

Chapter 2: The Guru *Darshan*

Searching for the *Sadguru* with total devotion and longing leads to success in locating Him. In this chapter, amongst other details, I will also describe the circumstances under which various devotees met Bhagavan Nityananda and realized that he was their Guru.

Pitfalls in the path

Once, a lady visited our home at Vajreshwari. She appeared to be very pious and her looks resembled an ascetic. She wore an ochre *saree*, left her hair loose and adorned her forehead with a very large vermilion *tika*. The ladies of my house were pleased at her impressive presence and got overwhelmed by her elaborate sermons. Her entry into our house was instantaneous and the members of the family treated her with the respect due to a visiting saint. She performed some miracles, including materializing *kumkum* in her palm. All the womenfolk were mesmerized by her charisma and surrendered to her demands. However, one fine morning the lady disappeared as dramatically as she had appeared, and so did some of our valuables. There was no trace of her. The family was saddened that a stranger could dupe them so easily. Within no time, our family rushed to have the *darshan* of Bhagavan Nityananda.

Baba was staying at Vaikuntha at that time. The moment they stepped inside the hall, Baba muttered, “Bunch of fools. Trusting all and sundry! Blindly watching a magic show!” They all felt ashamed. After having a Guru of Baba’s stature, it was indeed very stupid to get carried away by someone who performed so called ‘miracles’.

Without mincing words, Baba admonished them, “Because somebody has acquired some *siddhis* and exhibits some magical powers, it does not mean that he can be a Guru!” Cautioning them about the pitfalls in the spiritual path, he added, “Before you accept anyone as your Guru, you should first ask him ‘Can you show me God in His entire splendor with *shankar*, *chakra*, *gadha* and *padma*?’ Only the one who has *tyag* (renunciation) can be a true Guru! Only the One who has seen God and can show God to others can be taken as a Guru!”

Miracles often pass as spiritual achievements in the eyes of a gullible public. It is very easy to fall into the trap of impostors who pose as saints and lure devotees through such cheap gimmicks, often at the cost of the believers.

In the *Chidakash Gita*, Baba had discussed the aspects and attributes of a Guru. “A Guru should be without desire”, he explained to his devotees. “A Guru does not expect anything from his

disciple, except devotion and total surrender.” Baba stated in no uncertain terms that only if a person is capable of granting the experience of Self-realization, is he a true Guru. *Sadgurus*, who appear in the form of great ones like Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Akkalkot Shri Samartha and Bhagavan Nityananda were absolutely free of any bindings. They had no mundane ambitions or worldly possessions. There was no need for gimmicks or lectures to exhibit their powers. The greatness of those great beings was as inherent and natural as the sweetness in sugar. Devotees flocked to these great beings attracted by their spiritual prowess, just as trails of ants come to flock around lumps of sugar. There was no propaganda, advertisements or pamphlets to attract the devotees.

The Manifestation of the Lord on Earth

One day Goddess Lakshmi asked Lord Krishna, “Who is your most beloved devotee?” Krishna answered, “Bhakta Pundalik!” Lakshmi was surprised that Pundalik, who apparently did nothing but serve his parents, was considered the foremost one. There were many who did severe penance all their lives, but Krishna chose this simpleton Pundalik! To convince Her, Krishna told her that they would soon be visiting Pundalik.

It was late at night and Pundalik was massaging the feet of his aged parents. While thus engaged, he was composing and singing devotional songs, with his heart brimming with love for his beloved Panduranga. Tears began to flow down his cheeks. He remembered how he began his Guru Kripa journey. When he was young, he’d been cruel, self-centred and had ill-treated his old parents. One day he met his Guru who brought out a great transformation in him and ordained him to serve his parents. Since then, he turned a new leaf, from a local thug he was slowly transformed into a saint — Saint Pundalik. Through this selfless service, he realized the Self. While serving his parents, he would also compose devotional songs in praise of Lord Vittal.

Shri Krishna and Lakshmi took the form of Lord Vittal and His consort Rakhumai, and knocked on his door in the night. Pundalik could not get up for fear of waking his parents. He called out to the visitors, “Who is it at this time of night at my door?” Lord Vittal replied lovingly, “Pundalik, it’s us, your Vittal and Rakhumai. We are pleased by your service to your parents and your devotion for us. We have come here to take you to our abode *Vaikuntha*. Let us all leave before dawn.” Hearing this, Pundalik was very thrilled. He wanted to fall at their feet, welcome them with honour, and serve them. It was unbelievable! The very *Parabrahman* was standing at his door! Something that the sages and yogis fail to achieve even after several lives of penance! Just as he was about to leave his parents to open the door, a thought came to his mind.

He said to himself, "At last, my Lord Vittal is right here with Rakhumai. I am blessed indeed! If I go out and meet my beloved Vittal, I shall be permanently free from this cycle of birth and death. All my life, I have waited for this great day. Yes, but then, what about so many other devotees on this path? Who will redeem them? What will be the plight of all the other devotees like me? Instead of having the Lord all by myself, why can't I prompt Lord Vittal to ever remain on this earth? He will be thus available unrestricted for all those who crave His presence. No! I shall never be so selfish as to have Him all by myself. I will make Vittal and Rakhumai stay here for ever!"

Thus determined, Pundalik uttered in a soft voice "Oh my dear Vittal, I am massaging the feet of my old parents. They may fall asleep any minute. Please wait, Oh Lord, till they sleep." So saying, he threw out two large bricks for Vittal and Rakhumai to rest on. Since then, the Lord has been waiting eagerly for Pundalik, His dear devotee. The very act of sacrifice of Bhakta Shiromani Pundalik thus impelled the Lord to stay here on earth. The Grace of Lord Vittal was thus made available to all, irrespective of caste, class, creed or color.

The Lord is waiting at Pandharpur, standing on the brick, with both his hands resting on his hips. He is so easily accessible at the temple at Pandharpur, that, unlike other temples, the devotees can actually hug and kiss His Lotus Feet. Pandharpur, had become a virtual Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu and Lakshmi, with the devotees flocking to the place to have the *darshan* of their beloved. Till Bhakti Pundalik arrived, God for a common man was far off, on a high pedestal, difficult to approach. It was Pundalik who brought God to the doorstep of common man, thus opening the doors of *Bhakti* to all, irrespective of caste, creed, race and sex. Till then, God was the private property of a few, who locked Him in dogmas, rituals and false belief. Rightly, Pundalik is believed to have laid the foundation of *Bhakti Samprdaya* of *Varkari*. No religious function can begin and end without hailing Pundalik. Several saints like Sant Janaeshwar, Namdev, Tukaram, Sauta mali, Gorkumbhar, Eknath Maharaj, who belonged to a different strata of life followed Pundalik and made it possible for common people to thread the path of *Bhakti*.

The same Vittal has now come to us in the form of Bhagavan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri. He stayed at Vaikuntha ashram in Ganeshpuri and was freely accessible to all the devotees. Vittal is often perceived in the form of a cowherd with dark complexion, wearing a loin cloth and carrying a coarse blanket over his shoulder. Baba had a dark complexion and wore a loin cloth, and was often seen with a coarse blanket on his shoulder. While staying at Vaikuntha, Baba was adored by many as Lord Vittal and many of his devotees continue to worship him in that form.

The Samadhi Shrine of Baba in Ganeshpuri is located at the very spot where Vaikuntha Ashram previously was. Baba is eternally waiting for all his devotees. On Gurupurnima day, hundreds of devotees visit this shrine to have his *darshan*.

How can one greet Baba? First hug him and then wash his feet with tears of love and longing. The meeting of Bhagavan and his devotee is a moving sight and an amazing experience by itself. *Bhakti* comes out in the open and the devotion expressed is without inhibitions. One has to surrender to Baba and leave the rest to him. In due time, he will provide for the right guidance, the right knowledge and the right direction to embark on the journey of *sadhana*.

Once we have offered our hand to him, he will quietly lead us on this path of *shaktipat* and in due course, by his grace, the *Kundalini shakti* shall be awakened and we shall be lead to our ultimate goal. On our part, all we need to do is have firm faith in him and allow his grace to percolate us. Let us chant the *gurumantra* everyday till the mind, body and the nadis are cleansed thoroughly and the self gets ready for *shaktipat diksha*. Baba often reminded us that his physical presence is not required by his devotees who are pursuing the spiritual goal. He assured us that he would guide us step by step in this uncharted path in his subtle form. There is no alternative to *sadhana* for the *bhaktas* as most other methods are strenuous. *Namsamkritan*, *bhajan* and *japa* should be regularly done without any break, to prepare for the final *shaktipat*. Patience and commitment to *sadhana* is a must, and as they say, the rest is Baba's responsibility.

Several devotees, like Bhakta Pundalik, were responsible for making it easy for all of us to experience the divine grace of Bhagavan Nityananda. Unlike other saints or gurus, Bhagavan Nityananda was not placed on a pedestal and so glorified that one could not approach him. These simple devotees through their simplicity but unflinching faith and love left us a legacy of Guru Kripa Yoga with Bhagvan Nityananda as fountainhead of this path. *Bhakti* is thus open for all.

Shri Janananda Swami

In a small village called Hejmadi in South Karnataka lived a young boy named Shina. Shina's father died when he was an infant and His mother was very poor. He was very strong physically. One day while playing with a ball game with other children of his village, the ball crossed over to the road. Young Shina ran to retrieve it and as he was about to pick it up, a dark lanky youth picked up young Shina in his arms. The young stranger affectionately passed his palm over the head of the small child right down to end of his back bone. Shina looked deep into his eyes and left the ball forever! Thus Shina received Guru *diksha* and was later known as Swami Janananda of Kanhangad.



Parampujya Janananda Swami offering seva to Bhagavan Nityananda in Kailash Ashram below the staircase leading to terrace.

Swami Janananda was the only disciple of Baba who was given charge of the first Ashram of Nityananda at Kanhangad. He was totally devoted to his Guru and never hankered for name or fame. When Baba started his mission of constructing the meditation caves at Kanhangad, Swamiji assisted him in the strenuous activity of scooping out solid rock to carve out the caves. Being very strong, robust and tall, he toiled very hard. Baba used to admire his tough work saying, “Bhima is working there”.

Shri Sitaram Shenoy

In another village called Padbidri in South Karnataka lived a young boy called Sitaram. He was my uncle. Sitaram lived with his great grandfather Anant Shenoy, father Cherdappa and mother Bhavani. He had four brothers, Upendra, Vittal, Raghunath, Ramkrishna and one sister called Gulabi. Sitaram Shenoy, though ever robust in health and very hardworking, was always restless within. A spiritual obsession was bothering him and this propelled him to visit numerous saints who came to Padbidri and its neighboring villages. Whenever he met a saint, he used to ask if they were his Guru. None gave him a positive reply and he



remained with a sense of inadequacy. He once learnt that a young saint was visiting the neighboring village of Mulki, and staying for several days. Many people sought him out and found relief from their mundane pain and sorrows and were holistically cured of various illnesses.

My uncle, Sitaram could not contain his curiosity and one fine day, walked all the way from Padbidri to Mulki, in search of him. After making enquiries, he came to know that a dark, thin youth called ‘Kala sadhu’ was staying at a local hall where many people had assembled to take

his *darshan*. Sitaram quickly made his way to that crowded hall. He saw a young boy wearing nothing but a loincloth, seated on a wooden chair on the far end of the packed hall. People fell at his feet and addressed him as Deva. He, in turn, was silent most of the time and uttered some words of guidance or offered advice whenever a devotee pleaded for his divine intervention. Sitaram went close to the youth and prostrated at his feet. The Kala *sadhu* asked Sitaram, “Why have you come here?” Sitaram replied, “I am in search of my Guru.” To this the *sadhu* replied “Now that you have found him, what do you intend to do?” Sitaram fell at his feet with tears in his eyes.



**Young Nityananda in the house of Sitaram Shenoy at Banaman Gully, Girgaon, Mumbai.
One can see baby Ratnakar Shenoy and other children of Sitaram**

Thus Sitaram met his Guru, Swami Nityananda and later became one of the foremost householder devotees of Baba at Vajreshwari. From there, he began the journey of Guru Kripa yoga which has so far covered five generations of the Shenoy family. Sitaram Shenoy's grandfather, Anant Shenoy, father Cherdappa, his sons Prabhakar, Ratnakar, Shivaji and grandsons Ramchandra, Gopalkrishna (of Vajreshwari) and Kamalakar, all were blessed by Baba. With Sitaram leading the front, his brothers, Vittal, Raghunath (my father), Ramkrishna and Upendra too joined this path of Guru Kripa Yoga. Later, through marriages with children of other devotees like Hosdurga Devrai Pai (Master) and Gulabi Amma (Anand Ashram, Managudda, Mangalore) the family grew bigger and the grace of Baba extended throughout the large number of relatives, over several generations.

Swami Muktananda

At the age of sixteen, the young Muktananda met Bhagavan when he was studying at school. Baba loved children and often visited the school in which the young boy was studying. When the Saint visited the school, usually all the children would leave their classes and hurry to follow Baba. He distributed eatables and sweets to their utter delight. The children were totally captivated by the strange *sadhu*.

The young boy was mesmerized by the divine and peaceful personality of Baba and felt an inner urge to be like Baba. This made him leave the school and travel all over India in spiritual pursuits. He studied various scriptures and met several saints including Zipruanna and Siddharudha Swami. However, he could not attain the inner satisfaction from all these wanderings. Finally Swami Muktananda reached Ganeshpuri and met Baba again. He kept on visiting the saint to have his *darshan* and be near him. On 15th August 1947, in the early morning, Baba offered his *padukas* to Swami Muktananda, which he respectfully placed on his head. As soon as Swamiji placed the *padukas* on his head, he lost consciousness of the external world. With Baba's *padukas* on his head, in a state of semi-consciousness, he walked to the temple of Gaondevi (the village Goddess) on the outskirts of Ganeshpuri, where an *audumbara* (wild fig) tree stood. There he sat down..In his words, he '*sat forever*' in that spot, basking in the grace of Bhagavan Nityananda.

Although Swami Muktananda traveled all over India and met several saints, it was Zipuranna who indicated that his Guru was none other than Bhagavan Nityananda. It was only after he surrendered to Bhagavan that his real spiritual journey began.

Shri Shaligram Swami



There was a young man, who had taken initiation at Narayan Ashram and was given a new name Dayanand Saraswati. He was born in Bangalore and probably belonged to the family of the Diwan (Minister) of the ruler of Mysore. After initiation to the monk order at Narayan Ashram, he set out to perform *Godavari Pradhakshina* on foot (circumambulation, walking along the banks of river Godavari to complete one circle). As he was on his way, suddenly a man manifested in front of him and ordered him to "Come to Ganeshpuri." Dayanand was not aware, at that time, where Ganeshpuri was. But the person who

appeared looked very divine, and addressed him as if he knew him..He quietly set out in search of Ganeshpuri. After traveling for several days he reached Ganeshpuri and heard about Nityananda Baba. When he took *darshan* of Baba, he recognized him to be the same godly person who had ordered him to visit Ganeshpuri. He prostrated at Baba's feet. In the divine presence of Baba, he became aware of several of his past lives and realized that Baba was his Guru over the past eight life times. Thus Dayanand Saraswati met his Guru and was given the new name "Shaligram" by Bhagavan Nityananda.

Shri Sadanand Swami of Tungareshwar

Shri Vaijnath Patil and his wife Parvati, devotees of Baba Nityananda, lived in Rai in the Thane District. As they were without children, they prayed to Baba. Baba said, "You will get such a child that the world shall call him Baba". On 29th August 1957, a boy was born to Parvati. It was a full moon that coincided with the Hindu festival of *Nariel Purnima*. The name Sadanand was chosen for the child. From childhood he showed a strong inclination towards spiritual practices. He used to move about in a loincloth and often sat to meditate in lonely spots.



On 26 April 1971, ten years after the *Mahasamadhi* of Baba Nityananda, when he was just twelve years old, he decided to renounce the world. After donating all their possessions, Vaijnath and Parvati left their village and accompanied Sadanand to Tungareshwar. It was a thick forest with wild animals and no source of food was available nearby. For five days he stayed alone at the Shiva Temple in Tungareshwar. He declared on 1st May 1971 that Tungareshwar would be his *Karma Bhoomi* and he allowed his parents to stay with him. Sadanand Swami was linked to His Guru Nityananda even before his birth and continues to experience his grace.

Shri Madhav Padiyar

Many years ago, the young Madhav Padiyar left his house at Karnataka and came to Mumbai looking for a job. He took shelter at Sitaram Shenoy's gymnasium at Dongri, Mumbai. Being close to Sitaram meant that he would invariably be presented before Swami Nityananda. During one of his visits to Kurla, where Baba was stationed near Salt Pans, my father Raghunath took him to Baba. Whenever Raghunath was unable to visit Baba, it was Madhav who carried lunch for Baba. During the 1950s Madhav moved to Ganeshpuri and stayed in Kailash ashram to serve Baba.

After a few months of settling down in the presence of the Great One, Madhav started getting a feeling that he was not making any progress in his *sadhana*, as Baba did not prescribe any short cuts or techniques for easy nirvana. Getting impatient as days passed by, he decided to leave the place and started packing up. Holding his bag in one hand he stood in front of Baba and declared, "I am leaving for good". Baba smiled and gently asked "Where to and what for?" Baba's words reverberated in his mind and he was transformed. The 'baggage' fell from his hand for ever and he 'stayed behind' permanently, eventually becoming Shri Sadanand Swami of Kanhangad.

In 1961, some time before taking *Mahasamadhi*, Bhagavan Nityananda ordered Shri Padiyar to take up his permanent station at Kanhangad. He was asked to station at one place and engage in '*suvichar*', or '*pure thoughts*'. Padiyar went to Kanhangad after Baba's *samadhi* and served Shri Jananand Swami. Later Swamiji gave him ochre robes and the new name 'Sadanand' and blessed him saying, "Today I give half of the power my penance." Sadanand Swami stayed for over forty years at Kushal Nagar, till his final days.

Smt Lalita Mauli



Krishnabai was a young girl married to Shri Devrai Hatangdi. She continued her studies after her marriage. One day when she returned home early from school, she found her house locked and she waited in the compound, as it became dark. She heard a voice ordering her to, "Hold this." She stretched out her hand and a copy of the book, *Krishna Leela*, was placed in her hand. Since the book was in Marathi, a language she was not familiar at that time, she expressed her disappointment. She demanded to know whom the voice belonged to. The voice replied, "Krishna represents love for the Universe. At the appropriate time my identity shall be revealed to you." Krishnabai thus began her journey on the path of Guru Kripa

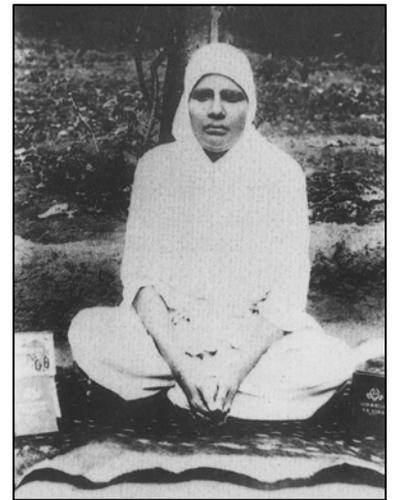
Yoga. She met the Kala sadhu, as Swami Nityananda was known then, in Udupi and later in Ganeshpuri. In addition to household duties, she also pursued spiritual *sadhana*. Baba gave her initiation into the exalted order of '*Paramahansa*' and declared, "You shall be Mother for the entire Universe. You shall love all with *samabhav* (*equal sightedness*)." Thus the voice which spoke to her as she was waiting at her home years earlier was none other than that of Baba Nityananda. Krishnabai became well known as Lalita Mauli of Panvel, New Mumbai. She received formal *netradiksha* and was declared a *Paramahansa* by Baba.

Smt Tulsamma

Here is a *bhajan* in which Tulsamma gives a glimpse of her past:

In her past life she was a cruel animal living in a jungle. So notorious was she for her cruelty that nobody dared to enter the jungle, for she spared none. She killed animals and people irrespective of their age or gender. One day a king with his retinue entered the jungle. Seeing her, the king went after her with his bow and arrow. Soon they both went so deep into the forest that the king got separated from his guards. It was at this moment that she attacked him and killed him in one stroke.

She then found and killed all his guards. Thus she lived her life. One day she saw a dark lanky youth walking in the forest. She watched him closely. He was very tall with long arms with a very divine appearance. He seemed very calm and full of peace. She ran forth to kill him. As soon as she reached him, he raised his palm bidding her to stop. In his soft but powerful voice he said, "Just be present to *who you and I are.*" Hearing his divine voice, although very ruthless and cruel, she stopped in her path. A great transformation occurred within her and she became tame as a dog. She surrendered at his feet. The divine man said, "You will have to undergo the vagaries of your



Karma. But fear not. You will be born again. In your next birth you shall be born as a girl and marry into a rich family. In your suffering do your duty dispassionately, with your heart merged in the Self. Shri Hari will be your guide." So saying he kept his palm on her head and left. As soon as he touched her, tears started rolling from her eyes. She withdrew from her daily routine, lost all interest in life and soon died.

In her next birth she was born as Anandi. While doing her duty, she met once again the same Kala Sadhu, now known as Nityananda.

This lady was none other than the devotee, Smt Tulsamma who, amongst the monk devotees, is considered to be foremost. The world is indebted to her, as it was she who brought out the teachings of Bhagavan Nityananda by compiling them in the form of a book, the *Chidakasha Gita*. As per Sadanand Swami, Baba very rarely allowed anyone to practise *pranayama*. Tulsamma was an exception. Tulsamma taught *pranayama* to some of her disciples, including Sunanda, who is presently taking care of Anand Ashram at Managudda in Mangalore.

Dr. Ram Bhosle

Ram Bhosle lost his parents when he was young and had to resort to the benevolence of his relatives. At a young age, felt frustrated with life, as his career was not picking up and he was constantly being harassed by his close relatives. He therefore left them and came to Bhivandi-Kalyan. The sufferings, however, did not leave him. At that tender age, he contemplated suicide as a solution to his woes. So he decided to wander about in the forest, so that wild animals could prey on him. He reached the thick forest of Tungareshwar and waited with intense yearning for a wild animal to finish him. But none came, even after a long wait. He felt miserable and out of sheer fatigue, fell asleep under a tree.

He woke up feeling thirsty and as he went to drink water from a stream he heard a voice whispering, "Welcome, dear guest!" in Sanskrit. He looked around to find a dark, tall man wearing a loin cloth, and felt annoyed with this stranger at his sudden intrusion. Baba, thus manifested in front of him and gently advised him not to kill himself, as a promising future in medicine awaited Ram, if he went abroad. But the young boy had neither heard of nor met Nityananda. Baba. He couldn't help laughing at the prediction of this stranger. Here he was – he could not even afford to pay the paltry sum of Rs. 15 for his fees for the matriculation examination - and this stranger was declaring that he would become successful by going abroad and studying medicine!

Getting irritated and impatient, he demanded food from Baba, as he had not eaten for three days and was feeling famished. He asked Baba for a full meal, knowing very well that it would be impossible to get any food in that jungle. With an intention of insulting the stranger, he demanded a full course lunch with meat and liquor. Baba coolly told him to look beyond a particular tree, and to his surprise, young Ram found a silver tray containing a piping hot meal at the spot mentioned. Having starved for several days, he did not bother to find out its source, but busied himself with filling his stomach. He stayed in the jungle for three more days and each day he found a glass of warm milk to drink.

Ram came back to Bhivandi and made a fresh effort to rebuild his career. Baba had instructed him to pursue the medical profession abroad. Destiny took him to J. J. Hospital in Mumbai and a series of events during the period 1935-37 led him to Vienna to study medicine. He learnt the art of massaging to treat various ailments. His whole life took a different direction after meeting Baba Nityananda and in a short while Ram became renowned as Dr. Ram Bhosle.

Ram met several saints and had the *darshan* of Shankar Maharaj under very strange circumstances. He lived with Mahavatar Babaji (Guru of Paramahansa Yogananda) for six years

in the Himalayas. He also went abroad 168 times and gave treatment to several prominent personalities including Mr. Churchill, Pandit Nehru, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Muktananda, Rangavadoot, and Gagangiri Maharaj. This art of massage known as *Samvahan*, which is a blend of the essence of ancient Indian methods, has become an effective technique and been adopted in several countries. Ram was also renowned as a freedom fighter. In fact, the then British rulers had issued eighteen warrants for Ram's his arrest for participating in India's freedom struggle. After India's independence, Ram became a changed man with his spiritual knowledge, but he continued the usage of *Samvahan* technique to treat illness. As a token of respect and *seva* to Baba Nityananda, Ram established a clinic at Vajreshwari and gave free service to the local people.

Shri M. Sanjeeva Kamath

Shri Mangalore Sanjeeva Kamath, who was staying in Mahim, Mumbai, was a staunch devotee of Bhagavan Nityananda. He often visited Ganeshpuri. During one such visit, he went to worship at the Bhimeshwar temple, after his bath in the hot *kunds*. Baba was standing inside the temple. As soon as he entered the temple, Baba asked Mr. Kamath, "Where is Lord Shankar?", placing his right foot on the Bhimeshwar Linga. Mr. Kamath was amazed by Baba's pose as Lord Shankar and prostrated at his feet. It was Sanjeeva Kamath who translated *Chidakasha Gita* to English, from Kanarese, for the first time.

Although his family did not encourage his spiritual pursuits, he continued to do his *sadhana* quietly. Years later, he asked me to help him offer *Abhishek* at the Ganeshpuri *samadhi* shrine during the Gurupurnima festival. He was old and I was wondering whether I would be able to fulfill his wish. I prayed to Baba and took him to Ganeshpuri on the eve of Gurupurnima. I put him up at our house at Vajreshwari for a night and, along with Engineer Hegde, took him to the shrine at 3:30 the next morning. By Baba's grace, I managed to take him inside the holy sanctorum and assisted him in pouring tender coconut water on the *samadhi*. His eyes were full of tears of satisfaction and he repeatedly expressed his gratitude to me. He died a couple of years later. It was only Baba who made me an instrument to fulfill Mr. Kamath's wish.

Smt Gulabi Amma

After the passing away of Tulsamma, a pious lady named Gulabi Amma, was in charge of Anand Ashram at Managudda, Mangalore. One of Gulabi Amma's daughters was married to my uncle Ramkrishna Shenoy, (at King Circle, Matunga, Mumbai) and another was married to Prabhakar Shenoy, Sitaram's son, (at Vajreshwari), as desired by Baba. Gulabi Amma occasionally visited

Mumbai and stayed at my father's house in Mahim. In those days the Shenoy family used to stay in Ganeshpuri for several days. She used to accompany them and took the opportunity to prepare delicacies for Baba. She was a very good cook, but fastidious about perfection and very strict. Obviously, while cooking for Baba, all the ingredients had to be clean, the best quality, in the right proportion and perfect.

Baba was in Vaikuntha Ashram and it was customary that Baba was the first one to take a bath in the *kunda* around 3 am, every morning. The devotees who stayed overnight used to go for a bath in the *kunda* at around 4 am, after Baba finished his ablutions. At that time, there was no electricity or alarm clock at the Ashram and it was very dark in those early hours. There was a large brass bell which was rung every hour to mark the time. Sometimes in the mornings, Baba used to loudly command, "Get up and go for your bath!" Early one morning, in her enthusiasm, Gulabi Amma got up assuming that Baba's bath would have been over and proceeded for her bath.

As she reached the *Kund*, she saw Baba seated in the *kund* at the centre and watched several Goddesses descending from the sky to give Baba his bath, pouring water over Him. She observed a streak of divine light as these celestial forms were descending, and the scene was all luminous. She was stunned at the magnificent sight and immediately retraced her steps to Vaikuntha Ashram, where the daughters of Raghunath Shenoy were sleeping. She woke up my sister Kusum, the eldest and narrated what she had seen. The very next moment Baba appeared in Vaikuntha hall and thundered, "Have you lost your sense? Was it time for you to visit the *Kund*? Do not brag about what you saw!" Thus admonished, Gulabi Amma was trembling with fear. However, she was fortunate to have a glimpse of the divine form of her Guru!

Shri Hosdurga Devrai Pai

Shri Devrai Pai was Head Master of District Board Higher Secondary School, Kanhangad. Bhagavan Nityanananda appeared as a dark, reed-thin boy in Kanhangad sometime in the 1920s. He used to move about in the *digambar* state, often wearing nothing. He was occasionally found on the beach, at the Nileshwar hill (later known as Guruvanam), along the walls of Ikeri Raja's Fort and in the caves close to this fort. Being in the *Avadhoot* state, people of Kanhangad often disturbed Baba, taking him for a lunatic. They used to throw stones at him and Baba used to throw sweet meats in return. Small children used to follow him, to collect the sweets. It was during this period that Shri Devrai Pai met Baba.

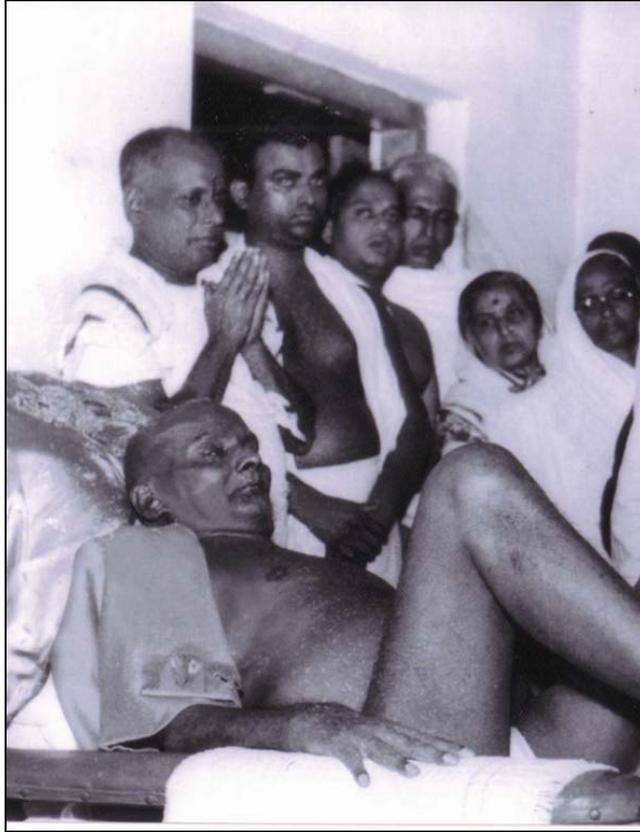
Devrai Pai was very pious and came from a family who were devotees of Lord Venkatarama. It was the tradition in his family to honour the saints and offer food to the needy and to guests. Noticing that the ignorant people of Kanhangad pestered Baba, he pleaded with Baba to wear a loincloth. It was Devrai Pai who tied the loincloth to the young Baba. Baba lovingly called Devrai, 'Master', a prefix which remained attached to Devrai's name more because of being addressed so by his Guru, than because of his being a teacher in the school. All his life he served Baba, thereafter Jananand Swami and finally Sadanand Swami. Among the householder devotees of Baba, Master is held in high respect. His daughter Sunita was married to my father Raghunath and another daughter Meenakshi was married to Sitaram's son Ratnakar. Both these marriages were blessed by Baba. The Guru *Charitra* of Baba would be incomplete if due respect is not given to Shri Devrai Pai. Master and my grandmother Anusuya served Bhagavan Nityananda from 1925 till he left Kanhangad and thereafter they served Parampujya Shree Janananda Swamiji till his *Mahasamadhi* in 1982 and later Shree Sadananda Swami. Devrai Master and his family served Baba for over 60 years.

Shri Raghunath Shenoy

With Sitaram meeting his Guru Nityananda, it was obvious that Baba's grace was available to the entire family. Sitaram's grandfather, Anant Shenoy, father Cherdappa Shenoy and Sitaram's four brothers, were all blessed indeed, to experience the divinity of Baba. My father Shri Raghunath was very close to Baba. He had several divine experiences of Baba's *leela*. Baba's grace was available to him so easily, without any effort, that Baba became almost a casual and integral part of his life. Though he looked up at Baba as the Ultimate One, the God of Gods, and approached Baba with great respect and restraint, there was a sense of familiarity. Baba had become a resource at hand.

One incident in his life illustrates that he was fortunate to observe Baba's divine form. During one of his visits to Ganeshpuri, Raghunath found Baba coming out of Vaikunth Ashram in a great hurry. Baba appeared furious and as soon as he saw Raghunath, he started abusing him and pelting him with stones. He got hit all over and was bleeding profusely, with his clothes in tatters. Yet, he remained transfixed on the spot, smiling. The onlookers, who were frightened by Baba's anger, wondered why he did not run for cover, to escape from being hit by stones.

Raghunath later told them "Oh! You were all seeing Baba furious, but when I looked at him I was seeing his most divine form. That form cannot be described and it was so mesmerizing, that I froze. I could neither feel the pain nor was there any fear in me."



**Raghunath Shenoy (just behind Baba)
followed by Karia Anna, Babab Anna.**

Hilda Charlton

Hilda Charlton was living in the United States, and was striving to know the reality of life. In her spiritual quest, she was performing daily *sadhana* without knowing where she was heading. Her efforts were sincere and pure. One day, as she was practicing, she suddenly had a vision of a yogi sitting under a tree in lotus position in meditation. She experienced grace flowing towards her and after this vision, her *sadhana* became more intense. Her search soon brought her to India. She was in Delhi and over a period, she started getting the feeling that her pursuits were futile, worthless. While undergoing this frustration, she also felt an intense urge to visit Vrindavan, the Holy land associated with Lord Krishna. There she was brought to the presence of a saint. The saint said to her in a stern voice, "Sit straight." She felt a gush of powerful divine energy flowing through her.

From Delhi she felt compelled to travel to Mumbai. In Mumbai, she hired a cab late in the evening and noticed a small picture on the dashboard. She couldn't make out the details of the picture, but in curiosity, she asked the taxi driver, "Who is the person in the picture?" He answered, "He is a

great spiritual giant. One can find him in a place called Ganeshpuri, a few kilometers from Mumbai”.



Something forced Hilda to proceed the very next day to Ganeshpuri. She found Swami Nityananda seated there at His Ashram, with several devotees before him. Being in his presence, she realized within her heart that all her searches, inner and outer, were over. Her trail of Guru Kripa Yoga had thus ended at the feet of Nityananda. He was the same person she had seen in a vision in her home several thousand miles away. She had seen him clearly in her very home, sitting under a tree. He acknowledged her and said to devotees who had gathered “Oh! Here she has come. *This One* gave her direction in Delhi and then an introduction in the cab in Mumbai.”

Devotees knew that Baba had not moved out of Ganeshpuri for several years. The connection between Baba and Hilda must have been long, maybe in past lives too. That divine bond had brought this lady to Ganeshpuri to seek Baba’s *darshan*. She stood there transfixed and her heart cried out to Baba, “My beloved. Oh! My beloved.” Yes, she had found her Guru. Just as she was about to give up her search thinking that it was futile, Nityananda lead her to the saint in Vrindavan. Finally when she met him in Ganeshpuri, she was transformed! She carried the *Bhakti Sampradaya* to US.

Shri Deshpande

Shri Gajanan Mhatre had narrated this story of Shri Deshpande from Nasik.

Once when Shri Tare, a renowned astrologer met Deshpande, he enquired whether he had taken the *darshan* of Bhagavan Nityananda, while he was working at Thane. When he answered in the negative, Shri Tare described Baba as a great *Avadhuta*, a Janma Siddha whose glance bestows divine grace and predicted that as per the indications in his horoscope, he would have the *darshan* of this great saint in the near future. Deshpande had neither heard of nor visited Ganeshpuri. This prediction brought a longing in his heart to have the *darshan* of the Saint.

Several years later, Deshpande visited Thane on an invitation for attending the marriage of his friend’s daughter. A few days before the date of the marriage, he walked into the Kopaneshwar Mahadeo temple, and while praying to the deity, he suddenly remembered the predictions of Shri

Tare. He felt an intense desire to visit Ganeshpuri. His friend, who was also his host, made the necessary arrangements for him to make the trip to Ganeshpuri. Thus, on a Saturday morning in February 1956, he finally reached Ganeshpuri, as if everything was falling into place as predicted by the astrologer. In those days, Ganeshpuri was a virtual jungle. Although there was a road, a person led him through the fields and thick foliage, to reach Vaikuntha, Nityananda's abode. His heart was beating fast with the excitement of the unknown.

When he entered the dimly lit hall, it was around eleven in the morning. There was a nip in the air and a chill in the hall. A dark person was sitting on a raised step and there were several people sitting in front of him. Although there were some thirty people around, the atmosphere was peaceful and quiet. All, including Baba, were silent. People were watching the statue-like magnificent figure sitting still, with his eyes closed, in silence. Deshpande being a novice, didn't know how to present himself to the Saint, and at that time he was not aware of the greatness of Bhagavan. Instead of waiting humbly on the outer circle of the sitting group, he walked straight to Baba's presence and stood in front of him. The devotees around were shocked at the apparent audacity of the stranger and were about to rebuke him to withdraw. Immediately Baba opened his eyes and stared at him. Baba ordered "Go, wash your hands and feet in the *kund*. Eat and come back."

Deshpande obeyed Baba's words and after some time, returned to the hall. Baba was sitting at the entrance of the room and, as usual, devotees were seated in front of him. Once again, he walked straight up to Baba and stood silently in front of Him. Devotees mistook his actions as arrogance, as they felt that he was not showing humility before the great Saint. Yet, everybody remained quiet and absolute silence reigned in the hall. Deshpande bowed to Baba with folded hands. When he raised his head from the ground, Baba pointed his finger at himself and said "So, *this* is what you have been looking for?" So saying, he began to recite, "*Aham Brahmasmi*" and immediately went inside the room. It appeared as if Baba was waiting for him so as to initiate him through his graceful glance and give him the mantra. Shri Deshpande came out of the hall completely overcome by this experience and spent his return journey to Thane contemplating the words of Baba.

He repeatedly churned the events that took place in *darshan* in his mind, trying to find their significance. One day, it suddenly flashed in his mind that several years ago he had undergone the practice of reciting the entire '*Shiv Lilamrut*' in the Nageshwar temple, in one go. At the end of this recitation, there was a prayer which says "Oh Lord Shiva, I am an ignorant child and I do not

understand what devotion is. I do not know how to recognize a Guru. Hence bless me so that I can find a true *Sadguru* who shall guide me.” In those days he had a strong yearning to perform *sadhana*. But being unable to locate a *Sadguru*, he couldn't fulfill his heart's desire and felt dejected. It was Nityananda who could clearly detect the deep urge for spiritual guidance in his heart and hence declared, “*This* is the thing that you are looking for.” So saying, Baba initiated him through his graceful glance and the mantra 'I am That'. Shri Deshpande finally met his *Sadguru*!

Shri M. D. Suvarna

Shri M. D. Suvarna owned a photo studio at Khar in Mumbai. In 1954, while he was undergoing a turbulent period in his life, his relative mentioned Swami Nityananda to him, saying he was a great Yogi and *Siddha* at Ganeshpuri, who moves around wearing nothing but a loincloth. He also narrated that many people had benefited from his *darshan* and stated that nobody could ever take his photograph without his blessing. When he heard this, the photographer's ego was hurt and he declared that if all the settings of any good camera are right, the photo has to materialize. He decided to visit Ganeshpuri and verify the facts himself. After reaching Ganeshpuri and taking a bath in the hot springs, his relative summoned Suvarna for Baba's *darshan*.



MD Suvarna (far right) with Bhagavan Nityananda

Suvarna took several snaps of Baba, apparently without His consent. To Suvarna's surprise, when he developed the film, the entire roll was blank. Thus provoked, he visited Ganeshpuri again to take a few more snaps of the Saint. He cross-checked the settings of the camera, verified that

everything was right. Yet again he found that only the photographs that were *not* of Baba were taken successfully. His attempt to capture Baba's picture proved futile, as the Sage's permission was not sought. Suvarna was stunned at this mystery and his ego vanished in a trice. Surrendering himself at Baba's feet, he humbly requested Baba's permission to take His picture.

Baba uttered his typical *humkar* and then warned him, "Do not ever ask '*this one*' to pose for any photographs. If you want to take any, then just take it without troubling." Suvarna took only two photographs that day and both came off beautifully.

Since then, he visited Ganeshpuri regularly on the weekends and took photographs of Baba. That was how Shri M. D. Suvarna had the *darshan* of his Guru. From 1954 till Baba's *Mahasamadhi* in 1961, most of Baba's photographs were taken by him. The world is indebted to Suvarna's family for making the storehouse of memories and experiences of Baba available in the form of films and photographs.

In this chapter we saw how various devotees met Bhagavan Nityananda because of their *purvashanchita punya* and their devotion and left us a legacy of Guru Kripa Yoga. Whoever reads this chapter installing his Guru on the lotus in his heart, will meet their rightful *Shradhasthan* and be guided in their *sadhana*.

Om Shree Nityanandarpanamastu