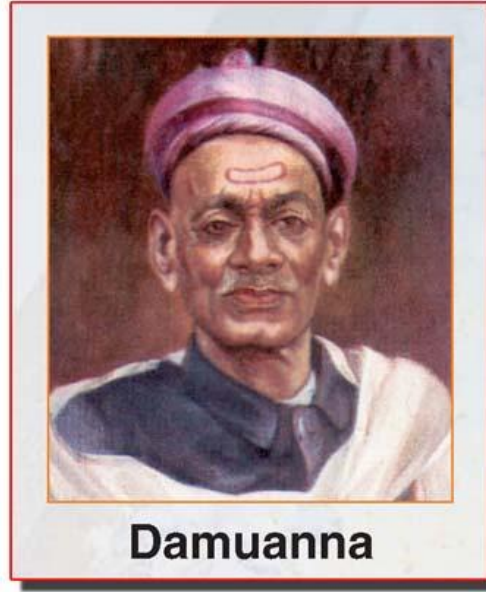


In Sai's Proximity

– Mrs. Mugdha Divadkar

DAMUANNA & NANASAHEB RASANE –

ANNASAHEB GADGIL – BALAJI PATIL NEVASKAR



“I will carry your burden forever!”

Baba had told Damuanna the names that were to be given to the first two sons and Damuanna had noted them down in his diary. One year passed thereafter and Damuanna's first son was born. When the boy was an infant, Damuanna took him to Shirdi and placed him at Baba's feet. He enquired, “Baba, what name shall I give him?” Baba retorted, “Damya, did you forget, what I had told you in such a short time? You have noted down the name on the third page of your diary. Have I not told you to name him ‘Daulatshah’? As instructed by Baba, Damuanna named him as ‘Daulatshah’ (Dattatray Damodar alias Nanasaheb Rasane).

After a few years thereafter, the second son ‘Tanashah’ was born.

When Daulatshah became five year old, Damusheth took him to Shirdi for Chaul Karma. Baba held the boy's hand in His own hand and taught him to write the word ‘Hari’.

Baba also gave guidance at the time of marriage of Daulatshah alias Nanasaheb Rasane. For this boy from a rich family, several proposals were coming from well-off families. One of the proposal was from his own maternal uncle who was offering a dowry of Rs. 2000 - 3000. There was also a proposal from a poor family from Pandharpur. Due to financial condition, the family could offer no dowry.

Damusheth took a bunch of horoscopes to Shirdi and along with Madhavrao went to see Baba. Madhavrao showed the horoscopes to Baba and enquired, “Which proposal should they accept?” Baba held the papers in his hands and selected the one belonging to the girl from poor family. Accordingly, Damusheth went with the alliance of his son with that girl.

The marriage was held in Pandharpur. Damusheth also invited Baba marriage. Baba assured him - “I am always near you. Don't be afraid. Whenever you think of me every time I will be with you. Don't forget this.” As Damusheth repeatedly invited Him, Baba said, “Without Allah's permission, I cannot do anything. I will send Shamya on my behalf.”

Madhavrao alias Shama attended the marriage at Pandharpur.

The people criticized Damusheth for foregoing such large sum of dowry and having alliance with a poor family. However, without getting attracted towards any monetary matters, Damuanna followed Baba's instructions to the last word. Daulatshah's family life with his wife began on the path of happiness.

Inner Knowledgeable Baba

A Mumbai Broker and a friend of Damusheth once recommended a deal to him. He said, “If you purchase cotton now for Rs. 50000 - 60,000, after some time it will fetch you at least Rs. 1 Lakh. However, you must not delay the matter.”

Damusheth did not do anything without taking Baba's advice. On this occasion also he wrote a letter requesting Madhavrao to seek Baba's permission for the deal. But, Baba said, "has he gone mad? He thinks that with such a purchase he will reach the sky. But, tell him, not to run after Lakhs. And, what is he lacking at home that he is getting involved in such unnecessary matters?"

Damusheth was little dejected on receiving such an answer from Baba. He decided to go to Shirdi and himself put the question to Baba. It was his practice to press Baba's legs after going to Shirdi. While pressing Baba's legs, an idea entered his mind – why not offer part of the profit to Baba. But, before he could utter a word, Baba retorted, "Damya, I do not want to get involved in any transactions." Then Damusheth gave up the idea altogether.

On another occasion, he asked Baba's permission about trading in food provisions. Baba said, "The market rates will collapse and purchase prices will be higher than the selling prices." Damuanna told this to his business friends. They said, "Actually, the present situation is exactly opposite."

However, during that season the rains were very good and the crop was abundant. The result was – the prices came crashing down and the hoarders lost a lot of money.

Damusheth himself narrated these stories about his business to Narsimha Swamy.

Once, Damusheth's appeal was being heard in Mumbai High Court. The lawyer wanted him to come to Mumbai. Damusheth went to Shirdi to seek permission from Baba. However, Baba did not allow him to go to Mumbai. Not only that, He made him stay with Him. There in Mumbai, Damusheth won the case.

When Damusheth first went to Shirdi, it was Balaji Patil of village Nevasa who used to sweep the Masjid, lit the lamps and do other such work. Damusheth obtained permission of Baba and started participating in the chores.

While Baba was Dehdhari, Damuanna took his advice in person and after His Samadhi Damuanna put chits of paper with "yes" - "no" options before Baba's photo and picked one of them treating it as Baba's advice.

Supreme Guru - Shri Sai Baba

In the year 1926, Damusheth's senior son – Dattatray alias Nanasaheb went to Kedgaon to avail the Darshan of Shri Narayan Maharaj. The moment Maharaj spotted him, he said, "Your Guru is Param Guru. He is several levels above me. Why did you come here? Your fate is safe in the hands of Baba. You have chosen rightly. You go to Him and yours shall be accomplished."

"I will fulfill wishes of my devotees!"

Nanasaheb was childless for a long time. Earlier he lost three children due to epilepsy. His wife, therefore, tried to persuade him to get married for a second time. He was depressed and sad. He lost interest in family matters.

In such a frame of mind, once sat in front of Baba's Samadhi in Shirdi and began pleading - "Baba, bless me either with a child or show me the path to Atma Kalyan." While appealing thus, his eyes welled with tears. Just then he heard a faint voice from the Samadhi - "Santati Ho Jayegi (You shall be blessed with a child)!" Nanasaheb's joy did not know any bounds. He prostrated before the Samadhi. He was amazed and ecstatic - not because he was going to be blessed with a child but with realization that his Sadguru responded to his prayers. In 1928, he bore a son.

As Nanasaheb had only one son, his father Damusheth prayed in front of the Samadhi and Nanasaheb was blessed with a second son in 1931.

Damuanna said, "I incessantly think of Baba. He sometimes gives me Darshan, sometimes even abuses me and on occasions even thrashes me. It is said that devotees of Akkalkot Swami benefited from abuses and beatings sometimes showered upon them. So is the case of Baba. Therefore, I was never hurt with his bad words or thrashings. Nor did my devotion and affection get any less."

A theft was committed at the Ahmednagar house of Damuanna. The startling fact was it was committed by a person who served in the home for as many as 33 years. With the help of keys, he opened the cupboard and took away the box containing family ornaments. It included a very old nose-ring which is priceless for a married lady. The loss of the nose-ring hurt everyone more than anything else.

After the name of the thief was revealed, Damuanna was very much disheartened. He was unable to understand the reasons which tempted the servant to commit such a deed. In turn, the man was threatened with dire consequences and offered various enticements, but to no avail. He did not disclose anything. A police enquiry commenced. But, in his heart Damuanna repeatedly felt that the matter should not be dragged to court.

Ultimately, he sat in front of Baba's photo and began praying. He placed the matter before Baba. Baba was his ultimate court. The very next day, the servant produced the stolen box of ornaments - intact with all its contents - before Damusheth and sought forgiveness.

Clearance of doubts

This is an event which took place sometime in 1910-11. Once, as usual, Damusheth was sitting at the feet of Baba. There, two questions going around in his mind. One was - "So many devotees come every day to Baba. Do they all benefit from coming here?" The moment the question was formed, Baba replied, "See! You must have observed the Mohor that a mango tree gets? But, some of it gets drained before conversion into fruit. Even all fruits do not reach the stage of ripening. Ultimately, only mangoes become ripe."

The second question was, "What will happen to me, when Baba is no more?" Baba immediately replied, "Damya, whenever and wherever you think of me, I will be always there with you."

Before his demise, Damusheth called his sons near him and earnestly told them, “From time to time my Baba has given me money – totaling now to Rs 31. Take care of them even more than your life. These are not simple Rupee coins – they are Saakshaat Kamdhenu. Make sure that nothing is left wanting in your service to Shri Sai Baba.”

Damusheth breathed his last at the ripe old age of 89 on 20th January 1941. His successive generations hold only Baba in esteem as their Param Aaradhya Daivat. The young and old from their household, even today follow Sai Baba’s teachings. As directed by Damuanna, the senior son – Nanasaheb – gave more importance to serving Sai Baba than looking after his own family. Baba also helped him in his Parmarthik progress. He spent major portion of his life in propagating the teachings of Shri Sai Baba. He was a trustee of Shirdi Sai Sansthan.

DATTATRAY DAMODAR alias NANASAHEB RASANE

After the passing away of Damuanna, when Nanasaheb went to Shirdi, he became inconsolable and began crying. At the Samadhi Sthan he heard Baba’s words, “Arre Nana, the rites of fourteenth day have been performed and the mourning period has ended. Isn’t it? You have eaten sweets now. Now don’t shed tears any more”.

Nanasaheb was a Punyatma. He was a good orator and a social worker. He had relinquished his entire life at the feet of Baba. He had no attraction towards his family life. His every act and deed was connected to Baba. He was drenched in the shower of Baba’s Krupa.

Since childhood his mind was getting prepared in devotion to Baba. Gradually, his Virakti grew. Simultaneously, his desires towards materialistic things and pleasures got destroyed automatically. In his heart, he believed that “It is the Sadguru who is the Karta and it is He who runs our lives.” He was a divine soul. He had excellent Vachasiddhi.

He was known for his very stern nature. However, at heart, he was equally kind. He hated devotees who gossiped and behaved carelessly. He despised cheating and deceit.

He always referred Baba as “My Baba.” He used to say, “People pester and harass my Baba. Everyone is scheming to loot my Baba. Don’t try to fool or annoy my Baba. HE IS A FIRE INCARNATE.”

He said, “It was never in the nature of my Baba to sit in a Devhara (small temple in a house). My Baba behaved like a common man. He used a lot of Urdu words in his conversation.”

There was a reason for Nanasaheb referred Baba with such close familiarity. It was Baba who had asked Damuanna to give his first son to Him.

Once, on the occasion of Guru Poornima, a coin of one Naya Paisa dropped from Baba’s garland into Nanasaheb’s hands. He preserved it with great devotion throughout all his life. He carried it

in the Button Patti of his shirt. He said, “My annual income is about Rs 5,000. Even then no coin in the world can match this Naya Paisa. And no value can be attached to it – it is valueless.”

Nanasaheb had expressed a desire that the coin should be cremated along with his body. And so was done.

He had another fervent wish. Most of the Jyeshtha and Shreshtha devotees of Baba had coincidentally passed away on the auspicious day of Ekadashi. Nanasaheb wished that the day - on which he would breathe his last – should be also Ekadashi.

In his last days, he moved his residence to Shirdi. On the day of Ashadhi Ekadashi, there was a small reason for his suffering an injury. He fell down on his shoulder. His collar bone was damaged. He was admitted to the Sai Hospital and passed away on the same day.

ANNASAHEB ALIAS CHIDAMBAR KESHAV GADGIL

“I am a Muslim!”

He was prominent amongst those fortunate persons who were brought to Baba by Nanasaheb Denge. At that time, Annasaheb was the secretary to the collector of Ahmednagar, while Nanasaheb was a well-known Inamdar of the city. Nanasaheb carried lot of influence in the Govt. offices. He was a close friend of Annasaheb as both were pious by nature.

Nanasaheb was dazzled by the divine experiences given by Shri Sai Baba. Even he had got a son by Baba’s grace. Annasaheb had heard several such experiences narrated by Nanasaheb. Impressed by the same, Annasaheb took his Munsif Vamanrao and senior officer from the Education Dep, Sitaram Patwardhan along with him and went in a for tonga to avail Darshan of Baba.

At that time, Madhavrao Despande was a school teacher. Annasaheb asked Madhavrao, “I have heard a lot about the Sadhu who resides here. Where is he?” Like many other people, at that time, Madhavrao was considering Baba to be a mad Fakir. He was yet to realize the divinity of Baba. Moreover, he was forthright in his speech. Pointing to the Masjid, he said, “no. There is no Mahan Sadhu here. But, a mad Fakir stays in that Masjid.”

The moment Gadgil appeared before Baba, choicest abuses got showered on him. However, as the abuses went on increasing, Annasaheb go more and more pleased... And an old incident was responsible for this.

Prior to his this visit to Shirdi, Annasaheb had gone to avail Darshan of a Sadhu in a temple at Bhimashankar near Pune. The Sadhu had ordered him to go for Baba’s Darshan. While showering him with abuses, Baba made a mention of the Sadhu. Annasaheb was taken aback with this. He developed full faith in Baba. Annasaheb started climbing the steps of the Masjid along with

Patwardhan, Vamanrao and the Tongawalla (who brought them to Shirdi). However, from where he was sitting, Baba shouted, “don’t climb! I am a Muslim. Go and prostrate before the Bhimashankar Sadhu. !” Hearing this, Gadgil bowed down before Baba.

From the description of Baba given by various people, Annasaheb had started believing that Baba was a Muslim. However, at the time of the Darshan, Baba eradicated the misconception.

Darshan in the form of Ganpati

Baba ensured with a keen eye that each follower followed the path of devotion chosen by the devotee, Baba made sure of this by fulfilling the wishes of the devotees and allowing them to do as they wished. Annasaheb was an ardent follower of Shri Ganpati. Now, he started seeing Ganpati in Baba. He even started performing Baba’s Pooja in the manner in which one worships Ganpati.

Once, when he was performing Pooja in this manner, Baba remarked to one of the gentlemen sitting nearby, “this old man is very cunning. He says, I am sitting on top of mice.” (It is well-known that Shri Ganpati’s vehicle is a mice and he sits on top of that.) Gadgil was delighted that Baba had guessed, what was in his mind.

“I am always with you!”

Later on, Annasaheb was promoted and he became Mamledar of Sinnar. The place being close to Shirdi, he used to frequently avail Baba’s Darshan. However, after some period, he was transferred to a distant place. He had to immediately report at the new place. He did not have enough time to go for Baba’s Darshan before his departure. He was in turmoil because of this and his eyes brimmed with tears. With a heavy heart he boarded the train. His mind was full of Baba’s thoughts. Suddenly, a packet of the Udi dropped on him from the compartment’s window. Curiously he opened the packet and found that it contained Udi. He preserved the packet carefully. He placed the packet in a Tait (locket) and it remained with him till end.

Later on Annasaheb got the opportunity to take Baba’s Darshan. He rushed to the Masjid and fell down at Baba’s fit. Before he could apologize, Baba said to him, “Arre, you could not come. Hence, I sent you Udi. Did you get it?”

The moment Gadgil heard these words, tears streamed from his eyes.

An old Sai devotee – Shri Laxman Govind Munge – narrates a beautiful story related to this incident. He says...

“Shri Chidambar Keshav Gadgil was a senior Mamledar and I assisted him as a clerk. When the Mamledar and Nanasahab Nimonkar went to avail Baba’s Darshan, I also accompanied them. We prostrated before Baba. A thought entered my mind ‘Why these Hindus perform Pooja for a Muslim like Baba?’ Just then, Baba said to Gadgil, ‘Give me my Kharka (dried dates), packet of Incense and my Dakshina of Re. 1!’ I was surprised to hear this. Because, the previous night, Gadgil had set aside these three articles saying ‘I am going to place these as offering before my

Sadguru – Baba.’ And, Baba now was demanding exactly the same three things. I was, therefore, convinced about Baba’s power of Antardnyan. Baba accepted the offering with pleasure.”

Annasaheb had deep knowledge about Paramarthik matters. He had realized that the ultimate destination of this mortal body was ‘Paramatmaprapti’. He lived accordingly. He introduced several people to the divinity of Sai Baba with the intention of spreading the joy of being in Sadguru’s company and turning them to the path of Satkarya. One such person was the manager of Satyanaratyan Co Sholapur, Shri V. S. Joshi.

In the course of his life, Annasaheb retired and settled down at Ghodnadi. He followed the practice of Annachhatra (distribution of food) at Shri Kshetra Gangapur. Due to this, he came frequently in contact with the Bazar at Sholapur. Thus, he met Shri Vasudeo Sadashiv Joshi who had turned to the path of Virakti from the young age of 16 years. Annasaheb was similarly enfolded in Sai devotion. Therefore, this contact through a mere commercial transaction developed into a thick friendship.

Annasaheb had similar close relations with Raobahadur Sathe alias Harivinayak. This is an incident of 1913...

Annasaheb wrote a letter to Shri Joshi, from Shirdi informing him that “I am at Shirdi and a Namsaptah is going on here. Please do come and avail Baba’s Darshan! You will need Rs. 10 for expenses. Don’t worry. Shri Narayan will give it at any place. But, don’t allow this opportunity to pass.”

Joshi read the letter with great joy. He took permission from his wife, arranged for the money and arrived at the Sathe Wada where Gadgil used to stay. He carried Pooja Sahitya and went with Annasaheb to avail Baba’s Darshan. Seeing the radiant figure of Baba, he was amazed. Tears filled his eyes.

At the time of evening Aarati, he continued to stare at the Mukhakamal of Baba. He was unable to regain his normal senses. Noticing this, Annasaheb said, “Joshibua, the Aarati is over; Come!” Only then, he came out of the trance.

Joshi asked the meaning of his trance. Annasaheb replied, “Joshibua, Baba does lot of such Gamati-Jamati (tricks). Only watch them!”

After spending a few days in the Namsaptah, he broached upon the subject (with Harivinayak Sathe) of returning home. Sathe informed him, “It is not possible to go without obtaining Baba’s permission.” Thereafter, a Sevekari pleaded the case of this guest of Annasaheb Gadgil. Baba replied, “has the Lord not given him enough Chatni – Bhakri (food) during his stay here? Why are you forcing him against his own wishes?”

The day on which Joshi left Shirdi was Thursday. Gadgil told him, “Joshibua, take the Prasad from here with you.” Joshi went to Bapusaheb Jog to ask for Prasad. Bapusaheb placed one piece of Barfi on everyone’s hand. Annasaheb said to Joshi, “Bua, this much Prasad will not be sufficient

for everyone at your home. Go and buy some more Barfi from these 8 Annas!” Thinking that any sweet from Shirdi is Baba’s Prasad, Joshi was proceeding to the Bazaar. However, he met a person on the way who was hurrying towards him. He was carrying a Thali full of Barfi. He said, “Baba has asked me to give this to the guest of Gadgil!”

In the meantime, Gadgil had sent a person to fetch groundnuts. He wanted to give them to Joshi. However, just then Raobahadur Sathe said, “Baba has received gunny bags of groundnuts from some devotee. He has issued orders to give two baskets full to Gadgil and his guest and distribute the rest amongst the devotees who have gathered here. Therefore, it is not necessary to buy groundnuts.”

From these two instances, the people who had gathered there realized, how Baba performs miracles sitting at one place and how He is omnipresent.

On his return to Solapur, Joshi gave some amount to Shri Govind Dhondo Pansare and sent him to Shirdi for availing Baba’s Darshan and also to take Baba’s photos. The duo of Gadgil and Sathe welcomed Pansare and took good care of him. He stayed there for four days and with Baba’s permission took His two photographs – one while He was sitting on the Shila and the other while he was reclining against the pillar. Pansare returned home a happy man.

Baba appreciated the devotion of Annasaheb and hence, He showered Gadgil’s guests – Joshi and Pansare – with love and affection. He also granted permission to take His photographs and guided them in the direction of Atmaunnati.

BALAJI PATIL NEVASKAR

There is a couplet which reads – Place your Tan-Man-Dhan (body-soul-wealth) at the feet of your Sadguru and spend your entire life in Guru (devotion of Guru).

Balaji Patil of Nevasa truly lived to this couplet. He was born in lower cast family. However, through his Bhakti of Sadguru, he traversed the Bhavsagar.

A long time back, the pious Balaji came for the first time to avail Darshan of Baba. The moment he took Darshan he decided to reside permanently at Shirdi. For some time Baba tried to convince him to return back to his family. However, till the end he was unable to find solace in family life.

Damuanna Kasar came to Shirdi for the first time in 1892. While narrating his experience he writes...

“When I first came to Shirdi, I saw Bala Patil of Nevasa doing all types of chores to serve Baba. He used to clean the Masjid and look after its lights. He also cleaned the Chavadi and the path on which Baba went to Lendi Baug.”

The villagers used to defecate on the path to Lendi Baug and also threw garbage. Balaji used to get up early morning and clean the mess. He started this practice which was later on followed first by Radhakrishnamai and thereafter by Abdul Baba. Balaji also put soil over the places where Baba used to spit His cough.

While narrating his Sai experience, Shri Saisharananand says - “the life of this Nevaskar is worth following. He was an ardent devotee of Baba”

Balaji carried the entire crop from his farm in bullock carts and considering Baba to be its rightful owner, placed the crop at His feet. He took home only a portion which was given to him by Baba. He managed to run his household within that. Balaji drank the water which was left over by Baba or even that water in which Baba had taken His bath. After Balaji, his son followed both these practices relating to the crop and water.

Every day about four times, Baba ate Bhakri made from Balaji’s milo.

Balaji never did anything without seeking Baba’s permission. He even sought Baba’s permission for stitching clothes for his family members. He had two wives. However, he had few children. Sometimes, the family came from Nevasa to Shirdi to avail Baba’s Darshan. On such occasions, Baba purchased Choli-Lugadi for Balaji’s wives and placed them in their Oti with blessings.

Once, Raghuji Patil of Shirdi (elder brother of Bhagoji Shinde) went to Nevasa. He stayed at Balaji’s home. One day a snake entered the stable of Balaji. The livestock was tied there, got scared and tried to come loose. Everyone was at their wits end as to how to set free the cows etc. and save them. However, the snake was had raised his hood and was sitting quietly.

While this havoc taking place, Balaji was overjoyed. He said, “Baba has arrived in the guise of the snake. He is no one else but my Sai.” He immediately went inside his house and fetched a dish full of milk. He placed the dish before the snake and said, “what is this Baba? Are you trying to scare us? Have this milk! Finish it completely!! This is my Seva. Please accept it!” Then he thought, the quantity of milk offered may not be sufficient. So, he brought a full pot of milk, placed it before the snake and returned to his place.

Everyone was flabbergasted. They were keeping a watch to ensure that the snake should not enter the house! Here, the snake drank milk and went away as quietly as he had come. Nobody had seen him coming and no one saw him departing. Everyone could not locate in spite of great efforts. All felt relieved; but Balaji was sad. He had seen the snake entering the stable. He wished, he should have witnessed his departure.

Balaji saw Sai everywhere. For him, Sai existed everywhere. Baba also showered this blessed soul with His Krupa.

It was the first death anniversary of Balaji. At that time, his mother was alive. For the anniversary feast, the number of people who had gathered was almost 3 times the expectation. Balaji’s wife panicked on seeing the huge gathering. She informed her mother-in-law. She said, “why do you

panic when our Baba is behind us? Bring that Udi!” Balaji’s wife brought Udi. Balaji’s mother took fistful of Udi, put it in all the vessels containing food and covered them with cloth. Thereafter she directed her daughter-in-law, “now take as much food out of these vessels as you want and serve it to the people. But, ensure that the vessels remain covered with cloth! Sai Baba will protect our reputation. Don’t worry.” Balaji’s wife followed her mother-in-law’s directions and Baba also protected their reputation.

The above incident was narrated by Balaji’s mother to Kakasaheb Dixit. This is a fine example which illustrates, how Baba looks after those devotees who devote themselves with Shraddha and Saburi.

Shri Saisharananand writes about the last days of Balaji thus:-

“Leaving everything, Balaji came to Shirdi once again. However, Baba persuaded him to return to his home. In his last days he gave up food and water. He only ate the Prasad of Bhakri sent by Baba and drank only water which was touched by Baba’s feet.”

In this manner, the unique Sai Seva of Balaji bore fruits.

Source: Saileela

– Translated from original Marathi into English by Sudhir