

'Completely obey the *Guru's* order is the true discipleship of a disciple. This alone is our adornment.'

Dr. Pitale: Service oriented

Sai Devotee Doctor Couple

We often meet people who say 'I am a devotee of this God or that *Guru*'. But, how many of them understand the implication of being a devotee or disciple ?

One, who lives by the tenet of his God's or *Guru's* teachings, reflects his surrender and discipleship. Following a *Guru's* teachings is the true discipleship. (Shri Sai Satcharita, chap. 23, verse 172, 189) One such true devotee of Sai Baba is Dr. Amol Pitale, resident of Vile Parle, Mumbai and a member of Gurusthan Trust.

Chapter 32 of Shri Sai Satcharita states the body which is completely given to the service of others has truly served the purpose for which it was created. According to this teaching Dr. Pitale is truly serving others for a decade by rendering free medical service to pilgrims walking from various places to Shirdi. He provides medical service to the pilgrims from Nasik to Shirdi from Gudipadva to Ramnavami. In this service he is supported by his wife Dr. Anita, his sister Dr. Shraddha, and sister's husband Dr. Ujjwal Bhure and mother Shaila Pitale. In these eight days while going from one group of pilgrims to another, he travels an estimated 4,500 km.

After learning about Dr. Pitale from renowned Singer Anupama Deshpande, we decided to meet him. After fixing an appointment with him we headed for his residence at Vile Parle. We were elated to meet a family which was blissfully drenched in Sai devotion. The most touching sight at their residence was the two and half feet brass statue of Baba in the hall. This statue was sculpted by Dr. Pitale's father Late Manohar Pitale. While the sublimely smiling statue of Baba was holding our attention, Dr. Pitale's one year four month old, Nishtha came running into the room. We were touched by not only the devotion of all the adults in the family, but also the tiny tot, who chanting 'Baba... Baba' was busy lighting the lamps in front of Baba.

Dr. Pitale said, "Nishtha is devoted to Baba, every morning when she wakes up, she comes to the hall, and ask us to lift her, then she kisses Baba. When we do *Pooja*, since she can't say *Aarati*, she simply chants 'Baba... Baba'."

Dr. Pitale then showed us a photo. We were shocked and the first thought to cross our mind was, 'Is this possible?' This was a photograph, where Nishtha was giving a kiss to Baba and it looked Baba too was responding to her. Actually, in the statue Baba's lips are closed; but in the photo they are together as if about to kiss.

While recalling the incident Dr. Pitale said, "It was her first birthday, as usual I lifted Nishtha in my arm and she kissed Baba, in that moment the picture was taken. That day we didn't notice anything unusual, nor did we when the photo prints came and we hung it in the hall. It was only when a friend of mine who was visiting us, brought it to our notice."

Dr. Pitale while stating this was feeling overwhelmed. He added, "Shri Sai has blessed five generations of the Pitale family, and this is a clear sign of it." We asked, "Five generations?"

Dr. Pitale explained, "Yes. Nishtha is the fifth generation of the Pitale family to be blessed by Baba. My great grandfather Late Vishnupant Pitale had the privilege of taking Baba's *Darshan* in 1916. In that first *Darshan* Baba's love attracted my great grandfather. That time my great grandfather took a picture of Baba and gave it in Dwarkamai, which was blessed by Baba. Even today that picture is with us. From that day to this day Baba is with our family, and we are experiencing His blessings bestowed on us."

When queried, "How did you think of providing free medical facilities to the pilgrims?" He replied, "In 2001, my father had asked Baba for something (vow), when the request was fulfilled, he promised to come to Shirdi.

"His wish was fulfilled; so we left for Shirdi the next day, and it was Gudi Padva. We had also taken with us first aid box and some medicines. We had halted our vehicle near Bhiwandi Bypass for a while. We saw *Shraddha Saburi Mandal's Sai Palkhi* (palanquin carrying Sai Baba's picture), they too had halted. We saw a boy vomiting; he too also had pain in his stomach. My father asked him if he needed any help, he told my father to meet the *Mandal's* chairman. At the same time the chairman was coming towards them. When my father said that my son is a doctor and do you want any help, the chairman said, 'You have arrived like God in this moment of distress, there are 25- 30 pilgrims who are unwell.'

"We treated them with our medicines and moved ahead. On the way we spoke to 2-3 more *Mandals*, and while treating the pilgrims, the medicines, we were carrying got exhausted. We bought some medicines in Nasik and treated a few more pilgrims. We reached Shirdi, took Baba's *Darshan* and returned to Mumbai. My father took a decision that from Gudi Padva to Ramnavami, eight days in all we will provide free medical services to the pilgrims on the way to Shirdi; and from that day to this day, the services are provided every year without a hitch."

When queried, "Where do you get the necessary fund for this?" He replied, "Initially, we spent approximately Rs. 25,000 on the medicines. Under this building the Sai temple, that you see was constructed by my father. The money from the donation box was collected once a year and that would help us buy the requisite amount of medicines. But, as the years rolled by, the number of pilgrims increased and the total cost of the medicines spiraled, this year it is Rs.4,42,614 (if we were to consider the retail price, the cost will be higher). As our service increased, so did the help; today, the pharmaceutical companies help us with the medicines. Besides, the Gurusthan Trust of this Sai temple also bears a part of the cost. There are some

generous donors who support us whole heartedly. We have never experienced a lack, with Baba's grace, somehow or the other help has always come. Initially our group had 14 people in this voluntary service, now we have 72. This is all Baba's *Leela*."

Again we enquired, "In eight days, many pilgrims were likely to feel unwell, so a large amount of medicines is required to deal with the situation. How do you manage it?"

Dr. Pitale replied, "We keep all the medicines before Sai Baba and then put *Udi* on them. Then we make packets of them to treat body ache, fever, loose motion and vomiting. Each packet has four dosages; some packets are handed to the *chairman* of the *Mandals*. At the moment there are 81 *Palkhis* in touch with us. We require about one lakh such packets. The Sai devotees are experiencing great results from these packets; so they have started calling it 'Sai Dose'.

We enquired, "In those eight days, do you experience Baba's *Leelas*?"

Dr. Pitale replied, "We experience many; but if you listen to the experiences of the Sai devotees, you will be pleasantly shocked. Once, I got a call from the chairman of the *Mandal* at around 12.30 p.m. asking me to treat a patient, who was shivering with very high fever. I asked him to give 'Sai Dose'; he said all the packets were exhausted.

"At that time I was on Kasara *Ghat* and he was at Wasim, the distance was too much. The chairman of the *Mandal* said, 'Let me see what I can do.' The chairman at that time, had tablets of Gelusil (one given for acidity), he took it, kept it in front of the *Palkhi*, applied *Udi* to it and gave it to the patient, in no time the patient's fever subsided and the next day, he was ready to walk !

"There are times when the condition of the patient is critical and he has to be hospitalized; but 'Sai Dose' is enough to treat the patient, isn't it Baba's *Leela*?"

"Once, a 62-years old man who walked to Shirdi every year, met us at our Igatpuri camp. His legs were operated upon and screws were fitted on them. One of the screws had come off and there was pus formation. I gave him a T.T. injection and told him that he needs to get the screw fitted and asked him to return home. He didn't listen to me and started arguing, 'I am on my pilgrimage to Shirdi. I can't leave it half way. Treat me if you wish, before I leave'. I beseeched him that he had a grave health hazard and he should return home. To this, he responded slightly with anger, 'If you want to treat me, please do it. Otherwise, even if all the three screws come out, I will continue my journey to Shirdi.'

"I saluted his Sai devotion and dressed his wounds. His dressing took about 30 minutes. This will give you an idea of the extent of his wound the pus formation. For the next three days I went to all the places where he was journeying and dressed his wounds. And, the most astonishing thing was, on the third day, the pus had totally disappeared from his wound. He

reached Shirdi, had Baba's *Darshan* and returned to Mumbai, he sought surgical attention and his leg is fine; we met him this year in the pilgrimage.

"Once, some devotees brought a patient to our medical camp. I asked what had happened, they said, 'This man has been hit by a running truck and the impact was such that the headlight of the truck broke.' But, when I examined the patient, he had minor scratches on his back!

"The *Mandals* who get to hear of us have come and voluntarily helped us. One came and gave us a generator, some others donate food packets and water bottles, and some give voluntary service, like in helping fill medicines in the packets, etc. This is the service that Baba has asked us to do, it is so touching to meet these kind souls. Some devotees from these *Mandals* now are a part of our extended family, and they keep in touch with us round the year.

"Once, when my father was ill, he needed 2-3 bottles of blood. When I called one Sai devotee, 27 devotees came forward to donate blood!

"By giving medical assistance we feel very happy and satisfied. Every year people go on vacation and return with renewed vigour. For us those eight days rejuvenate us, we get energy for the entire one year, other than this we do not go for any outings in the year.

"In 2005 my Dr. Ujjwal had gone to Switzerland for some study. Hence, we were finding ourselves short of one doctor. With this niggling thought we left for *Seva*; but the next day, Dr. Ujjwal joined us in this trip! My sister had taken a loan for his travel, the moment we completed the camp he returned to Switzerland. The satisfaction we get while serving is incomparable to anything and it seems like Baba's doing to get this done by us.

"Even my wife's parents are blessed by Baba. Her mother's great grandfather is the same Harishchandra Pitale, to whom Baba had given the blessed two rupees, which are still with the family.

"Let Baba forever bless us all. Let Him get the service done through us, this is the only earnest prayer at His Feet."

Penned by **Sau. Mayuri Mahesh Kadam**

Email : saimayumahesh@gmail.com

Translated from Marathi into English by

Ms. Shamshaad Ali Baig

Email : shamshadbaig@gmail.com