārāj placed it on a wooden platform and offered ritual worship. The picture continued to receive regular worship throughout the stay of Shri Vāman Rao at Garudeshwar at the end of which, Shri Mahārāj handed it back to Vaman Rao. This picture is at present in the sanctorum of Shri Vasudeva Nivas, Pune.

⁴³ Imparting of sacred verses orally.

Chapter 13. The Passage to Eternity.

In the summer of 1906 AD, when Shri Mahārāj was staying in Chidambar Kshetra, some mischief-monger set off a rumour of his Mahasamadhi (physical dissolution). A search party from Wadi went right up to Rameshwar and not finding him returned to Tanjavur. When they neither found him there nor got any trace of him, they almost despaired. Shri Mahārāj divined this and left Chidambar and met the party in the Māyāvaram market to their great relief and joy. Shri Mahārāj then told them not to believe such rumours since “the place and the time of the demise of this body will be known to all well in advance.”

In the 1911(AD) Chāturmās at Kurugaddi, a crow pecked Shri Mahārāj thrice on his head. Shri Mahārāj declared that a person so stricken by a crow did not live longer than six months and urged his devotees to give up their attachment to “this body.” Shri Datta Prabhu, however, instructed Shri Mahārāj to take a bath in Godāvāri at its confluence with Venagangā to counter the bad omen. These events illustrate his total lack of fear for death and detachment from body.

Shri Mahārāj arrived at Garudeshwar after the *Chāturmāsa*, guided by Ashwatthāmā (see page 21). *Garud* (eagle), the avian vehicle of Shri Vishnu had performed penance at this place to obtain Shiva’s grace. Within a month of his arrival, he declared to Shri Rāma Shastri Prakāshkar that he would not be going anywhere henceforth. The desolate temple soon grew into a place of pilgrimage as hundreds of devotees of Shri Mahārāj started pouring in from all over India. The devotees constructed some shelters with kitchen and other bare amenities and organized daily activities. On any day, there would be hundreds of persons to be fed. The things proceeded

smoothly. Many a time Shri Mahārāj used to order in advance preparation of a particular cuisine favoured by the guests who usually arrived at noon. Each day some miracle was witnessed. People of all religions and castes came to seek relief from their problems. Shri Mahārāj helped everyone without disturbing one’s faith. To the Muslims he would instruct to chant Āyats from Qura’n. Even some Parsis came and received his grace.

One morning, after the daily discourse, Shri Mahārāj addressed the assembly as follows.

“Today I wish to convey to you the essence of all that I have been teaching in my life through my discourses and writings. The primary objective of human life is to obtain liberation (from the recurring cycles of birth and death). To this end, one should carry out one’s religious obligations as ordained by the scriptures, consistent with his *Varna* and *Āshram*. This will lead to the steadiness of mind so essential for the next step viz. study (*Shravana*), contemplation (*Manan*) and meditation (*Nididhyāsan*) of Vedānta (conclusion of Vedas). Emphasis should be on the study i.e. the listening to discourses by detached and realized persons. This will calm the vacillations of mind. (The resultant) Righteous (*Sāttvik*) tendency is alone conducive to the spiritual ascent of man. To cultivate the *Sāttvik* nature, diet has to be wholesome (*Hit*), measured (*Mit*) and pure (*Medhya*). The signs of Sattvik nature are: -

**Firm faith in one’s religion,
Meticulous observance of religious conducts viz.
Snaan (bath), Sandhya (prayer), Dev-Puja (worship),
five major Yagnyas (sacrifices dedicated to Deities,
Sages, Ancestors, Animals and People),
Atithi Satkar (honour to the guest),
Service to Gomata,
Sincere attendance of Kathā, Kirtan,
Bhajans, Purāna etc.**

**Soft and kind speech,
Refraining from harming anyone in any way,
Service and obedience (for men) and to
husband, in-laws (for women) and other elders.**

One may pursue any means for livelihood viz. commerce, agriculture or service. However, one should never abandon the conduct ordained by Scriptures and obedience to the Guru. Only discharge of one's religious duties purifies mind. Only purified mind gets established in *Upāsana* (Service to God), which in turn is the only source of Peace of mind. Only a peaceful mind is capable of the knowledge of self which is the sole means of Liberation." Shri Mahārāj further exemplified the seven grounds (levels) of Knowledge and concluded that, "This is a brief summary. One who follows this advice will finally attain absolute happiness."

In the summer of 1914 (AD), the chronic dysentery afflicting Shri Mahārāj exacerbated and his health declined rapidly. Learning this, the priests of Wadi commenced *Santat Dhārā* (non-stop shower) worship to Padukās. When Shri Mahārāj was informed of this, he sent a message to the priests not to unnecessarily bother the Lord, "since this body is soon due to fall".

In the previous autumn (bright 9th of Ashvin), an idol donated by a sculptor from Baroda was installed at Garudeshwar. Shri Mahārāj asked the Lord about the future arrangements. "We wish to abide here. Do not send the idol anywhere" was Lord's reply. Accordingly a trust was formed to manage the temple.

When the devotees started pressing Shri Mahārāj to take some medicines, he replied, "I am soon quitting this body; as such no medicines are necessary. Shankarāchārya lived only 32 years. This frame has endured much longer. This was afflicted twice by snakebite, thrice by cholera, once by *Sannipat*, once by plague, twice by leprosy and twice by leukoderma. Dysentery is

a constant companion. Who gave medicine on those occasions? The physician engaged (Shri Datta Prabhu) at birth ever continues to look after!"

Shri Mahārāj was originally scheduled to depart on the dark 8th of Jyeshtha month; however he did not consider that day auspicious. Hence, noting the exact period of the *Tithi*, Shri Mahārāj made someone sit him up and went into Samadhi for three hours. On waking up from Samadhi he said, "Today's destined departure has been evaded." By the dark moon (Amavasya) of Jyeshtha, he was very weak and in acute pain. He called Shri Appā Shastri Jere from Wadi and whispered in his ears, "I have been subjected to black magic in my householder days; however I have no desire to counter it." Even on that last day he tried to perform *Nityakarma*; but he could not even hold water in his hand and gave up the effort saying, "(May) God's will (prevail)". He further added, "Once *Amavasya* is past, this body has to be quit".

Accordingly, as soon as the Amavasya gave way to Shukla Pratipadā of Āshādha⁴⁴, Shri Mahārāj sat up facing the Lord to the west, performed *Trātak* (steady gaze), controlled his breath and quit the body with a loud chant of "Om". The day was Tuesday, *Nakshatra*⁴⁵ *Ārdra*, *Ayan Uttarā*⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ First day of the bright fortnight of the fourth month.

⁴⁵ Constellation.

⁴⁶ Summer solistice.

Chapter 14. Significance of the Digambara Mantra.

This Mantra was revealed to P.P. Shri Vasudevānanda Saraswati Swāmi Mahārāj and he propagated it on a large scale. All his disciples, including some great saints like P.P. Shri Nrisinh Saraswati (Dixit) Swāmi Mahārāj, P.P. Shri Yogananda Saraswati (Ganda) Mahārāj, Pujya Shri Rang Avadhut Mahārāj (Nareshwar), Pujya Yogiraj Shri V.D. Gulavani Mahārāj, Pujya Shri Datta Mahārāj Kavishwar (both of Pune), Pujya Nana Mahārāj Taranekar (Indore) and others continued to propagate this Mantra. In fact, this *Mahāmantra* (which is also a *Siddha Mantra*) is the greatest single contribution of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, insofar as it is open to all humanity and is a simple, easy and surest path to Self-Realization. The Mantra has found wide acceptance amongst the followers of other saints in Datta tradition viz. Shri Akkalkot Swāmi Mahārāj, Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi etc.

Shri Swāmi Mahārāj himself in an Ārati titled “*Digambarā Digambarā Shripāda Vallabh Digambarā*” has explained the meaning of this Mantra. A Roman transliteration of the same is furnished herewith.

digambarā digambarā śrīpādavallabha digambarā.
 ārati hē tava caraṇīm rāhō..
 ārati hē tava caraṇīm rāhō. natitati guruvarā..dhru...
 digbhiravēṣṭitamambaramēva pratyagbrahmēti.
 khaṃ brahmēti śrutirapi vadati.
 khaṃ brahmēti śrutirapi vadati. digambarā cēti..1..
 digvaccāmbaramēva vyāpaka pūrṇabrahmēti.
 saccitsukhaghanamāyātītam.
 saccitsukhaghanamāyātītam. digambarā vadati..2..
 śrīpādaśrīvallabha nāma prāpa hi nakragajēndramiva.
 draupadyambarīṣacōra.
 draupadyambarīṣacōragrasitadvijamēva..3..
 digambarā guru vāsudēva dattastvambrahma.

kāmākṛōdhagrasitaṃ māṃ labha..
 kāmākṛōdhagrasitaṃ māṃ labha tathaiva jhaṭiti vaha..4..
 digambarā digambarā śrīpādavallabha digambarā..

Let us consider these stanzas one by one.

digambarā digambarā śrīpādavallabha digambarā.
 ārati hē tava caraṇīm rāhō..
 ārati hē tava caraṇīm rāhō. natitati guruvarā..dhru..

Digambara, O my Master, this Ārati is dedicated to your lotus feet along with a series of salutations! In this thematic verse, the Ārati is dedicated to *Guru* or the Lord Master, implying that all three *Digambarās* and *Shripāda Vallabh* refer essentially to *Guru*. The essential unity of the four terms is hinted at. At the same time object of the hymn has been identified as Shri Gurudev. This is the *Dhrupad* or the recurring (theme) verse.

digbhiravēṣṭitamambaramēva pratyagbrahmēti.
 khaṃ brahmēti śrutirapi vadati.
 khaṃ brahmēti śrutirapi vadati. digambarā cēti..1..

The space (*Ambar* meaning *Akash*) that has to be stripped of attributes (*Dik* (*g*) meaning direction or region) is verily the Manifest Divinity (*Pratyak Brahm*, the Divine as experienced by an individual thus being conditioned by his personality; naturally it varies from person to person), for do not the scriptures (Shrutis) say that the Divine is (like) Space (*Kham=Akash*).

This stanza reveals the meaning of first *Digambara*. When a person, disillusioned with the ephemeral and illusory sensual pleasures, identifying them as the root cause of human misery, (*Vairagya* and *Vivek*), with a desire to attain a state of permanent and irreversible state of Happiness (*Mumuksha* or urge to be released from the human bondage), turns his mind inwards, (depending upon his sincerity, intensity and efforts and by the Grace of God or *Sadguru*), experiences his own inner Self. The Self being without attributes and beyond all human perception, this illumination is manifest through the

mind-stuff (*Chitta*) of the seeker and takes on the qualities of that medium. Thus it is that different seekers perceive the same Reality (without attributes) as having varying attributes. This perceived Self is the *Pratyak Brahm*. This in itself is a great achievement on the path of self-realization. Yet it is only the initial stage of self-realization. Through continuing, patient and ardent practice, the seeker's *Chitta* gets progressively purified and his experience of the Truth deeper and purer.

The first *Digambara* thus denotes the initial, individual, variable, imperfect but genuine Divine experience. Some persons may have a vision consistent with their beliefs and concepts viz. a particular deity, prophet or *Guru*. Others may see amorphous lights, colours etc. Others yet may hear sounds, tunes or words and so on. Some others may experience divine touch, heavenly aroma or exquisite flavours. This experience engenders true faith and guides the devotee on the pathway to God.

Highly advanced aspirants not only visualize *Ishta Deva* (personal deity) but actually communicate and interact with the same in many ways viz. play, quarrel, sing, dance or fight with the Lord as conceived by them. They will receive instructions, directions and commands from their God. The Lord may listen to their prayers and fulfil their desires. These individuals have highly purified hearts and very close to reality. Even so there is a screen of their own conceptions that impose a certain form and other attributes on the reality. They are not yet acquainted with the ultimate, universal Truth. Their "God", though a source of great happiness and joy, a dependable succour and a constant companion, is limited their own individuality.

As the aspirant progresses on the spiritual path his experience will get deeper, more blissful, more constant and more potent. Their perception of reality thus evolves over a period of time. However blissful, steady and potent, their

experience remains personal. Thus *Pratyak Brahma* can be said to be stages on the path of Self-realization.

digvaccāmbaramēva vyāpaka pūrṇabrahmēti.

saccitsukhaghanamāyātītam.

saccitsukhaghanamāyātītam. digambarā vadati..2..

In the second stanza, a different analysis of the word *Digambara* is employed. *Ambar* here too, means *Ākāsh* but in the sense of The Infinite. *Dik* denotes the sensory universe. The space here is the all-inclusive, omnipresent *Brahm* and *Dik* the phenomenal world, the cosmos held (supported) by it. The same stanza goes on to further describe it as a continuum of existence, consciousness and bliss, which is beyond *Māyā* (cosmic illusion). This is the ultimate reality, the culminating experience of the One and the Absolute Divinity. Here the perceiver merges with the perceived. The seeker loses his identity and unifies with the Truth. This experience, or Reality, or Truth is beyond human expression, beyond human conception even.

Even the scriptures, after trying to capture It in words have frustrated saying "*neti, neti*" (not so, not so). There are three ways in which the scriptures indicate this *Brahm* or *Paramātmā*. An indirect way (*Tatasth Lakshan*) is to relate it to the phenomenal world as its Maker, Supporter and Destroyer, as the very stuff of which the world is made, as the final destination of all creation. More direct statements are mostly negative (*Nishedha Vakya*) viz. It has no beginning nor end, no limits, no attributes; it is beyond thought, beyond word, beyond duality, in short beyond *Māyā*. The only positive statements (*vidhivakya*) are that it exists (*Sat*), is conscious (*Chit*) and is blissful (*Anand*). These are the impressions that linger after this climactic Divine experience. There is no variation here. All seekers, Yogis, devotees and Seers are unanimous about this final realization. Thus the second *Digambara* characterizes the final goal of the Divine path.

śrīpādaśrīvallabha nāma prāpa hi nakragajēndramiva.

draupadyambarīṣacōra.

draupadyambarīṣacōragrasitadvijamēva..3..

Shripad Vallabh is the name of the first incarnation of Lord Dattatreya in this age of Kali. We have briefly reviewed his life earlier. In this hymn, he represents the Divinity with attributes (*Sagun Brahm*). Even after discarding his mortal frame, he revealed himself to kill the robbers and resurrect his devotee murdered by them. This story from Shri Gurucharitra is sited here and related to the stories of *Gajendramoksha* from *Bhāgavata Purāna* and *Droupadi* from Mahabharata, portraying the mercy of God towards His devotees.

Even as the seeker is striving for the ultimate realization, the path is too long and strewn with obstacles. “One among the thousands strives for attainment, and only a rare one amongst such thousands knows me appropriately”, says Lord Shrikrishna in BhagwadGitā. It is also said that the process of enlightenment may extend over several human births. All through these phases, the ordinary mortals are governed by the laws of Karma and subject to its vicissitudes.

One King *Indradyumna* renounced his kingdom and was meditating in a hermitage when Sage *Agasti* came asking for water to satiate his intense thirst. *Indradyumna*, being totally immersed in meditation, did not respond. The sage was dismayed at the insult and cast a curse upon the king that he will be reborn as elephant. In his life as elephant, his leg was seized by a giant crocodile. All his might and the help from his herd, the elephant king (Gajendra) could not extract his leg from the mouth of the crocodile. Gajendra, finally called upon the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Supreme who governs, animates and dissolves this cosmos. Lord Vishnu moved by Gajendra’s sincere devotion, instantly arrives and releases Gajendra from the crocodile’s jaws.

Droupadi, the Queen of Pandavas, whom the King Yudhishtir staked and lost in a game of dice, was dragged to

the imperial court of Kauravas and was about to be humiliated by stripping in the royal court. When she found that the helpless husbands, indifferent courtiers and callous king Dhritarashtra were either unwilling or impotent to stop her humiliation, she surrendered to Lord Krishna. The intense faith and devotion of Droupadi compelled the Lord to manifest in the form of garments that continued to appear and cover Draupadi’s body, even as Dusshasana went on stripping her. Finally he had to give up in frustration and Draupadi’s dignity was guarded.

All the three stories illustrate the mercy, power and all-pervasiveness of the Divine. This Divine with these attributes is to be worshiped by all seekers to overcome the vicissitudes of fate. This is the message of this stanza.

digambarā guru vāsudēva dattastvaṃ brahma.

kāmakrōdhagrasitaṃ māṃ labha..

kāmakrōdhagrasitaṃ māṃ labha sadaiva jhaṭiti vaha..4..

digambarā digambarā śrīpādavallabha digambarā..

In the last verse of this hymn, Digambara is identified as *Guru*. After asserting the Absolute continuum of Truth, Consciousness and Bliss as the ultimate goal of spiritual journey which began with the relative and subjective experience/s of the Divine and after invoking the Grace of the Brahman (God) with attributes in the earlier verses, Shri Mahārāj has introduced the concept of *Guru* who is described as *Vāsudeva*, *Datta* and *Brahma*.

Vāsudeva is derived from the root *vas* meaning to cover or enclose and *dev* meaning luminous or one that radiates light. One who encloses the entire universe, entire phenomenal world and illuminates it. “*īśāvāsyamidaṃ sarvaṃ yatkiñca jagatyām jagat*” (Ishopanishad 1). God encompasses everything in this world. *Vāsudeva* thus means the Immanent Reality. There is nothing in this world that is free of Divinity. Every atom reflects the Glory of the Brahma. The realized souls experience this Reality

and thus see the Divine everywhere. For the ordinary mortals, however, the experiential world is the cover that is hiding the Reality. *Dik* meaning the phenomenal world is the *Ambar* (attire, cover) of the Truth. *Vāsudeva* is the all-pervading Reality that shines through the gross world and is at the same time veiled by it.

Datta symbolizes the personified Brahma, the God with attributes of the previous verse. Literally it means the given or the bestowed one. This is derived from the story of Sage Atri and his consort Anasuya.(vide supra) He is thus the God in human form, Divinity with attributes.

Brahma further underlines that *Guru* is in fact an amalgamation of all the three aspects Divinity described earlier. It is implied that the spiritual journey begins with the Grace of *Shriguru* leading to the subjective experience of the Self (*Pratyak Brahma*), gradually evolving through progressive purification of the seeker's heart to the Ultimate Realization (*Purna Brahma*), over a long period, often comprising of several human lives. In this long odyssey, it is the *Guru* who promotes and protects the spiritual progress, steadying the seeker on his path and warding off all obstacles.

Read with the theme verse, this verse unmistakably points to *Sadguru* as the initiator, guide, protector and also the goal of the pathway to God. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj beseeches *Sadguru's* favour to vanquish the innate enemies on the spiritual path viz. desire, anger, covetousness, delusion, vanity and jealousy. Though *Kāma* and *Krodha* mean only the first two, all the six are implied here. Shri Mahārāj urges swift action (*Zat iti*) to end his (read the aspirant's) deep-rooted miseries in the form of the recurring cycles of birth and death.

This paramount significance of *Sadguru* on the path of Self-realization is often misunderstood by many. There are widespread misconceptions about *Guru*. In fact there are many scholars and intellectuals who consider *Gurus* and their

overwhelming influence to be the source many social evils, conflicts and suffering, especially in Hindu societies. Hence this subject needs to be clarified.

Guru literally means large, elder, and superior. For example the largest planet is Jupiter is known as *Guru*. All elders in family are referred to as *Guru*. However, *Guru* is used more commonly to mean teacher. Anyone imparting knowledge, be it secular (viz. arts, literature, science, sports, music, dance etc.), religious, esoteric, spiritual and so on. In India one who imparts a Mantra is also *Guru*. Not all Mantras are benevolent. There are Mantras of the dark sciences also.

Then there are the *Āchāryas*, *Mahantas*, chiefs of the various *Peethas* who are revered as *Gurus* by the followers of the particular sects. In fact, these *Gurus* are identical to the various pontiffs, bishops, Rabbis, *Ayatollahs*, *Imams* etc in non-Hindu societies. The famous 16th Century saint Samarth Ramdaas⁴⁷ lists 17 *Gurus* in his magnum opus "*Dāsabodha*" (5:2). All these *Gurus* merit respect, reverence, allegiance and obedience in their own right from their respective disciples or followers. It follows naturally that loyalties to different *Gurus* may often conflict. Thus none of the *Gurus* could be said to wield absolute power over an individual. Every individual will have several *Gurus*. It is not expected that they will all receive the same degree of respect and allegiance. In fact the individuals who observe these obligations are few in any civilization or in any period. Though some of the religious leaders might have held a sway of varying potency in certain regions and over certain periods of time, the conflicts generated by them have been very much milder and of low intensity, compared to the crusades. Most religious sects in India have been predominantly non-violent and tolerant. Certainly scourges like inquisitions are unheard of. The Hindu religion, it needs to be emphasized here, does not believe in conversions,

⁴⁷ He was the Guru of the great Maratha Sovereign Shivaji.

considers all religions originating from one God and forbids censure of other religions. However, this is besides the point in this discussion.

What needs to be emphasized here is that all these *Gurus* are temporal and *not relevant* to this discussion. The *Guru* that is extolled in this hymn is the one who can release an individual from human bondage, the Karmic cycle of birth and death and leads to realization of Self, the True Essence of one's being. By definition such a *Guru* has to be a Self-realized Soul himself. Unless he has vanquished all human weaknesses, he cannot be expected to help other human beings to overcome theirs. He is thus by definition risen above all distinctions of race, creed, caste, nationality, even sex. All human beings are equal to him. Even this is an understatement since his compassion and love extends well beyond humanity. As *Bhagavad-Gitā* says, "The realized person looks upon the learned and humble Brahmin, the cow, the elephant the dog or consumer of dog meat as equal."⁴⁸ He sees the divine in all these and in fact knows them to be his own manifestations. This unswerving realization further implies constant communion with the Supreme Being. While this does endow the saint (this is true of saints in any culture or creed, indeed!) with supernatural powers, he never does feel the need or urge to exercise these powers. Having dissociated himself from the body-mind complex through complete attenuation of individual ego, he totally identifies himself with the all-pervading Divinity. Thus he has no human motivation. He is thus an instrument of the God. All his actions are determined by the Lord.

Having united with the transcendental Reality, he is no more an individual and thus one with all self-realized souls. "The saints may appear different, but are in reality one since they have merged with the One Truth." (*Samartha Ramdaas*).

Such saints appear from time to time, in all cultures, all countries and all religions. Indeed these saints are the gifts bestowed by God on humanity. They neither belong to any community nor are limited by it. They are a common heritage of all mankind.

It is difficult to recognize such individuals. Only the Grace of God can place one under the patronage of such a *Guru*. "Human birth, urge for Self-realization and the auspices of a saint are hard to find and are bestowed by God's Grace. (*Vivekachudamani*.3) The totally self-less life of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, as we have tried to review in this book, with his compassionate and impartial grace to all, irrespective of caste, creed etc., was a live demonstration of such a *Guru*. He did enjoin strict compliance with scriptural dictates of one's own religion. He considered these to be divine commands. We have already seen the deep undercurrents of brotherhood between Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and many of the contemporary saints.

All these saints, who are virtually angels on the earth, are universal friends, nourish and bring to fruition the souls of all beings like the spring season, fulfil the aspirations of all supplicants and finally guide them to highest human endeavour, Self-realization. Those who have come under the tutelage of such a *Guru* are blessed indeed! However there are some words of advice for them from the saints and scriptures.

Since it is almost impossible to distinguish a true *Guru* from the fake, utmost caution is advised in accepting someone as *Guru*. *Guru* should be tested for his detachment, unselfishness, impartiality and above all his spiritual knowledge and experience. Not only should he be capable of elucidating the scriptures but also be adept in lifting the consciousness of the disciples to higher and higher spiritual planes, leading ultimately to Self-realization. An event in the life of Swāmi Vivekananda comes to mind. His *Guru* Shri Ramakrishna Paramahans claimed that even a touch of money

⁴⁸ 5:18

burns his skin. Vivekananda (then known as Narendra) placed a coin of one rupee under the bed of Shri Ramakrishna. Only when the *Guru* jumped from the bed immediately after lying down on it, was Narendra convinced that the detachment of the Paramahans was genuine. The *Guru* heartily approved this trial.

The knowledge and practice of Self-realization has originated from the Supreme Being and has come down through the continuous lineages of such *Gurus*. It is the same *Guru* principle that passes from one *Guru* to disciple who becomes a *Guru* as the *Guru* principle matures in him to fullness and so the chain goes on. The individuals are only the mediums of the manifestation of the *Guru*. Thus Great Sage Patanjali says in his Yoga Aphorisms, “He (God), not touched by time, is the teacher (Guru) of the ancients too⁴⁹.” Thus the *Guru* is verily the God. The only difference is that the *Guru* has human form and is thus accessible to other human beings. Any person with a sincere urge for divine knowledge can approach him. It therefore follows that all *Gurus* are one in principle.

Though there are several living saints at any time, only one of them is destined to be the *Guru* of a given individual. The Guru-disciple relationship is determined by the *Karmic* linkages. Such an aspirant who has found his *Guru* is doubtless very fortunate. One should cultivate full faith in one’s *Guru* and revere him as “Creator (Brahma) without four heads, Sustainer (Vishnu) without four arms and the Destroyer (Shiva) without three eyes, yet seeing all” (GuruGitā). Several ancient scriptures have extolled the greatness *Guru* and accorded him the highest esteem.

It has also been emphasized that, reverence to one’s own *Guru* does not signify disrespect to other *Gurus*. Though one may not owe the same allegiance to them, one should always be respectful to them and scrupulously avoid denigrating them.

One gets a *Guru* one deserves. A sincere aspirant always finds a genuine *Guru*. This is Divine assurance asserted by many sages, saints and scriptures. One must pray to God to get a real *Guru*. Contact with the *Guru* is the spiritual birth as well as the assurance of the final goal of human life.

⁴⁹ 1:26.

Appendix I Chronology and Itinerary of the life of

P.P. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāj.

Year	Place/s	Events
1854	Mangaon	Born on Sunday the dark 5th of Shravana in the year of Ananda (Bliss). 12 th August 1854
1862	Mangaon	Upanayan (initiation to Brahmacharyāshrama.)
1875	Mangaon	Married at the age of 21, rather reluctantly at the insistence of his teachers. Performs <i>Gayatri purashcharan</i> and <i>Smārtāgni save</i>
1877	Mangaon	A brief sojourn to Goa to learn astrology and the death of his father, Shri Ganesh Bhataji
1883	Mangaon	Establishment of Shri Datta Mandir (temple) at the instance of the Lord Himself. Constructed sanctum with his own hands. Composed " <i>Dwisahasri Gurucharitam</i> ".
1889	Narsobāwādi	Leaves Mangaon with his pregnant wife and arrives at Narasobawadi. His only offspring is stillborn. He spent the next year and more and received instructions from Govindaswāmi who passes away.
1891	Gangākhed	Leaves Wadi and in the summer of 1891, his wife dies of cholera. Age 37 years. After the mourning period of 14 days, is initiated to Sannyasa (mendicancy) by Lord Dattātreyā.
1891	Ujjain	Receives monastic sceptre from Shri Nārāyanānand Saraswati who bestows the yogapatta (monastic name) of Shri Vāsudevānand Saraswati on him. His first Chāturmas (prescribed stationary period in monsoon for the Sanyasi.)
1892	Brahmavarta	2nd Chaturmaas; stay of 8 months. Composition of <i>Dattapurāna</i>
1893	Haridwar	3rd Chaturmaas; meets the reigning Shankaracharya of Shāradā Peetha Shri Rājarājeshwar Swāmi at whose insistence Swāmiji stays and gives discourses on Upanishads. Travels to Badrikedār and on his way Ancient sages Nar-Narayan appear to him.
1894	Himālayas	4th and the 5th chāturmas. Spends over 2 years in the

- 1895		Himalayas. His exact whereabouts were never revealed to anyone. It is a matter of marvel as to how he even survived, given his strict code of diet.
1896	Jālvān	6th chāturmas. Returns to Haridwar and proceeds to Jālvān, After the chāturmas chāturmas, travels to Brahmāvarta and proceeds to Nemāwar on the banks of Narmadā.
1897	Petlād	7th chāturmas. Later at Chikhaladā, Datta idol is annoyed by austere Deepavali and hides away in the river and is lovingly retrieved by Swāmiji and offered special worship. Composition of <i>Dattalilamritābdhisar</i>
1898	Tilakwādā	8th chāturmas. Transcripts Kurma Purana from Telugu to Devnagari. Proceeds via Shinor, Gimar, Prabhas to -
1899	Dwārakā	9th chāturmas. Proceeds to Shinor via Dakor and onwards to. Completes the <i>Commentary on "Dwisahasri Gurucharitam"</i>
1900	Chikhaladā	10 th chāturmas. Mandaleshwar, Indore and Ujjain to nurse Shri GuruSwāmi Narayanānand. Composition of <i>Māgh Māhātmya</i>
1901	Mahatpur	11th chāturmas. 6 months stay. Dr. Tatake cured. Shri Ganda Buwa and Shri Govind Pandit perfect Khechari under his guidance. Composition of <i>Dattamāhātmya and "Trishati"</i>
1902 1903 1904	Brahmāvarta	12th, 13th and 14th chāturmas. Third visit to Brahmavarta. Longest stay in his Sanyasi life. His brother Sitaram arrives and stays on, completing a <i>Gāyatri purashcharan</i> under the guidance of Swāmi Mahārāj. Shri Shāntāshram Swāmi comes visiting from Benares. The plague epidemic. <i>Gurusamhitā (Samashloki Gurucharitra) Laghu Vasudevaamanān & Saptashati Gurucharitrasār</i> composed.
1905	Narsobāwādi	48 days stay. Shri Dixit Swāmi gets monastic sceptre. Vedic school (Pathashāla) established with Shri Dhundhirāj Shāstri as the instructor. Proceeds to Ganagapur via Shirol, Miraj, Pandharpur and Akkalkot where he met the famous Swāmi Samarth. Composition of <i>Shri Krishnālahari</i> on the way. A devotee named Tukaram is blessed and Gurustotra composed for him. Proceeds via Gangākhed, Parali, Aundha, Hingoli to...

1905	<i>Narasi</i>	15th <i>chātur</i> mās. A small village on the banks of Kayadhu. Proceeds to Karanjā, Amarāvati, Brahmavarta, Kashi, Prayag and back to Narmadā. Composition of <i>Dattachampu</i>
1906	<i>Badhawai</i>	16th <i>chātur</i> mās. On conclusion of <i>chātur</i> mās, proceeds to Wādi for a stay of two months around Gurudwadashi. Proceeds south via Gurlhosur along the banks of Ghataprabha, Vishvamitri and Tungabhadra to Hampi and Mt. Sheshāchal where he composed a hymn in the praise of the ruling deity Shadānan and <i>Kumarshiksha</i> . Following the Bahuda and Karatoya rivers, visits Srirangam, Shrishailam and Tirupati-Tirumal, Kanchi, Pakshitirth. In this summer Pinakini unexpectedly augmented her flow to enable Swāmi Mahārāj to take a mandatory dip after the monthly tonsure. Visiting Kumbhakonam, Mayavaram etc. he arrived at.
1907	<i>Sandhyāmath</i>	17th <i>chātur</i> mās. On the banks of Venu (Kaveri). Composition of <i>Commentary on Krishnalahari and Dwisahasri Churnika</i> . Further travels include Shringeri where the Shankaracharya felicitates him.
1908	<i>Mukteshwarpur (Muktyālā)</i>	18th <i>chātur</i> mās. Situated on the banks of Krishnā in Andhra. Composes <i>Yuvashikshā, Vriddhashikshā And Streeshikshā</i> . After the stay, proceeds to Peethapuram to rediscover the birthplace of Shripad Shrivallabh. Accompanies Brahmanand Saraswati to Rajamahendri to install a Triumph idol of Lord Dattātreyā.
1909	<i>Pavani</i>	19th <i>chātur</i> mās. On the bank of Wainaganga, near Nagapur. Crowds of devotees from all over India gathered, performing numerous yadnyas and festivities. Shri Vāmanrāo from Kudutri near Kolhāpur, (Yogiraj Gulavani Mahārāj) received initiation here in the company of elder brother Shri Shankarrao, mother Umabai and Sister Godāvāri. Proceeds via Mahur, Ājegaon, Renāpur, Bārsi to Wadi for a stay of four months. From Wadi travels south to...

1910	<i>Havanur</i>	20th <i>chātur</i> mās. Shri Vāmanrāo Gulavani is the first to seek out Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and is blessed with his exclusive company for 10-12 days, exposition of Gitā and finally a vision of Shri Dattaprabhu clad in tiger-skin. From here Shri Mahārāj proceeded along the banks of Tungabhadrā, to Shringeri and then to Gokarna, Galgali and lands in Kurugaddi near Rāichur.
1911	<i>Kurugaddi</i>	21st <i>chātur</i> mās. This remote and inaccessible island set in the river Krishnā is considered its umbilicus and is blessed by Shripāda Shrivallabh whose temple was renovated by Shri Mahārāj. Even here devotees thronged from all over India as soon as the news of Swāmi's stay spread, braving the monsoon floods and other hardships. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj stayed here up to Gurudwādashi. He then proceeded north, via Yellora, Chalisgaon, and Dharmapuri to.
1912	<i>Chikhalada</i>	22nd <i>chātur</i> mās. After a stay of 6-7 months he crossed the dense forest of Shulpāneeshawar near Katarkheda. He was guided by Ashwatthāmā. Thus he arrived for his final <i>chātur</i> mās on the banks of Narmadā.
1913	<i>Garudeshwar</i>	23rd <i>chātur</i> mās. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj arrived here on 6th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra and stayed till the end. Soon the remote temple, believed to be to be the site of the penance of Garuda, was bustling with the devotees of Mahārāj. Hundreds came and left every day over the next year and a quarter. Thousands used to be there on any typical day. It became a place of pilgrimage and remains so to date. After the summer of 1914, the chronic dysentery flared up and his health started rapidly deteriorating. As had been his practice all his life, he trusted only one healer, his master and Lord Shri Dattaprabhu! As soon Amāvāsyā of Jyeshtha month gave way to the first day of Ashadha, (Tuesday, Ardrā Nakshatra, uttarayan), he sat siddhāsana facing the idol of Shri Datta, his eyes in a Tratak, with a deep and sonorous chant of "Om", he left the physical frame in a final, controlled exhalation! Shri Guru Dev Datta

Appendix II.

Literary Works.

Following table summarizes the literary works of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. These were published by Swāmiji's prime disciple, Yogiraj Shri Gulavani Mahārāj of Pune, at Hyderabad(Andhra Pradesh), about 40 years ago, with the help of a learned and devoted editorial team led by venerable Brahmashri Shri Datta Mahārāj Kavishwar. The works of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj have been described by the venerated Shri Dhundhiraj Mahārāj Kavishwar, as "extraordinary, divinely inspired, spontaneous, pleasant, suffused with divine benediction, fulfilling to the recipient... authentic, self-evident and bestowing wishes"

It needs to be emphasized here that this holy body of valuable and varied literature was the creation of a poor Brahmin from a remote village in coastal Maharashtra, who had very limited facilities and practically no access to any library. Most of the cultural treasure was composed in his itinerant life, with neither fixed home nor any assured source of food nor any comforts nor leisure normally considered essential for creative writing. All his life Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was afflicted by physical ailments and braved adverse climate. One of his major Sanskrit works, *Shri Gurusamhitā (Samashloki)*, all of its 7000 stanzas, was written when he was suffering from plague.

Even after a century, Swāmiji's works have not only survived but continues to nourish the faith of thousands of devotees of Lord Dattatreya who find in his works the divine guidance and solace. Several authorities have compared his works with those of Shri Day Shankaracharya, for its vast scope and extent, spiritual depth, great variety and most of all, the vibrant divinity. Marāthi and Sanskrit are two languages in which his literary genius finds a multifaceted expression. The subject of these writings are the life, philosophy and worship of

the Great Lord Dattatreya and His two incarnations in the Kali Yuga, Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narsimh Saraswati.

Brno.	Composition	Year	Place
1	Shri Gurucharitam (Dwisahasri)	1889	Mangaon Maharashtra
2	Shri Dattapurana	1892	Brahmavarta UP
3	Shri Dattalilamritabdhisar.	1897	Petlad MP
4	Dwisahasri (Commentary) with Yogarahasya, Bodharahasya & Churnika.	1898	Prabhaspattan and Dwaraka Gujarat
5	Shri Dattapurana Commentary.	1899	Siddhashram Gujarat
6	Magh Mahatmya	1900	Chikhalada MP
7	Shri Dattamahatmya	1901	Mahatpur MP
8	Shri Dattakavya (Trishati)	1901	Mahatpur MP
9	Shri Gurusamhita (Samashloki)	1902	Brahmavarta UP
10	Laghu-Vasudeva-manansār.	1903	Brahmavarta UP
11	Saptashati Gurucharitra Sār	1904	Brahmavarta UP
12	Shri Krishnalahari	1904	On the way to Ganagapur
13	Shri Dattachampu	1905	Narasi Maharashtra
14	Kumarshiksha	1907	Hampi Karnataka
15	Samashloki Churnika	1907	Sandhyamandap Thanjavur Tamilnadu.
16	Shri Krishnalahari Commentary	1907	Sandhyamandap Thanjavur Tamilnadu.
17	Yuvashiksha & Vriddhashiksha	1908	Muktyala Andhra P.
18	Streeshiksha	1908	Muktyala Andhra P.
19	Panch Pakshik.		

These works, however are by no means not constrained by, or limited to the subjects and encompass, in the author's lucid and authentic style, the doctrines, rituals and the mythology of Vedic religion, their relevance to human life and directions for appropriate religious and spiritual practices. The works range from simple rhythmic devotional songs in Marāthi to ornate, profound Sanskrit poetry set to specific meters. He has also written flowing commentaries on some of his more important works that display his vast and deep knowledge not only of the Vedic and scriptural literature, but even of grammar, Ayurveda, astrology and other Indian sciences. His works thus comprise a priceless treasure of Indian cultural heritage.

Major portion of these works are in Sanskrit. This is because Sanskrit is the traditional medium of philosophical and spiritual writings in India. It was more widely understood in comparison to any other Indian language among Hindu intellectuals, at least until the Macaulay's education "de-Hinduized" Hindu intellectuals⁵⁰. After independence, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar even sponsored an amendment to make Sanskrit the official language of India (10th September, 1949), which was unfortunately defeated. Thus the preference shown by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj to Sanskrit was only natural.

Another reason for his preference to Sanskrit was that the major work on Datta tradition *Gurucharitra* was in Marāthi. This had evidently restricted the Datta sect mostly to Maharashtra. At the outset of *Samashloki Gurusanhita* (verse-to-verse translation of *Gurucharitra*) the author says, "Since

⁵⁰ "Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully; we find it difficult to provide instruction to all. The effect of this education on Hindus is prodigious. No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respected classes 30 years hence. And this will be effected without our efforts to proselytize; I heartily rejoice in the prospect." Lord Macaulay to his evangelist father in a letter dated October 12, 1836.

Marāthi language is not understood by all, I am composing this work in simple Sanskrit.⁵¹" Obviously it was his intense urge to make the doctrines, rituals, mythology and practices of Datta tradition accessible to a comprehensive audience that led him to compose major portions of his works in Sanskrit. His choice is vindicated by the increasing popularity of the translations of his major Sanskrit works (*Dattapurana*, *Dwisāhasri* & *Samashloki*) in regional languages viz. Gujarati, Telugu, Hindi etc.)

Not that he neglected his mother tongue (Marāthi) or the vast masses that did not understand Sanskrit. He has a plethora of literature in Marāthi language. His *Dattamāhātmya* remains even today his most popular work. This, the author himself has made clear, is a Marāthi adaptation of the *Upāsana Kānd* of *Dattapurana*. However, Swāmi Mahārāj has enriched it by inclusion of his commentary and discussions of *Dnyān*, *Karma* and *Yoga*. In the last 13 chapters of this holy book, by aligning of every third letter of each *Owi* (verse), one gets the *Mantras* of *Māndukya* and *Isha Upanishads*. There are many other hymns and works of Mahārāj which are thus "stringed" with *Mantras*. In this way he has provided a way for "indirectly" reciting the Vedic *Mantras* for women and lower castes that are not permitted to chant these by scriptural injunction.

A comprehensive review of all the works of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj is far beyond the scope of this book. Suffice to say here that Shri Mahārāj has left behind a large body of literature in which every person may discover his own path to the grace of Lord Dattatreya. Thousands of devotees continue to seek solace in the one or the other work of Shri Mahārāj and benefit from it in their temporal and spiritual lives.

⁵¹ महाराष्ट्रीयभाषा तु न सर्वविषयोचिता। अतः सुगमया देवाण्येदं तन्यते मितम् (मया)।।१:६।।

Appendix III.

Major Disciples.

We have tried to convey the wide range of disciples guided by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj on a variety of spiritual disciplines in the chapter on “Seekers of Truth”. Many of his disciples were mentioned therein to illustrate the versatility and potency of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj as a perfect master in the genuine tradition of Gurus. Among his thousands of disciples, there were dozens, perhaps hundreds that attained Self-Realization, many, indeed most of them remain unknown, given their innate aversion for publicity. We are trying to briefly record some of the disciples who were, in their own right, saints and Gurus and have thousands of followers all over the world. This is by no means a comprehensive review but the masters reported here are fairly representative.

Shri Narasinh Saraswati (Dixit) Swāmi (1866-1927):- Born in a religious Brahmin family (Dixit) at Sadalge near Narasobawadi and named Nārāyan, he joined English school in Miraj. Once a friend of his father chastised him for his western style of living in contrast to the family tradition. Deeply affected he left the English school and came to Narasobawadi, devoting himself to the study of scriptures. This was around the same time as Shri Vasudeva Shastri's one year stay prior to renunciation. Nārāyan sought his guidance at the instance of his father. He dedicated himself to the ideals of Shri Mahārāj and even after the latter's departure, continued to lead a devoted life in Wadi. He lost his wife and son to the plague and was himself afflicted by the same. Apprehensive of death, he got himself initiated to *Ātur Sannyas*. On recovering from the illness he sought out Shri Swāmi Mahārāj who was on his way to Wadi, and requested him to bestow the sceptre. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj sent him back to

Wadi. After arriving at Wādi, Shri Mahārāj refused to confer the sceptre on Shri Dixit Swāmi, for want of the “Lord's command”. Dixit Swāmi was sorely disappointed and spent the night standing in poignant prayer outside the chambers of Shri Mahārāj. The same night Shri Mahārāj was directed by Shri Dattaprabhu to grant the wish of Shri Dixit Swāmi. Accordingly Shri Mahārāj gave him the sceptre and the name of Shri Narasinh Saraswati.

He was also known as Shri Dixit Swāmi Mahārāj. He spent most of his life at Wadi in the service of Lord Dattatreya following the directions of his Guru Shri Swāmi Mahārāj who was also very proud of him and sited his example as an ideal *Sanyasi*. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj used to send the manuscripts of his works to Shri Dixit Swāmi Mahārāj. He left standing instructions to the priests of Wadi to obey Dixit Swāmi. He has a substantial following and his major disciple Brahmashri Datta Mahārāj Kavishwar is a well-known scholar and saint.

Shri Dixit Swāmi left Narasobawadi Wadi towards the end of his life for pilgrimage and established *Shri Vāsudevānand Saraswati Peetha* at Aurawad (Amarapur) in 1923AD. He breathed his last to enter eternal life at Ayodhya in 1927AD.

Shri Yogānanda Saraswati (*Shri Gāndā Mahārāj* – 1868-1929) Born of Gujrati Brahmin parents (Desai) on the day of Dattajayanti (birth anniversary of Lord Datta) in Telangpur (Dist. Surat) he was named Kalyān. As he grew up into a rather simple and guileless boy, he got the nickname of Gāndā. Married at a young age of 8 yrs., he finished school and worked for a merchant. Even though financially well, he did not find contentment in the worldly life and travelled extensively in search of a spiritual guide (Guru). When he returned home, his urge for spiritual life became acute and he became restless. Failing to find happiness in sensual pleasures, he spent his days

on the banks of Narmadā, offering service to the Brahmins there. His father, unhappy with his waywardness scolded him. He then left home again and started living as a hermit under a banyan tree. He was directed by one saint, Pandurang Mahārāj to do penance at Nemawar where he came to know about Shri Tembe Swāmi Mahārāj, then staying at nearby Shinor.

Shri Mahārāj instructed Gāndābuwā in Yoga and directed him to practice the same in a Shiva temple in Nikoda. After some days he asked Gāndābuwā to go to his parents and seek their pardon and permission to pursue spiritual life. Accordingly, Gāndābuwā went home and pleaded with his parents. Convinced that their son was not cut out for family life, they agreed to let him follow the spiritual path on conditions that, 1) He should be present at the time of their death, 2) perform their last rites and 3) arrange his daughter's marriage. When Gāndābuwā returned to Shri Mahārāj at Dwārakā and conveyed the conditions of his parents. Shri Mahārāj assured him that these would be fulfilled.

Shri Gāndābuwā spent the rest of his life in the service of his Guru Shri Swāmi Mahārāj who led him through higher and higher Yogic practices to final goal of self-realization. Gāndābuwā was an ideal disciple who scrupulously followed his Guru's wishes, whether express or implicit. By Shri Guru's grace, he was by the bedside of his mother at the time of her death by plague(1903) and performed her last rites. Soon after, he married off his daughter; she unfortunately died by drowning, followed six months later by her husband's death. Shri Mahārāj had predicted these events. He also looked after his father until his death (1918).

After the Mahāsamādhi of Shri Mahārāj, Gāndābuwā following the instructions of Mahārāj, took Sannyas and spent his last years at Gunj (Dist. Parabhani, Maharashtra) where he wrote a detailed life of Shri Mahārāj in 15000 verses in Marāthi.

Being a Gujarathi by birth, he thought the composition should be edited by someone who knows Marāthi. Shri Mahārāj assured him in a dream that "The Brahmachari is coming." Gāndābuwā did not even know that the Brahmachari referred to was another major disciple of Shri Mahārāj, Shri Rang Avadhut Mahārāj who had just completed the 108 Saptah of Shri Datta Puran and was about to set off on Narmadā Parikrama (circumvolution). The Avadhut was told by Shri Mahārāj that "Gāndā is waiting for you." Shri Rang Avadhut Mahārāj then sought out Shri Gāndābuwā. He not only completed the editing of the voluminous tome but even arranged for its publication.

Shri Gāndābuwā left his mortal frame, sitting on Padmāsan and loudly chanting "Om!", Phalgun Vadya 12, 1929.

Shankarāchārya of Karavir and Sankeshwar:- Shirol is a small town near Wadi. Shankara was a son of born in the Kulkarni family there. He completed school and was married at an early age. Being spiritually inclined, he liked to read religious books like Dāsabodha and Dnyāneshwari. As the fate would have it, he lost his young daughter, and a couple of years later also his wife. This accentuated his natural inclination to renounce family life. Being the only son, his parents would not permit. Finally Shankarrao convinced his parents to adopt a child and left home in search of Guru and reached Kāshi. There he was directed by on Pragnyānānand Saraswati to P.P. Shri Tembe Swāmi Mahārāj, then staying at Brahmāvarta. Thus he came under the tutelage of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj who imparted him some preliminary Yogic training and discerning his musical talent, composed some *Kirtanas* for him to perform. During his stay with Shri Mahārāj, Shankarrao was greatly influenced by his detachment (See page 29) and Yogic powers. Shankarrao and Shri Sitārāmabuwā were once caught in a storm. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, divining this went inside his cottage and sat in meditation, causing the storm to subside. After some days, Shri

Mahārāj advised Shankarrāo to learn Sanskrit since “the real bliss can be had only through the study of Vedānta”, and sent him to one Nārāyana Shastri of Ekasambe. After studying Sanskrit and scriptures there he learnt about the Shringeri Shankarāchārya. Proceeding there, he immersed himself in the study of Vedānta for 12 years subsisting on a diet of neem (margosa) leaves. Eventually, donning ochre robes, he became the Shakarāchārya of Karavir seat. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj sent him a copy of Adi Shankara’s commentary on Brahma sutra, in his own hand. The pontiff always lovingly d this as a mark of the grace of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, which he believed to have caused his elevation.

Brahmānand Saraswati of Nellore: - Born at Mangal Giri near Bezawada in Govindarāju family he was named Ramachandra (Ramappa). He was devoted to Lord Dattatreya and used to visit Wadi. He later took Sannyas and was close to the then Shringeri Shankarāchārya, Shri Nrisinh Bharati. (See “Realised Souls”). At his instance, Shri Mahārāj installed a three-headed idol of Lord Datta (Bhaktavatsal Datta) at Rajamahendri. He was with Shri Mahārāj in his last Chāturmās in Garudeshwar. Following the directions of Shri Mahārāj, he established the temple of Shri Nrisinh Saraswati at his birthplace Kāranjā.

Shri Sitārām Mahārāj Tembe (1858-1919):- This younger brother of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj received his instructions and guidance since childhood. He wanted to accompany Shri Mahārāj when he left Mānagāon (1899) but was dissuaded by the elder brother. Following the directive of Mahārāj he looked after his mother for five years after which he developed a strong urge to visit his brother and left Mangaon in search of him. On the way he stayed at Gwalior and studied scriptures for three years. Following the trace of his Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, he went to Haridwār where he met Shri Nārāyana Mahārāj Jālawanakar, an

accomplished Yogi. After receiving advanced Yogic training from him, Sitārārāma learnt from him that Shri Mahārāja’s whereabouts. Accordingly, he went to Brahmavart and sought the blessings of Shri Mahārāj. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj directed him to carry out *Gāyatri Purasharan*. He completed the arduous penance in about three years. Shri Mahārāj stayed in Brahmavart for this period. After this, he was again separated. Shri Sitārārāma Mahārāj was an accomplished Yogi and a learned scholar. He had acquired the mystical technique to convert copper to gold (*kimayā*). He performed great Yadnyas with the wealth thus created. He used to sport a lavish lifestyle but was not dependent on it. He spent extended periods of austerities also. His Yadnya at Rājpur was attended by Shri Mahārāj and many other saintly figures of the day.

He was very much distressed when Shri Mahārāj left his physical body. In response to his intense prayers Shri Mahārāj appeared to him and granted him freedom from the limitations of physical body (*Videhi Avasthā*). In 1919, he “donated” 16 years of his own life to one devotee, Hemarāj Mākhādi of Hingoli and accepted his ailment. Subsequently his health rapidly deteriorated and he came to Badanerā. There he left his body by Yogic process sitting in lotus position under a *peepul* tree. (Phalgun Vadya 8).

Shri Rang Avadhut Mahārāj: - Shri Vitthalbhatta Valāme, a religious Brahmin of Devale in coastal Maharashtra (Konkan) migrated to Godharā in Gujarat to serve as a priest in a temple of Vitthala. A son was born to his wife Rukma on the auspicious day of Gokulashtami (birth anniversary of Lord Krishna). Named Pāndurang, the boy was highly intelligent and deeply religious. Soon after the untimely death of his father, Pāndurang and his younger brother Nārāyan were taken to Devale for thread ceremony. After the ceremony his mother took him to Narasobawadi where he was blessed by P.P.Shri Tembe Swāmi Mahārāj who placed his hand on Pānduranga’s head

saying “This boy belongs to me!” This contact transformed the young boy’s life and the experience filled his consciousness, the voice of Shri Mahārāj echoing in his ears. Soon after he saw a holy person in his dream who commanded him to “Read the holy book.” Later he got a copy of Gurucharitra from his maternal uncle, who, in turn had received it from Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi. Pāndurang started reading the holy book regularly scrupulously observing the rules prescribed for it.

This was the only physical contact that Pāndurang had with Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, though all his life he received guidance from his Guru through dreams, trances etc.

Pāndurang was educated up to graduation (B.A.) and started teaching Sanskrit. He was also well-versed in Marāthi, Hindi and Gujarathi. He came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi and also participated in the national movement. He continued his religious and Yogic practices and had grown hair and beard, because of which he acquired the epithet of Bāpaji.

Once a Sanyasi approached him with a request to write a hymn to Dattatreya for him because he had been told in a dream that he will achieve *Paramapada* (the ultimate religious state) by reciting the hymn ten thousand times. Accordingly, Bāpaji wrote a hymn for him. This Sanyasi was later elevated to Dwārakā Peetha (Shri Chandrashekhara Swāmi).

Soon after, Bāpaji was directed by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj to perform 108 readings of Shri Dattapurana. Following the instructions of a saint, he came to Nareshwar on the banks of Narmadā. This Shiva temple was located in a dense forest teaming with wild beasts, snakes and other dangerous creatures. Being the cremation ground for seven villages, it was considered a haunted place. Against the advice of his well-wishers, Bāpaji chose the place for the penance and completed the 108 readings of the Puran as per the instructions of his Master. Even as he was to set off on the *Narmadā Parikramā* as a ritual fulfilment (*Sāngatā*) of the penance, he was ordered by Shri Mahārāj to

visit Shri Gāndābuwa to edit his recently completed *Gurumurticharitra*.

After finishing the work in Gunj and the *Narmadā Parikrama*, Bāpaji went to Sākori to visit Shri Upāsani Baba, a disciple of Sai Baba; and later, the saint of Shirdi who received him with great love and respect, addressing him as Avadhut, made him sit by his side and told him, “Go Avadhut! People are waiting for you! Emancipate them! Whenever you meditate on me, I shall be with you!”

Bāpaji finally settled down in Nāreshwar where devotees thronged in thousands from all over Gujarat and India and desolate forest grew into a bustling Ashram. His ailing brother joined him there with mother and died soon after. His mother stayed on at Nareshwar and Bāpaji served her diligently and devoutly till the end. After the death of his mother in 1968, he left Nareshwar and travelled to Haridwār visiting several; holy places on the way. Finally, on 19th November, 1968, after feeding several Sadhus, he left his physical frame to be united with Shriguru.

Shri Rang Avadhut Mahārāj was instrumental in spreading the Dattatreya sect throughout Gujarat, where it was hardly known at the beginning of 20th century. Through Bāpaji’s influence, the Datta worship has spread to all corners of Gujarat. He has a large following and his dedicated disciples are spreading his mission all over the world. The Avadhut has left substantial body of literature in Gujarathi, Sanskrit and Marāthi. His *Gurulilāmrut* in Gujarathi is read by thousands of devotees. It includes the accounts of the lives of Bhagawan Dattatreya, Shripad Shrivallabh, Shri Nrisinha Saraswati and Shri Tembe Swāmi Mahārāj. *Dattabāvani* is a Gujarathi hymn of 52 verses dedicated to Shriguru and is regularly recited by thousands of devotees all over the world.

Yogirāj Gulavani Mahārāj:- The *Gulavanis* of Kaulav, a tiny village in mountainous Radhanagri taluqa of Kolhapur district of Maharashtra, were Vedic Brahmins devoted to Dattatreya. They were recipients of the benediction of the great 18th century saint Shri Nārāyana Swāmi. As pledged to the Swāmi, one of the sons from each generation was dedicated to the service of Mahalaxmi in Kolhapur. Dattatreya Gulavani migrated to nearby Kudutri after his second marriage to Umābai since his first wife had died young without any issue.

Dattātreya and Umābai were greatly devoted to Lord Dattatreya. The couple used to regularly visit Narasobāwādi, which was about 6 hours by horse ride, on each full-moon day. They observed this vow with determination for 22 years, in addition to the regular religious practices. In due course the couple was blessed by four sons. However, the couple wanted some sign of the grace of their beloved Lord Dattatreya and they prayed continuously and intensely for this. Around this time Umābai conceived again. The righteous lady intensified her prayers and religious services. Getting no sign of divine grace, she took to fasting, neglecting her delicate physical condition and the admonitions of her husband and other members of the family. Six days went by and Umābai became very weak and spent all her time in the shrine. On the 7th day, around midday, she was sitting in front of the idol, very much exhausted, chanting prayers with closed eyes, she felt something drop in her lap. When she opened her eyes, she found to her joyful surprise two small silver *Padukās* smeared with scented sandal paste. She quickly turned to look at the door and saw a tall, radiant *Sanyasi* quickly leaving through it. She showed the propitious gift to her eldest son who ran after the *Sanyasi* but could find no trace. Dattambhat (Ābā) learnt of the benediction after he returned from his religious services.

Around the same time on the birth anniversary of Lord Dattatreya, Ābā went to Wadi and was bathing the Nirgun

Padukas with water when he heard someone say “I am pleased with you”. He looked around but found only the Padukas. Two weeks after this episode (Mārgashirsha Vadya 13, 1886AD), Umābai gave birth to a son who was named Vāman.

Vāman spent his childhood in Kudutri, attending school in nearby Tārāle. After the fourth year, Vāman went to Kolhapur for further education. Simultaneously he also attended the Sanskrit Pāthashālā of Pt. Pitre. He used to learn lessons by heart in just a single reading. Throughout his school years Vāman won scholarships. His teachers recognised his talent in painting and encouraged him to appear for the state level examinations in drawing. After his success in the first two examinations, joined J.J.School of Arts of Mumbai for further education, but had to forgo his matriculation in the process.

It was during his stay in Mumbai that he received a letter from his elder brother Shri Shankar Shastri asking him to come to Narasobawadi to be introduced to P.P.Shri Tembe Swāmi Mahārāj staying there at the time. Discerning Vāman’s artistic talent, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj had directed him to paint a likeness of Lord Dattatreya wearing a garland setting in its flowers the letters of a verse from Trishati (3:102) set in Hārabandh. On the auspicious day of Shri Gurudwadashi (Anniversary of the disappearance of Shripād Vallabha) in 1907 AD, Vāman prostrated before Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and presented to him the exquisite painting of Dattatreya incorporating the said verse as a garland of alphabets. Pleased with the picture, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj blessed Vāman and gave him a *Yantra* to tie on his wrist to ward off all harm and evil. Yogiraj, as Vāman came to be known later, wore the Yantra all his life.

Vāmanrāo returned to Mumbai to resume his studies. During his stay in Mumbai, Vāmanrāo went to see Shri Nārāyan Mahārāj of Kedagaon who had come in the neighbourhood. Even as Vāmanrāo saluted the saint, the latter instead of blessing

him, returned the salutation. This surprised everyone including Shri Vāmanrāo.

After completing the training in Mumbai, just as the final examination of teacher's grade approached, Vāmanrāo was struck with an intractable fever which forced him to return to Kudutri. The fever turned out to be plague. The entire village was vacated. Because of Vāmanrāo's sister-in-law's confinement, the Gulavanis could not leave. Dozens of dead rats used to drop in the house every day and the village was inundated with rains. As a precaution Vāmanrāo was shifted to Hanumān temple and everyone gave up on his survival. However, Vāmanrāo had strong faith in the *Yantra* bestowed by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and fearlessly suffered the infliction. His faith was borne out and he made a complete recovery. Immediately he carried out a *Saptāh* of *Gurucharitra*. Subsequently he went to Wadi and completed seven consecutive *Saptāhas*.

Thus, for no fault of his, Vāmanrāo was unable to take the crucial examinations of matriculation and the teacher's grade in drawing. He could have taken them later; but considering these as divine will, decided not to pursue further studies. Instead, he made Self-realization as the sole objective of his life. He even dissuaded his mother from arranging his marriage saying his horoscope did not have any marital sign. Around this time, Vāmanrāo started performing 1200 *Gayatri* chants (*Japa*) daily.

In 1909 Vāmanrāo lost his father. Soon thereafter, he accompanied his mother, sister Godavari and his brother Shankar Shastri to Pavani near Nagpur where Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was camping for *Chāturmas*. Along with his family members, Vāmanrāo also received *Mantradiksha* (initiation) from Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. Later Vāmanrāo went back to Mumbai looking for a job. After a few months of futile search, he went to Ganagapur and embarked on seven *Saptaha*. After

completing six readings of *Gurucharitra*, he met a *Ramal*⁵² astrologer. Vāmanrāo asked him the question uppermost in his mind, "How soon shall I meet Shri Guru Mahārāj". The astrologer told him that if the meeting does not occur in six months, he will never see his Sadguru.

Vāmanrāo took this very seriously since *Ramal* predictions were reputed to be accurate. He became so anxious to set off in search of Mahārāj that he completed the 7th reading in a single day. Handing over his umbrella to the priest towards dedicatory rituals, he embarked on an odyssey almost penniless, not knowing the whereabouts of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, braving the scorching heat of summer. The account of his eventual meeting with Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. The 10-day stay and the climactic vision of Shri Datta Prabhu have been described in the 12th chapter.

Vāmanrāo continued to seek the company of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj and met him again at Pimpri near Hingoli and even travelled with him to Aundha Nāganāth where he received Shri Guru's guidance in *Yogāsanas* and attended discourses on *Mandukya* and *Aitareya*, two of the major *Upanishads*.

Vāmanrāo was refused permission to join Shri Swāmi Mahārāj in his *Chāturmas* at Chikhalada. Instead he was directed to complete a *Purashcharan* of *Shri Dattamalamantra* at Audumbar. He completed this penance in 40 days. When he communicated this to Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, the latter asked Vāmanrāo to join him at Garudeshwar, where Vāmanrāoji made the most of the opportunity to serve his Guru. He won the heart of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj with his diligent, untiring and ardent service. Because of his excellent handwriting, he was assigned the duty of writing letters for Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. This was an onerous task because Shri Swāmi Mahārāj received literally hundreds of letters daily.

⁵² A technique of prediction by dice

Vāmanrāo had taken the picture of Shri Datta Bhagawan clad in tiger-skin he had drawn as envisioned by him. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj got it framed and placed on a small table and started offering regular worship to it. This continued for the five months of Vamanrao's stay at Garudeshwar. When Vāmanrāo was leaving Garudeshwar, Shri Swāmi Mahārāj handed the picture to him which Vāmanrāo made a part of his daily worship which continues till this day at Shri Vasudeva Nivas, Pune.

Within a few months of Vāmanrāo's departure from Garudeshwar, he received the news of the dissolution of the physical frame of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. (23-6-1914). During these four years, Shri Vāmanrāo established himself as a photographer in Kolhapur. The reigning monarch Chhatrapati Shahu Mahārāj was one of his patrons. In 1917, he went to Barshi as a drawing teacher and continued to serve there up to 1926.

Though he was very devoted, conscientious and popular teacher, the main goal of his life was Self-realization and all his spare time was occupied by religious and Yogic practices. Though he was by this time an accomplished Yogi himself and many sincere students of Yoga in Barshi took lessons from him with great benefit, Vāmanrāo himself was restless. With the departure of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj, he felt spiritually orphaned. Following the guidelines of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj he intensified his efforts to awaken *Kundalini* – the dormant inner spiritual power that when awakened, conducts the aspirant through progressively higher Yogic stages culminating in Self-realization. This mobilization of *Kundalini*, the serpent power, is a very arduous process beset with many risks. For this reason, it should be practiced under the close supervision of a master Yogi. Shri Vāmanrāo sought help from several known contemporary masters but with no success. Finally his brother disciple Shri Govind Mahārāj Pandit undertook to guide him.

Thus one fine day, he set off for Hoshangabad on the banks of Narmadā, with a couple of friends and his mother, to practice advanced Yoga. By a strange coincidence, while Shri Vāmanrāo was camping on the southern bank of Narmadā, a young monk (30 years at the time) from Dhaka in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Swāmi Chinmayanand, landed on the northern bank. Swāmiji, adept in the *Shaktipāt* Yoga, had come to Hoshangabad from Himalayas following the insistent directive of Divine Mother to “Proceed to South”. Shri Vāmanrāo soon came into the contact with Swāmiji through the likeminded Yoga students in Hoshangabad. A strong spiritual bond soon developed between the two. Shri Vāmanrāo received directions from Shri Swāmi Mahārāj in a dream to “acquire the discipline of *Shaktipāt* Yoga from the Bengali Swāmi who has been brought here for you.” After some initial hesitation, Swāmiji, who recognized the sincerity, determination and diligence of Shri Vāmanrāo, initiated him in the *Kudalini Shaktipāt* Yoga. (1922AD).

As a result of Vāmanrāo's Yogic accomplishments, his deeply religious background and conscientious efforts, he progressed speedily and was soon authorized by Shri Swāmi Chinmayanand (later known as P.P. Shri Lokanātha Tirth Swāmi) to initiate seekers to *Shaktipāta* Yoga. In 1924, Shri Vāmanrāoji Gulavani shifted to Pune where he continued to reside till the last. It will be appropriate now to refer to him as Yogiraj Gulavani Mahārāj.

He led a very quiet and simple but strictly disciplined life as a drawing teacher in Nutan Marāthi Vidyalaya, Pune, staying in two-room tenement with his widowed mother and sister, who were both disciples of P.P. Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. Initially his esoteric achievements were known only to a few close people. Even though Shri Lokanātha Tirth Swāmi Mahārāj had authorized him, initially, Shri Yogiraj preferred to refer aspirants to Shri Swāmiji for initiation. Over time, he was more

forthcoming in this respect. The circle of disciples slowly grew to a large size and many prominent personalities sought his initiation. Among them was Pandit V.D.Satavalekar, 20 years older than Shri Yogiraj, and very well known for his work on Vedic texts. Sir Chunilal Shah KCI, one-time finance minister of Bombay Presidency also became his disciple. Another outstanding person who came to Shri Yogiraj, was Shri Tryambak Shastri Khare who later became Jagadguru Shankarāchārya of Jagannāthapuri. An article by Shri Khare Shastri was instrumental in spreading the fame of ShriYogiraj and a growing stream of seekers from all over India, indeed all over the world started flowing in. Thousands of aspirants from all walks of life sought the grace of Shri Yogiraj. These included professionals, industrialists, learned scholars, peasants, priests and even Sanyasis.

Initially Shri Yogiraj was reluctant to initiate Sanyasis as he considered them to be his Gurus. But once Swāmi Pradnyānānand Saraswati (Karve Swāmi) came to Pune and expressed his desire to be initiated. After a lot of prevarication, Shri Yogiraj had to acquiesce and he offered the initiation as a “service” after due worship to the Swāmi. Several Sanyasis received initiation after that.

In 1947, Shri Yogiraj lost his mother. Five years later he lost his elder brother Shri Swāmi Shankaranand (1952) and sister Godavari. These were very painful bereavements to Shri Yogiraj.

In 1955 (10th February), P.P. Shri Lokanatha Tirtha Swāmi Mahārāj left his mortal frame in Kāshi. Shri Yogiraj deeply revered ‘Bengali Swāmiji’, as he was referred to in Maharashtra, though the Swāmi was six years younger in age. Shri Swāmiji also loved Shri Yogiraj as a son, addressing him as “Vāman”, as evidenced by his frequent and long visits to Pune. He had often indicated to his close disciples that “Myself and Vāman are one!”

In 1950, a committee of eleven members was established under the chairmanship of Shri Yogiraj to publish the entire available works of P.P. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāj. Pandit Dattatreya Shastri Kavishwar was assigned secretarial responsibilities. With the untiring efforts of Pt. Kavishwar Shastri (who later succeeded Shri Yogiraj as chief trustee of Vasudev Nivas and spiritual guide) and his team, the complete works of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj were published in 12 volumes in five years. Financial, material and editorial assistance was received from the followers of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj from all over India. The celebration of the fifty-first birth anniversary of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj was highlighted by the publication of the final volume. This is one of the signal contributions of Shri Yogiraj towards the propagation of the mission of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj.

Despite the innate aversion of Shri Yogiraj towards any publicity, his fame spread all over India and abroad. His 71st birth anniversary (1957) was celebrated by his devotees with enthusiastic participation of all sections of citizenry. The famous *Vārakari* saint Shri Sonopant Dāndekar asserted that Shri Vāmanrāoji was being honoured because he could convert even a modern sceptic into a believer by imparting divine experience. Sainly figures like P.P. Shridhar Swāmi of Samartha tradition, Shri Rang Avadhut Mahārāj of Narehwar, Shri Golawalkar Guruji of RSS, Shri Upalekar Mahārāj of Phaltan, Shri Baba Mahārāj Arvikar, Shri Samarth Nana Mahārāj Taranekar etc. developed close and mutually respectful relationship with you.

The floods caused by the breach of Pānashet dam in 1961 were devastating to the humble tenement where Shri Yogiraj lived. He had to take shelter in a temple and his lovingly built library as well as the stock of the books of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj were destroyed. He could no more resist the caring entreaties of his devotees – especially that of Pt. Datta Shastri Kavishwar, to let them construct an *Āshrama*. Thus *Vasudeva Nivas* came into

being in the year 1965, which not only served as a residence for Shri Yogiraj but also as a centre for propagation of the works and mission of Shri Tembe Swāmi Mahārāj and the *Shaktipāta Yoga* of Shri Lokanāth Tirth Swāmi Mahārāj, during and after the corporeal life of Shri Yogiraj.

Shri Yogiraj Gulavani Mahārāj transformed the lives of each and every person he came into contact, whether his disciple or not. He directed thousands of lives towards the divine and continues to do so even after the dissolution of his physical body on 15th January 1974. Many devotees, including this humble writer, firmly believe and experience the uplifting presence of Shri Yogiraj in the Vasudev Nivas Ashram.

Shri Nānā Mahārāj Tarānekar :- The *Joshis* of Tarāne near Indore were well to do Vedic Brahmins. Shri Shankar Shastri was a spiritually inclined and learned Brahmin and was a disciple of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj who had stayed in Tarāne on his way to Ujjain for receiving the sceptre. He had two sons, Gangādhar and Mārtand. The latter was born on the 5th day of the bright fortnight of *Shrāvan* (13th August) in 1896 A.D. When he was 4 years of age Shri Swāmi Mahārāj came to stay in Indore for a few weeks. During this period, he often visited the Tarānekar house. Young Mārtand used to sit in the lap of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj who lovingly gave him grapes raisins.

Soon after the thread ceremony, he got a strong urge to be initiated by an able Guru. He approached his father Shri Shankar Shastri who directed him to perform *Saptah* readings of *Shri Gurucharitra*. Eight-year old Nānā, as he was fondly addressed, immediately embarked on the penance, on 10th October 1904. During first *Saptah* he ate one meal a day. During the 2nd *Saptah*, he ate only fruits; during third, he took only cow milk. From fourth *Saptah* onwards, he observed complete fast only drinking a small amount of *Tirth* (holy water). After seven *Saptah*, the tired and exhausted Nānā sitting in meditation, heard

the tender voice of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj calling him “My child! Why are you offering such a severe penance? What is your wish?” Nānā expressed his wish to be initiated by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj who blessed Nānā covering him with own *Chhati* (robe) and pronounced the *Gurumantra* in his ears. He also touched Nānā between the eyebrows and placed his right hand on Nānā’s head, sending Nānā into the trance. Waking him Shri Swāmi Mahārāj directed Nānā to follow the path of devotion. Later Nānā completed a *Gāyatri Puraṅcara*.

Shri Nānā was married at the age of 18 years. Two years later he lost his father and a few months later his mother too. Shri Nānā had to shoulder the household responsibilities, the priestly duties, the Vedic school and bringing up younger brother. Shri Nānā was blessed with a son; however within a couple of years his wife Mhālasābāi passed away. In view of the his religious and household obligations, his family prevailed on him to get married again. The second wife also named Mhālasābāi, soon died, after giving birth to a daughter. Now Shri Nānā had to be both father and mother to his children in addition to his multifarious duties.

Shri Nānā was patiently suffering the afflictions of fate and steadfastly carrying on his religious services and loving *Upāsana* of Datta Guru . His solitary succour was his Master Shri Swāmi Mahārāja, who appeared to him in dreams and directed him in every respects viz. instructing him in the complex procedures of *Yajnas*, advising him regarding the spiritual practices, asking him to go to Gānagāpur for service to Shri Datta, correcting him occasionally etc.

Around this period, Shri Nānā was visited by an accomplished Yogi from Onkāreshwar, who taught him advanced Yoga.

Following Shri Guru's direction Shri Nānā Mahārāja completed pilgrimages. He performed the elaborate Kāshi pilgrimage as laid down in the scriptures which culminated in his encounter with Lord Shiva. Similarly Shri Gopālakrishna appeared to him in Mathura. He performed the Narmadā

Pradakṣiṇi on foot, observing strict regulations. Once he did not get any food for three days and was lying half-conscious with hunger and exhaustion. Narmadā Mātā appeared to him offering a golden pot filled with thickened milk. During his Himalayan pilgrimage, he met Uddhavaji in a cave who exalted him to a blissful trance. He had several such encounters with deities and divine figures like the nine Nāthas, Ashwatthāmā etc.

As per the directed by his Master P.P. Shri Vāsudevānand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāja, he preached the path of devotion (*Bhakti Mārga*). He specially propagated

Karu,tripadē, a set of three prayers composed by Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. He postulated a simple and direct approach to Shri Dattatreya, particularly suitable for the modern humanity, benefiting thousands from all walks of life. After spreading the cult of Datta all over the world for almost the entire 20th Century, Shri Nānā Mahārāja left his mortal frame on 16th April,

1958. His *Tripadē Parivāra* is spread all over the world and is being competently nurtured and guided by the grandson of Nānā Mahārāja, Dr. Pradeep (Bābā Mahārāja) Tarānekar.

Appendix IV.

Dr̥ḥ Datt̥tr̥y̥ya NamaḌ.

[We are furnishing herewith the *Vidh̥nam* (method of worship) of the *Bejamantra* of *ārē Dattatreya* as laid down by P.P. *ārē Vāsudevānand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāj*. Transliterated text followed by the Devanagari version with explanatory notes in English.]

Pa.Pa.ārēṣud̥v̥nanda Sarasvatē (Ḍ̥mb̥) Sv̥mēpra, etāḌ

ārēdatt̥tr̥y̥yamantravidh̥nam.

ḥrē. ḥcamya, pr̥i,ṇiyamya. "mam̥bhēḌ̥jasiddhidv̥r̥i
ḥrēdatt̥tr̥y̥yapret̥yārthaḌ tanmantrajapamahaḌ kariḌy̥." (iti sa'kal̥pya) ḥsan̥di
kḥtv̥i. asya mantrasya sad̥ḥiva ḥāiḌ, ḥgyat̥rē chandaḌ, datt̥tr̥y̥° d̥vat̥i, dr̥ḥḌ
bejaḌ, namaḌ ḥaktiḌ, datt̥tr̥y̥°ti kēlakam, jap̥° viniy°gaḌ. OM dr̥ḥḌ
aḌEguḌḥḥḥbhy̥Ḍ namaḌ, OM drēḌ tarjanēbhy̥Ḍ namaḌ, OM drūḌ
madhyam̥bhy̥Ḍ namaḌ, OM draiḌ an̥mik̥bhy̥Ḍ namaḌ, OM drauḌ
kaniḌḥḥḥḥbhy̥Ḍ namaḌ, OM draḌ karatalakarap̥ḥḥḥḥbhy̥Ḍ namaḌ. °vaḌ
h̥day̥diḌ. (OM dr̥ḥḌ h̥day̥ya namaḌ, namaḌ, OM drēḌ ḥiras̥° sv̥ḥḥ, OM drūḌ
ḥikh̥yai vauḌaḥ, OM draiḌ kavac̥ya huḌ, OM drauḌ n̥°tratr̥y̥ya vauḌaḥ, OM
draḌ astr̥ya phaḥ iti digbandhaḌ.)

Dh̥y̥nam-

m̥ḥḥkama-aluḌ caiva -amaruḌ ca triḥḥlakam.

ḥa'khaḌ cakraḌ dadh̥naḌ taḌ datt̥tr̥y̥yaḌ nam̥myaham̥

M;nasapEj; - **LaE** p^othvy;tmakaE gandhaE parikalpay;mi. **HaE** jk;E;tmakaE pu^opaE parikalpay;mi. **YaE** v;t;tmakaE dhEpaE parikalpay;mi. **RaE** agny;tmakaE dEpaE parikalpay;mi. **VaE** am^o;tmakaE naiv^odyaE parikalpay;mi, **SaE** sarv;tmakaE sarv^opac;ri,i parikalpay;mi.

M;liE sampEjya -

mah;mi! mah;mi; sarva;aktisvarEpi,¢.

caturvargastvayi nyastastasm;nm^o siddhid; bhava..

Mantrajapa

Dr;E Datt;tr^oy;ya Nama 108.

Jap;nt^o m;liE Eirasi nidh;ya h^oday;di ny;sj;n k^otv;

Samarpa,a an^ona jap^ona Ercdatt;tr^oya^o p^oeyat;m.

Pr;rthan;

¢;var^o gurur;tm^oti mErtibh^odavibh;g^ona.

v^omavadvy;ptad^oh;ya dakAi;imErtay^o nama^o 1

jcamya ;san;dh^o jalaE k^oiptv; t^ona lal;g^o tilakaE kury;t.

प.प.श्रीवासुदेवानंद सरस्वती (टेंबे) स्वामीप्रणीतं श्रीदत्तात्रेयमंत्रविधानम् ।

श्रीः। आचम्य, प्राणानायम्य । "ममाभीष्टसिद्धिद्वारा श्रीदत्तात्रेयप्रीत्यर्थं तन्मंत्रजपमहं करिष्ये।" (इति संकल्प्य) आसनादि कृत्वा । अस्य मंत्रस्य सदाशिव ऋषिः, गायत्री छंदः, दत्तात्रेयो देवता, द्वां बीजं, नमः शक्तिः, दत्तात्रेयेति कीलकम्, जपे विनियोगः। उ० द्वां अंगुष्ठाभ्यां नमः, उ० द्वां तर्जनीभ्यां नमः, उ० द्वं मध्यमाभ्यां नमः, उ० द्वं अनामिकाभ्यां नमः, उ० द्वौ कनिष्ठिकाभ्यां नमः, उ० द्रः करतलकरपृष्ठाभ्यां नमः। एवं हृदयादिः। (उ० द्वां हृदयाय नमः, नमः, उ० द्वौ

शिरसे स्वाहा, उ० द्वं शिखायै वौषट्, उ० द्वौ कवचाय हुं, उ० द्वौ नेत्रत्रयाय वौषट्, उ० द्रः अस्त्राय फट् इति दिग्बंधः।)

ध्यानम्- मालां कमंडलुं चैव डमरुं च त्रिशूलकम् ।

शंख चक्रं दधानं तं दत्तात्रेयं नमाम्यहम् ।।१।।

मानसपूजा - लं पृथ्व्यात्मकं गंधं परिकल्पयामि । हं आकाशात्मकं पुष्पं परिकल्पयामि । यं वातात्मकं धूपं परिकल्पयामि । रं अग्न्यात्मकं दीपं परिकल्पयामि । सं सर्वात्मकं सर्वोपचाराणि परिकल्पयामि ।

मालां संपूज्य -

महामाले महामाये सर्वशक्तिस्वरूपिणी ।

चतुर्वर्गस्त्वयि न्यस्तस्तस्मान्मे सिद्धिदा भव ।।

मंत्रजप द्वां दत्तात्रेयाय नमः १०८.

जपान्ते मालां शिरसि निधाय हृदयादि न्यासान् कृत्वा -

समर्पणं अनेन जपेन श्रीदत्तात्रेयः प्रीयताम् ।

प्रार्थना ईश्वरो गुरुरात्मेति मूर्तिभेदविभागेन ।

व्योमवद्भ्यासदेहाय दक्षिणामूर्तये नमः ।।१।।

आचम्य आसनाधो जलं क्षिप्त्वा तेन ललाटे तिलकं कुर्यात् ।

Explanatory notes:-

The Vidh;nam begins with the usual preliminary practices

common to all religious procedures (PEj;). The first of these is **Āchamana** or ritual sipping of water. A drop of water from a copper (or silver) cup is placed in the hollow of right palm and is let into the mouth by holding the bottom of inclined palm against the lower lip. Having taken three sips together with the recitation

of the corresponding Mantras: K^oav;ya Nama^o, N;ri;ya,;ya Nama^o,

M;ldhav;ya Nama^o, a drop of water is then allowed to slip from the tip of the palm into a copper dish with the further recitation of

the Mantra G^ovind;ya Nama^o. This completes one Āchaman.

Usually two of the cycles are performed during the practice

session.

The next step is **Prānayāma** or purification of breath. This is performed by holding the right nostril shut with thumb and slowly inhaling with the left nostril till the lungs are full. The left nostril is then shut holding the breath for about half the time taken for an inspiration. Opening the right nostril, slowly exhale for about double the time taken for an inhalation.

(Inhalation(*PEraka*):Holding Breath(*Kumbhaka*):Exhalation (*R@caka*) in the proportion of 2:1:4).

After thus attaining a purity of body and equanimity of mind, there is the definition of the *Mantra*, manner of articulation and the intent of recitation (**Sankalp**). The Seer of the *Mantra*(*ĪĀi*) is **Sadāshiva** (Lord āa'kara), the metre **Gāyatri**, the deity **Datt;tr[®]ya**, **Drām** is the seed, **Namah** the power and **Datt;tr[®]ya** the pivot and **Japa** the application.

Nyāsa is consignment (placement) of deities through *Mantra* to the different parts of the body. There are two sets of *Nyāsa* to be performed – diGitāl (*Kara*) and corporal (*Anga*). In diGitāl *Nyāsa* one starts with the thumbs (*AÆguÀĜha*). First, one rolls the tips of index fingers over the insides of respective thumbs from root to tip with the *Mantra*, *OM dr;E aÆguÀĜh;bh;E namaĀ*. This is followed by *Nyāsa* on the four remaining digits. The procedure is as follows: roll the tips of both thumbs from the roots to the tips of the respective fingers while reciting the appropriate *Mantras* -- index fingers *OM dr;E tarjan;bh;E namaĀ*, middle fingers (*OM druE madhyam;bh;E namaĀ*), ring

fingers (*OM draiE an;mik;bh;E namaĀ*) and little fingers (*OM drawE kaniÀĜhik;bh;E namaĀ*). Finally the diGitāl *Nyāsa* are concluded by alternately rolling the two palms over the backs of opposite hands (*OM draĀ karatalakarap;Ĝh;bh;E namaĀ*).

Corporal *Nyāsa* starts with the placement of right palm over the heart (*OM dr;E h;dayya namaĀ*), this is followed by touching the top of the head with the recitation of the *Mantra*: *OM dr;E ġiras[®]sv;h;ġ*. One then moves to the *āikh;ġ* (crown of head) followed by the clapping of the right palm against the left (*OM druE ġikh;ġyai vauĀaġ*). The palms are then straightened, turned inward and crossed in a sweeping motion from the head to the waist with the final placement on the front parts of the shoulders (*OM draiE kavac;ya huE*). After this, the right middle finger is placed on the point between the two eyebrows with the placement of index finger on the right eye and the ring finger on the left eye (*OM drawE n[®]tratr;ya vauĀaġ*). The three middle fingers are then joined together to clap the palm of the left hand (*OM draĀ astr;ya phaġ*). Finally one moves the right hand clockwise around the head and concludes by snapping the middle finger against the thumb (*iti digbandhaĀ*). This last action secures the body in all directions.

Dhyānam means visualization of and meditation on the deity (*D[®]vat;ġ*), in this case *ārc* Datt;tr[®]ya. The iconic elements of this countenance are described in the text as follows:-

“I offer salutations to [*ārc*] Datt;tr[®]ya holding a rosary

Bibliography.

While performing the *Japa*, one refrain from speaking and focus one-pointedly ([®]kjgratj) on the meaning of the *Mantra*. The recitation should not be loud. There are various types of *Mantra* recitation. *Mantra* recited out loud and made public is considered to be of low quality while silent recitation with the movement of lips (upj/Eju) of moderate quality. The highest level is mental recitation in which the *Mantra* is repeated only within the confines of mind with no apparent outward physical indication.

On completion of *Japa*, the corporal *Nyāsa* are repeated except the *Digbandha*. The *Japa* is then dedicated (*Samarpana*) with the supplication: *anēna japēna śrīdattātrēyaḥ priyatām*, meaning “May Glorious Dattātreya be pleased with this *Japa*.” Then one concludes with the salutary prayer (*Prārthanā*): *īśvarō gururātmēti mūrtibhēdavibhāgēna. vyōmavadvyāptadēhāya dakṣiṇāmūrtayē namaḥ*, meaning “Obeisance to [Śrī] *Dakshinamurti* who, though immanent like the space, assumes the three aspects of the God, the Guru and the Self.”

The method of worship of Śrī Dattātrēya is concluded with two *Āchamana* followed by sprinkling of a little water under one’s seat and applying the same to one’s forehead.

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Nārāyan Bhujang Bhalariao: *Āthavaṇṭīl Gurudev (Marāthi)* 2008

P.P. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāj Prabodhini.

At a gathering of the representatives of the Datta Institutions from all over India, on 19th October 2002, P.P. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāj Prabodhini, was established with the aim of reviving the memory of the holy life of Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāj, spreading his message and propagating his sacred works, at Garudeshwar, the seat of Swāmiji's *Samadhi*. Following objectives were formulated in the light of guidelines by Swāmiji's major disciple Ygiraj Shri Vamanrao Gulavani Mahārāj.

A. Objectives of Prabodhini

1. Publication of the works of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj. Translation of his works into various Indian languages and into English. Dissemination of these works through computer, internet and other media. 2. Encouraging the study and research of Swāmiji's literature and inclusion of the same into the school and college curricula. 3. Association of more and more institutions under the Datta tradition and fostering cooperation amongst these. 4. Development of memorials at the places of Swāmiji's *Chaturmaas* and provision of facilities of regular worship and dissemination of Swāmiji's literature at these.

B. Work thus far accomplished

1. Practically the entire works of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj are now available in the form of books, CD-ROM. 2. Many of these works have been translated into Marāthi and Gujrathi languages. 3. Hindi translation of *Shri Gurucharitam (Dwisāhasri)* has recently been published. 4. *Dwisāhasri* and *Samashloki* are available in Telugu script. 5. An internet site has been established in Hindi and English languages, wherein the life and works of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj have been made available along with Prashnavali. (www.Swāmidham.org; www.tembeSwāmi.org). 6. While some of the places of Swāmiji's *Chaturmaas* already have memorials with regular services, establishment of these has been undertaken recently at Havanur, Pavani and Muktyala. 7. Translation of *Shri Krishnalahari* and *Dattapurana* have been undertaken.

The onus of keeping alive this flame of divine knowledge ignited by the dedicated spiritual endeavour of Shri Swāmi Mahārāj rests on us, the devotees and followers of his tradition. We should try and spare as much as possible of our earnings for this cause.

1. We sincerely appeal to you to send your financial contributions to –

P.P. Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembe) Swāmi Mahārāj Prabodhini.

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