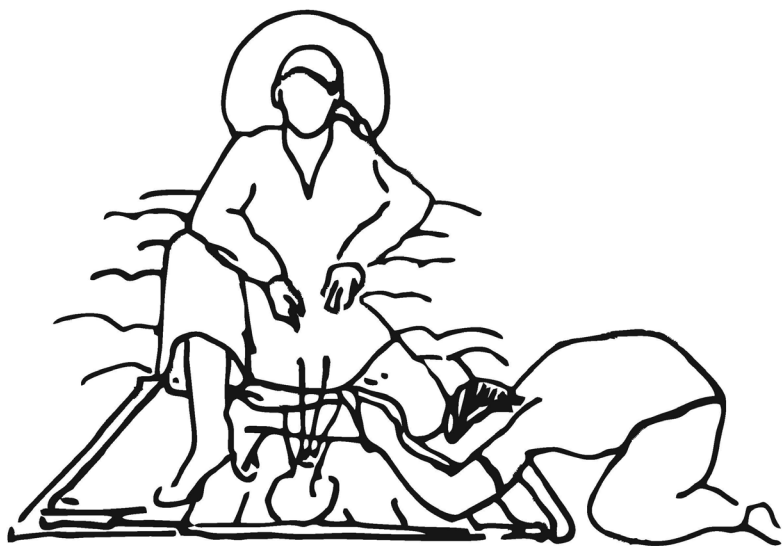


# AT THE LOTUS FEET OF SAI



His Humble Servant  
Dr. Motilal Gupta





# **At the Lotus Feet of Sai**

*Biography of Dr. Motilal Gupta*

Biography  
By  
Niti Shekhar





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DEDICATED TO SRI SAI BABA OF SHIRDI  
The inner ruler of all





## PREFACE

‘Sai Baba has blessed you with an IIM’, Dr. Motilal Gupta declared with a tranquil smile on his face.

‘But all the results are out Guru ji – I have not been selected,’ I replied.

‘No, no. You will get the admission. Don’t worry, Baba will give.’

In 2012 I had to appear for the Common Admission Test (CAT) for admissions into the management schools of India. Even before I filled the form, Guru ji had blessed me that I will be selected in one of the IIMs – the top-rung management colleges of the country. However, my name did not appear in any of the lists declared by the IIMs that had shortlisted me. I decided to take admission in a second-grade college and went to seek Guru ji’s blessings. Still, he insisted that my efforts have been rewarded. A week later I received a mail that I had been selected in the final list of IIM Kozhikode.

The day I reached Kozhikode, I saw Sai Baba in my dream, blessing me and as I went forward and prostrated myself at Baba’s feet, it was not Baba but Guru ji smiling at me.

Dr. Motilal Gupta is a saint and an extraordinary philanthropist. He is the founder and chairman of Sai Dham, registered as Shirdi Sai Baba Temple Society, a non-government, non-profit organization at Faridabad. Dr. Gupta has a dream that one day each and every child of India will receive quality education. Since 2004, Shirdi Sai Baba School has been providing free and quality education to underprivileged children.

In 2019, the NGO is running two schools where more than 2,000 underprivileged children are provided free and excellent education along with meals, clothes, books, study material, healthcare and excursions. The Shirdi Sai Baba School at Faridabad is CBSE-affiliated, with students scoring more than 90 percent marks in the 10th Board examinations. In 2013, the second Shirdi Sai Baba School was established in the remote village of Niswara, District Mahoba, Uttar Pradesh, in order to provide free and modern education to the rural, disadvantaged children.

The other activities organized by the NGO include running 18 dispensaries, providing vocational training and placements to young men and women, organizing mass marriages in four batches in a year for the poor besides gifting them necessary household items that range from bicycles to pressure cookers and distribution of clothes in the far-flung villages of the country. The service is provided without any discrimination based on religion, caste, creed or gender. All the activities run successfully under the watchful eyes of the octogenarian founder-chairman of the organization, Dr. Motilal Gupta, popularly known as Bauji. His astute management skills, enthusiasm and hard work can be matched by none.

In 2011, as I walked past the corridors of the school during my first visit to Sai Dham, watching children dressed smartly in red check-shirts and khaki trousers, I began to get convinced that the task of ‘serving the humanity’ which is the tagline of Sai Dham, at such a huge scale can be achieved only by the exceptional. Dr. Motilal Gupta has been chosen by the Almighty to serve all. This book is the story of this outstanding humanitarian for whom serving the humanity is worship.

Dr. Gupta was born in 1934 at Faridabad in British India in a family of businessmen known by the name of Mehndiwalas. A scholar throughout and a gold medallist from Banaras Hindu University in Bachelors of Science, he graduated in the year 1955. Soon after graduation, he joined his family business and later started his independent venture. In 1960 our dear Mummy ji, Late Smt. Kanta Gupta, became a part of the blessed life journey of Dr. Gupta –like Yamuna joins Ganga, and as they flow, provide food, support lives and quench the thirst of many.

In 1986, once Mummy ji was going to the temple of Sai Baba at Lodhi Road in New Delhi. An inner feeling called upon Dr. Gupta to visit the temple as well. That day, as he stood before Baba, he became one with Him. Dr. Gupta relinquished his business and thus began the journey of Sai Dham. It was only a miracle of Sai that he was able to redeem his sold-out ancestral land at Faridabad, out of which he donated 3 acres for the establishment of Sai Dham. Dr. Gupta placed Sai Baba's picture at the foot of the peepal tree in that land and Baba, in turn, gave him the blessing to feed the hungry, educate the poor, and give health and happiness to those afflicted with physical and mental sorrows. As Sai Baba always chanted 'Allah Malik', so does Dr. Gupta dedicate all his charity at Baba's feet.

Guru ji is the most beloved devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba. He is the reflection of that merciful Fakir for whom serving the poor and abating the suffering of the helpless was the chief concern. The divine relationship between Sai and Guru ji is like that of Ram and Hanuman or Krishna and Arjun. Here the devotee is in union with the one to be devoted.

It was while visiting Sai Baba's Temple at Lodhi Road, New Delhi that a desire arose in my mind to write

Guru ji's biography. When I expressed my wish to Guru ji, he blessed me and gave his consent. This is the most venturesome undertaking of my life. In order to accomplish this humongous task, I have placed my ego at the feet of Sai Baba. Therefore, it is Baba who has written the life story of His most beloved devotee.

Sri Govind R. Dabholkar, the author of Sai Baba's biography, Sri Sai Satcharitra, has mentioned that Baba told His devotees to conquer the six inner enemies – lust, greed, attachment, anger, jealousy and pride, which are obstacles to the path of righteousness. The biography of Dr. Motilal Gupta has been divided into six chapters. As one progresses through the book, the lessons will create awareness in our mind to discriminate between the right and wrong. While conquering their six inner enemies, those who wish to practise charity and serve humanity will get strength of body and mind to do so. Thus sieving out the impurities from mind, the reader will get solace and happiness.

I pray to Sai Baba to bless all the readers for their kind attention. I also pray to the readers for their forgiveness if they find any fault in my writing. That I am a child, whose nature is to fall as it learns to walk, I pray for your pardon and mercy.

Dust at Sai's feet,  
At Guru ji's service,  
Niti Shekhar

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## CHAPTER ONE

### DR. MOTILAL GUPTA: AN INTRODUCTION

*The creatures may be different, but the hunger of all is the same, though some speak and others are dumb. Know for certain, that he who feeds the hungry, really serves Me with food. Regard this as the Truth.*

*Shirdi Sai Baba*

‘Every human being can do *sewa* according to his or her means,’ Guru ji stated. ‘One who has nothing can dig a pit, place in it a broken pot and fill it with water for the birds to drink. You see, that is service too and involves no cost. Adopt *sewa* in your heart and Lord Sai will reward your *sewa*.’

We were on our way from Dr. Motilal Gupta’s residence in Greater Kailash II to Sai Dham, Faridabad. A few yards away from the turn at Mehrauli–Badarpur Road, stray cows and monkeys can be seen on the roadside. The driver pulled the car on the side-road. Sri Sai Satcharitra’s CD played on. We were curious why the car was stopped. It seemed like a routine affair. Bhola *bhaiyya* then pulled out a bucket full of soaked grams from the back of the car and spread it on the ground. The monkeys and cows had already gathered at the place. They knew it was time for their protein intake.

Dr. Motilal Gupta believes that hunger of all creatures – birds, beasts and humans – should be appeased. Donation of money or material requires discretion but food can be

distributed to all and sundry. Nature's definition of love is what a mother feels for her young ones. What connects the mother to her child is her ability and selfless will to feed her child. Whether it is a human mother feeding milk to her baby or a mother lioness fighting for a game for the cubs or a mother bird fetching grains from far-and-wide to her nest for her young ones, appeasing the hunger and consequently the nourishment that gives strength for their protection becomes the basis of the strong bond between the dyad of the mother and the child. But the love of a philanthropist is beyond that of a mother. A mother cares only for the child born out of her, Dr. Gupta's love and care is for all alike.

Believing firmly in the teachings of Sai Baba, Sai Dham provides cooked rice and dal for the inhabitants of the leper's colony every day. About 2,000 under-privileged children of the Shirdi Sai Baba Schools are provided with healthy food for their meals. All the employees of the NGO are provided with free lunch. No visitor goes back without a bowl of *khichdi* or *kheer* at noon. And the guests of Guru ji have the special delight of dining with him. Guru ji takes special care to look after the needs of all who are dining. Whether they tasted the special *kheer* of the day or whether they would like *chapati* with or without ghee, all dine to their heart's content. The food partaken in the company of Guru ji gives contentment and happiness that has no parallel.

The life of Dr. Motilal Gupta has lessons for each one of us. He does not preach nor give any moral lessons, rather his actions speak for him. I believe that reading about Dr. Gupta's life will give us silent advice, which if followed, will endow us with the most precious and rare gift of life—happiness. I must therefore sing and celebrate the life of

my mentor with the hope that the reader will also be able to experience the bliss that I have experienced at Sai Dham in Guru ji's company. I must also explain to the readers the circumstances that have led to this duty assigned to me of writing the blessed life of this exceptional philanthropist.

I had the good fortune of visiting Sai Dham for the first time in 2011. Guru ji presented my family with a copy of Sai Baba's biography, *Sri Sai Satcharitra* by Sri Govind R. Dabholkar, also known as Sri Hemadpant. This was the most auspicious moment of my life. This was the beginning of my devotion to Shirdi Sai Baba. I have been reading this book ever since. Reading and understanding the philosophy and teachings of Baba and observing Guru ji perform his duties based on these principles is like the ultimate knowledge revealing itself. Guru ji had transformed my life forever.

The following year in, 2012, I had to appear for the CAT examination for admission into the management colleges of India. 'Sai Baba has blessed you with an IIM, Guru ji had already declared even before I had filled the forms. With Sai's grace, I scored a decent percentile of 99.28. The interview results were out in April-May 2013. My name did not appear in any of the lists of the IIMs that had shortlisted me for the interviews.

At the IIM Calcutta interview I was asked a numerical question from the area of Operations Research. I had scored a D grade in one of the compulsory Operations Research courses that we were supposed to read during my undergraduate program at BITS-Pilani. So anybody can guess the outcome of my IIM Calcutta interview. IIM Lucknow's interview was based on my passion for working in the NGOs. I was later told by the intelligentsia that I used the

wrong term, I should have said ‘Social Enterprise’ instead of ‘NGO’. I failed to understand their malice against the word NGO. After all, I was extremely proud of my mentor, my idol, my Guru ji who runs an ‘NGO’. Next was IIM Kozhikode. Incidentally, I was the last student for the interview before the lunch break. After having heard the views of some 10 odd students on business and current affairs, my interviewers were in no mood to discuss the same. They looked through my under-graduate transcript. ‘So you read *Bhagwad Gita* as an elective. Tell us what you learnt,’ they asked. I answered. Later, I did not bother to check the results of IIM Calcutta and IIM Kozhikode. My parents had checked the results up to the fourth list and my name was nowhere to be seen. Also, IIM Lucknow had rejected my views on NGO.

I decided to take admission in a second-rung college and went to seek Guru ji’s blessings. ‘No no, you will get the admission. Your efforts have been rewarded,’ insisted Guru ji. I believed in his words but I knew it would take a miracle to make them true. And the miracle happened.

A week later my parents received a call that I had been selected in the last list of IIM Kozhikode. Students were informed through phone calls as by early July, they stop checking the results or take admission elsewhere.

I packed my bags and landed in Kozhikode. That night I saw a vivid dream in which Sai Baba was standing in front of me and blessing me with the words, ‘Your efforts have been rewarded’. Baba was standing bare feet in his white *kafni*. As I fell at Baba’s feet, I saw they were not Baba’s but Guru ji’s feet. Guru ji in his black half-shoes, and grey safari suit was smiling at me. I woke up. It was almost 6 a.m. The vision was so real that it hardly felt like a dream.

I immediately called up Guru ji. He answered the call and asked, ‘Where are you?’ I offered my prayers to Guru ji as tears filled my eyes.

Since then a belief arose in my mind that Guru ji is in union with Sai Baba. And Baba, in turn, loves His beloved devotee who has been carrying out His mission of serving the humanity with no discrimination based on religion, caste, creed or gender. This spiritual relationship is beyond the ken of our limited human brain that often seeks logic and reasoning in order to understand the phenomenon around us. But where science ends, spirituality begins.

I have surrendered my ego at Sai’s feet and implored him to guide my body, mind and soul. Reading Sai Satcharitra gives strength to my otherwise feeble mind to grasp knowledge and perform my designated karma. So Baba, of His own accord, has granted me this duty of writing the life story of His dearest child and my mentor, Dr. Motilal Gupta.

Nine months before I started the work on this biography, I had the desire of reading *Gyaneshwari*. The great book finds multiple mentions in Sri Sai Satcharitra. It is the translation and commentary on Bhagwad Gita by the premier saint-poet of Maharashtra of the 12th century, Sant Gyaneshwar, in Marathi. I ordered the English translation of the book online, received the parcel and kept it in my drawer for six months. Situations in my life had taken a turn and try as much as I could, I was not able to read the book. I had a physical mishap and adverse circumstances overtook my professional life that pushed me into deep anxiety and depression. My prayers to Sai Baba bore fruit and one day I finally got the opportunity to read *Gyaneshwari*. From the moment I read the first verse, my mind attained calmness

and then peace prevailed. The troubles I had been facing started to fade away.

When I completed my first reading, I realized that my thought process had substantially changed. It was more than just a coincidence that the very next day I completed reading *Gyaneshwari*, my meeting with Guru ji had been arranged. When I reached Sai Dham, I was in pain as I was suffering from a recurring gum inflammation for the past few days. My husband and I were to return to IIT Kanpur the next day. Guru ji greeted me with the following words, ‘Why do you worry? I have just created this medicine out of *jamun* leaves for toothache. Apply it and you will be fine.’ The medicine gave me a lot of relief. However, the swelling had led to an infection and seeing a dentist was inevitable. Guru ji took me to the doctor couple, Dr. Ashwani Pruthi and Dr. Sujata Chadha Pruthi, the visiting dentists at Sai Dham who provide free dental care to the beneficiaries of the NGO. On our way to the clinic, Guru ji advised out of his own accord that if there was an extraction of tooth to be performed it must be done. It made me wonder that as there was a gum infection, why should there be a need for tooth extraction. Finally, Dr. Pruthi diagnosed that it was my wisdom tooth that had erupted in an awkward position which was causing the infection. Extraction of the wisdom tooth was inevitable and also a scaling had to be performed. He asked us, ‘What is your programme? How long are you staying here?’ Guru ji replied for me, ‘She is staying with me till she is totally fit, please cure her.’

The next five days were miraculous, which we shall cherish forever. Those were the most auspicious days of our lives. We had never expected that we would get an

opportunity to stay with Guru ji. His hospitality was beyond our imagination. He, who cares for lakhs, took care of me like a mother bird cares for her young ones. For the next few days, Guru ji would take me to the dental clinic, bring me back to his residence and give us tasty dishes to eat. Such is his love, pure and selfless!

On the second day, while I was on my way to Sai Baba's temple in Lodhi Road, an idea struck my mind – to write the life story of my mentor, Dr. Motilal Gupta. Why should the world be devoid of knowing this extraordinary human being whose silent actions and love for all can be an inspiration to many? This would also be my tribute to the saint who is in union with Sai Baba. It is a great fortune that I have been chosen by the almighty to witness this spiritual festival. I must narrate this to all who aspire to walk on the path of righteousness, be of service to humanity and find happiness which has become a rare attribute, especially in today's busy life.

I humbly asked Guru ji for his consent for writing his biography. He smiled and blessed me. My service had been accepted. 'Baba will help you,' he said and thus sanctified my work.

Guru ji is immersed in philanthropy as Saint Gyaneshwar is immersed in Bhagwad Gita. He is unaware of his work as a new-born is unaware of the actions it does with its body. It is Guru ji's natural characteristic to work for the cause of those in need. He is not elated upon being honoured, nor does he care about unnecessary criticism. Slowly and steadily, he manages the activities of Sai Dham, while remaining totally detached from his actions. Guru ji behaves like any one of us as he bargains for the price of 100 kilos of watermelons for distribution. He then becomes

a saviour for three children of his school who had become orphans by placing them in foster care of a teacher.

We, the ordinary people, often perform charity for our own satisfaction. Giving one roti to a cow in a day, which weighs more than 150 kilos, giving one rupee to a beggar, donating un-wearable, torn or soiled clothes, giving expired products or a week-old curry from our refrigerator to our maid makes us swell with pride for helping others. Such charity gives a sense of satisfaction to the donor. But what it does to the donee, we often do not care to understand. Occasional feeding of a roti which is merely 40 calories provides absolutely no nourishment to the big animal. On the contrary, I feel it must be like an appetizer for the poor cow, wanting more of it. With that one rupee, the beggars, more often than not, buy *gutkha*. If the clothes are un-wearable, torn and spoilt for us, they will be so for other fellow humans as well and that old curry from our refrigerator might lead to the maid's or her child's stomach upset, causing her extra expenses of buying medicines.

On the other hand, Dr. Motilal Gupta does philanthropic work till the donee is satisfied. As for this donor, his hunger for charity is insatiable. Guru ji is determined to provide all the necessary facilities to the children of Shirdi Sai Baba School till they become successful professionals in their lives, supporting themselves and their families. 'So that is how one family gets rid of poverty,' he says. The holistic, scientific education along with sound moral values encourages these children, coming from disadvantaged sections of our society, to study with utmost sincerity and practise charity, for charity begins at home. 'I want some of them to become IAS officers, engineers and doctors,'



Guru ji says. ‘It will be a great boost to the society’. And *Inshallah*, that shall happen.

Dr. Gupta organizes mass marriages four times in a year. Since 2007, 1025 couples belonging to poor sections of the society have been tied in nuptial knot at the Sai Dham temple. The evil of dowry, as it percolates to the poorer sections of the society, becomes a menace of indiscriminate proportions. The poor take loans, sell off their valuables and work more than their capacity to gather dowry for their daughters. The concept of mass marriages for the poor was brought into action to help take off their load of marrying their daughters. This way they can spend on their daughter’s education rather than dowry. In order to encourage the people belonging to the nearby slums or villages to adopt mass marriages, volunteers are sent to spread the message. Also, the young couples are given all the essential items to start a new household. Pressure cookers, utensils, gas stoves, bed rolls, bicycles, clothes, sanitary kits and even toys are provided. ‘Every year, I introduce at least one new item in the list,’ says the chairman of Sai Dham.

Dr. Gupta has also been very vocal in asking the elite to reduce the expenses on their extravagant weddings. ‘Earlier, the invitations were by word-of-mouth, then we had simple hand-written postcards, it was followed by wedding cards, today they send boxes!’ exclaims Guru ji. It was in one of the mass marriages that one noble businessman decided to act upon the message of Dr. Gupta and declared that he would opt for simple invitation cards for his son’s wedding and funded the entire event by sponsoring the weddings of 25 poor girls at Sai Dham.

Saving the girl child from death and discrimination, educating her so that she becomes a responsible citizen, a

professional and most importantly, an able mother who will give the first lessons to the future generation of our society, is an important mission that Dr. Gupta has undertaken. More than 50 percent of the students of Shirdi Sai Baba Schools are girls. Women are provided with vocational training in dress designing, tailoring and beauty culture with assured placements. It is Guru ji's long term vision and management that has led to various tie-ups between garment manufacturing companies and the vocational training centres of Sai Dham. That is one step forward in making women financially independent, especially in an environment where the men of the family become alcoholics.

Sri Hemadpant writes in Sri Sai Satcharitra that Sai Baba initially practised medicine as he came to live in the village of Shirdi. This famous Hakim would cure the sick and diseased without any fees. Blind got back their sight and lame were able to walk. Such was the prowess of the poor Fakir.

Guru ji, being a reflection of Sai Baba, is no different. His passion for homeopathic medicines has been present since his college days in Banaras Hindu University. 'I studied Chemistry till Intermediate. During my graduation I had taken up Physics, Mathematics and Statistics. But I liked reading homeopathy in my free time. My friends would call me Mr. Doctor. I would give them medicines when they fell sick and the sickness would be cured,' Guru ji chuckles.

This was even before his self-realization of being Baba's devotee. In fact, the first activity of Sai Dham, when it was founded in 1986, was opening of Dr. Gupta's dispensary. He would treat the sick and the diseased and would

even provide home delivery of medicines, free of cost, a practice he has been following till date. I have also been a beneficiary of his medicines as have been lakhs of people. There are 18 dispensaries which are successfully running today. Apart from the homeopathic clinics, gynaecologists, dentists, eye surgeons, physicians, orthopaedics and other specialists visit Sai Dham once or twice a week and provide free-of-cost consultation and medicines to the poor.

I have been on Guru ji's mailing list since 2011. Once I was scanning through the emails and annual reports of Sai Dham which I had received in the past nine years. Apart from the usual emails consisting of the results of the Shirdi Sai Baba School children, the annual financial statements and details of the mass marriages, Sai Dham has been organizing many events throughout the years, providing happiness, peace and even laughter to many. Yoga workshops, *kavi sammelan*, *bhajan* and *bhandara*, celebrating Independence Day and other festivals, providing artificial limbs to the disabled, *janta durbar* in collaboration with the local government, counselling services, Sai *mela*, magic show for kids, diabetes workshop, Sai Dham *Gyan Puruskar* to commemorate educationists – the list goes on.

In April 2017, YS University, Florida recognized the work of the founder-cum-chairman of Sai Dham, and conferred upon him an honorary doctorate degree. Guru ji thus became, Dr. Motilal Gupta.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018, at 03.20 a.m., we received an email from Guru ji that Mummy ji has passed away at 12.15 a.m. After having served dinner to her husband, Mummy ji was calling guests for a *bhajan* to be organized the next day and went to bed at 11 p.m. With no illness, she got up at 11.30 a.m. and told her husband that she felt unwell. By the

time she was taken to hospital, she had left for the heavenly abode.

Ms. Kanta and Dr. Motilal were eternal love personified. At every juncture of life, supporting her husband, as she managed the affairs both at home and Sai Dham, their matchmaker was Sai Himself. A few weeks later, on 22 April, the second batch of mass marriage was organized as per schedule. This is what Mummy ji would have wanted. This is what is Guru ji's conviction. And this is how, together, they serve their Lord Sai.

As we stayed at Guru ji's residence, Siya *bhaiyya*, their faithful cook who has been serving his Bauji and Mummy ji for the last 33 years, told us that he never feels that Mummy ji is not around. 'I miss Mummy ji very much. She comes in my dreams and asks if I am taking care of all or not,' says Siya *bhaiyya* with a melancholic smile on his face as he looks at Mummy ji's photo.

It is time for breakfast. My husband and I are at the table. 'How is your gum, is it getting better?' asks Guru ji. I reply in the affirmative. Siya *bhaiyya* is serving *parathas*. We are very hungry. I must have eaten at least five *aloo parathas* that day as I felt relief and also due to the fact that I did not have a good meal for quite some time due to the gum problem. My husband, on the other hand, was quite conscious of not having more than three as he watches Guru ji eat his meagre breakfast consisting of cereals. His laptop is right next to his bowl of boiled vegetables on the dining table.

Guru ji's phone rings. He puts it on speaker. It is an unknown number and probably the caller's location does not have a good mobile network. Guru ji answers, 'Give me 10 minutes, I am having my breakfast.' He calls back

on the number. ‘Was Sai Baba Hindu or a Muslim?’ comes a loud voice from the phone as happens when the speaker tends to hold the mobile very close. ‘Nobody knows Baba’s religion,’ Guru ji replies. The voice continues, ‘You know they say many things so I thought of asking you.’ ‘OK, no problem,’ Guru ji disconnects the call.

A minute later there is another call. ‘Sir, I am a registered homeopathic medicine practioner. Do you have any position for me in your dispensary?’ asks a lady. Guru ji asks her the alternative name of a homeopathic drug. ‘I don’t know but I can check it from Google,’ she replies. ‘So can anybody, you know nothing,’ replies Guru ji as he puts the phone down. My husband bursts into laughter. ‘You are stricter than most of my colleagues at IIT Kanpur, Guru ji. That was a spontaneous quiz,’ notes my professor husband.

‘Has Bhola come? He is late again. I had told Tiwari to remind him for the next few days till he starts coming on time.’ Guru ji is getting annoyed. ‘Bauji, I was stuck in traffic,’ explains Bhola *bhaiyya*, the dedicated driver serving his Bauji for the past seven years. ‘So take the traffic into account and start early!’ One can sense sweetness even in his wrath.

On our way to Sai Dham, we stopped, as usual, to feed the soaked grams to monkeys and cows. Bhola *bhaiyya* is spreading the soaked grams as the monkeys, cows and birds flock at the usual spot. ‘They must be finding the grams very delicious,’ Guru ji ponders. He narrates some anecdotes of his life as Sri Sai Satcharitra plays in the background. The narrations are interrupted by many phone calls. Bauji, when shall the uniforms be delivered for the new session? Bauji, which contractor has to be finalised for the painting of the school desks? Bauji, how many more invitation cards of

the mass marriage need to be printed? Bauji, the masala for pickles has arrived, the store house is full, where can we get it stored? Some were given the answers to their queries, some reprimanded for not taking the decision on their own and some were told to wait till he reached the NGO.

Upon reaching Sai Dham, Guru ji visits the temple, pays his *Dakshina* before proceeding to his cabin. His astute administrative and management skills are what run the organization with such efficiency. Well versed with today's technology, the octogenarian is like any young manager working in an MNC in India. He operates MS Word, Power Point and Excel and confidently handles all his social media accounts like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. 'Social media helps me a lot, I can spread the messages of Sai Dham with just a click,' Guru ji tells us enthusiastically. After all, Guru ji has read and understood Science as it has evolved itself in the last 70 years. He stands for the constructive use of Science for the benefit of the masses.

Visitors are entertained as Dr. Gupta works on his laptop. He does multitasking with utmost dexterity. The visitors from the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) wing of the donor company are very impressed to know that CBSE Class 10 results of the school have been 100 percent with students securing 99 percent, 94 percent and 93 percent in Hindi, Mathematics and Social Science respectively. Cheques need to be signed to release payments and contracts need to be renewed. Not a single document receives his signature without at least a cursory glance. And that glance is good enough to point out the minutes of errors.

It is lunch time. All the visitors have been invited to have lunch. My husband and I wait for Guru ji as he

is engaged with a few guests. The guests have brought *ghewar*, a special sweet from Haryana. ‘Get me some, I would like to taste,’ Guru ji is as excited as a five-year-old to taste the exotic sweet. We finish our lunch. Today, by chance, the appointments are scheduled so as to give him an hour or so to lie down in the ante-room. It is the World Cup season. My husband is watching the India versus England match. Guru ji comes back to the cabin. ‘I am not able to sleep because of the match, what is the score?’ he asks my husband. They discuss the scores and the strategy, which player should have been dropped and which one should have been chosen. England scores a four, a danger for India but the player is appreciated for the good shot. Some visitors have an appointment. Guru ji must attend to them, although, today it seems he could have liked to watch the cricket match without any interruption as both the cricket enthusiasts were enjoying the show while having homemade *mathri* and *shikanji*. But work comes first. My husband and I move into the ante-room.

Its 8.30 p.m. I feel exhausted. Also, the air conditioner in Guru ji’s cabin has not been working efficiently. This was pointed out several times by us as we fiddled with the remote so as to increase its cooling. Guru ji is writing the name and address on the invitation cards for the mass marriage ceremony himself. The staff who was assigned this duty is herself getting married. So Guru ji fills in for her. He is trying to find out the addresses from his Excel sheet records. ‘How do I find the addresses from this record quickly?’ Guru ji asks me. ‘Please press Control and F and then you can search the addresses against the names,’ I answer. I am asked to find the address of one Mr. Bhatia, Mr. Agarwal, Ms. Sharma and so on. In most of the cases

Guru ji would already speak out the address before I could find it. ‘Guru ji, you remember the addresses as well!’ He smiles.

It is past 10 p.m. Guru ji looks at us. ‘OK, let’s go now. I will do the rest of the work tomorrow. Bhola let’s pack up. These envelopes need to be couriered and these will be hand delivered.’ We finally head towards home. On the way back, we stop at the fruit market. ‘Bhola, buy some cherries for little Nyra.’

Guru ji and my husband are discussing cricket. Another match has started. The car radio is tuned to the channel broadcasting the match. What I gather from their discussion is that it is an interesting one. We reach home quite late. Siya *bhaiyya* is serving us dinner. ‘I don’t know why, but today I feel exhausted,’ Guru ji says. My husband points out that the AC in his office is not functioning properly. We come to the conclusion that it is not working at all. It gets difficult in Delhi without an AC in the end of June as the weather becomes very hot and humid. Guru ji does not respond to our observation. Later, I find out from the office that the eight-year-old AC has not been working for quite some time, but Bauji does not pay any heed. He does not want to spend on his cabin, after all it serves just him.

‘Siya, the guests might like to eat the *Mysore pak* that we got that day from Chandni Chowk, get it for them.’ Siya *Bhaiyya* has quietly brought the *Mysore pak* having guessed his Bauji’s intentions. He has also guessed what would have been the reaction of Mummy ji in such a situation. The *Mysore pak* lies in front us. I excuse myself so does my husband. We also remind Guru ji of the *ghewar* he already had today. The *Mysore pak* goes back untouched. I take Guru ji’s blessings and retire to bed. My husband follows.



‘Hey, where are you going? West Indies has picked up pace. Just a few more overs to go, lets watch the match,’ he tells my husband. They watch cricket till past midnight. I am tired and had a sound sleep. By the time we wake up next morning, Guru ji is already back from his morning walk and is checking his mails on the breakfast table.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EARLY LIFE

*There will never be any dearth or scarcity, regarding food and clothes, in any devotees' homes. It is my special characteristic that I always look to and provide for the welfare of those devotees who worship Me whole-heartedly with their minds ever fixed on Me. Lord Krishna has also said the same in the Gita. Therefore, strive not much for food and clothes. If you want anything, beg of the Lord, leave worldly honours, try to get Lord's grace and blessings and be honoured in His court.*

*Shirdi Sai Baba*

‘Guru ji, what were your aspirations as a child?’ I question as I try to take a sneak peek into Dr. Motilal Gupta’s life prior to the creation of Sai Dham. ‘I had no ambitions,’ he replies candidly. ‘I just wanted to do what was in front of me with utmost perfection, I never thought beyond that.’

Guru ji is narrating to us his memories from the childhood days as we sift through his old, black-and-white photographs. The audience is taken back in the time by Guru ji’s lucid yet vivid descriptions

Dr. Motilal Gupta was born on 11th December 1934 at Faridabad. His father, Sri Ram Gopal ji Mehendiwale, was a businessman and mother, Smt. Chanda Devi ji, a homemaker.

‘It was my grandfather, Sri Bansidhar ji Mehendiwale who set up the entire business with his toil and effort,’ Guru

ji tells us. His grandfather was an enterprising businessman. He had set up his business in Delhi and Faridabad. Even today, there are many shops in Khari Baoli in Delhi that are owned by the previous employees of Sri Bansidhar ji as he had facilitated many to buy lands and shops. It was he who had bought the land on which Sai Dham stands today. Dr. Gupta has fond memories of visiting his Dada ji in Delhi as he would travel at night and sleep in the vehicle that would transport henna from Faridabad to Delhi and return back the following night in the same vehicle due to lack of other transport facilities. With two elder brothers and three younger sisters, Dr. Gupta and his family stayed at Faridabad as their father managed the business of *mehendi* or henna. The family believed in modern education for all the children. All the brothers studied up to graduation whereas all the sisters are post graduates.

Dr. Gupta was a prodigious child. As early as the fourth standard, he was awarded Government scholarship of ₹4 per month for the following four years. He bagged the scholarship upon excelling in the class 4 examinations. He studied in Government school, Faridabad. Faridabad was a small town with a population of 10,000. The students had to go to the nearest *tehsil*, Ballabgarh, for the 4th standard and the 8th standard board examinations. 'We would go to Ballabgarh for the examinations in a matador van that would often break down on the way. We would then have to push the vehicle,' Guru ji fondly remembers with a smile. He recalls how once he fell from a camel in their henna fields as he hopped on one of them sitting down and the camel jumped up while he was still unstrapped. Another incident of which he has lively memories is that of waiting at the Faridabad railway station for the Frontier Mail. 'Frontier

Mail was a premier train but still it would halt at the small station of Faridabad which did not even have *pucca* platforms in those days,' Guru ji tells us enthusiastically with an innocent smile. In the evening, the children would go to the station to catch a glimpse of the premier train. The train would bring cold, lemon drink bottles which the kids relished and returned the empty bottles back in time before it departed.

Then came 1947, the year of India's independence. India and Pakistan were created out of British India. The partition that followed led to chaos and displacement of people at a large scale, especially in the state of Punjab. Young Dr. Gupta witnessed camps that were constructed for the incoming Hindu population as the native Muslims of Faridabad left their homes to cross the newly defined border. In such a situation, the following year, the examinations could not be held on time and were held in September. 'Studying was getting difficult in Faridabad as there was no electricity there. If I lighted candles or lanterns in the night to study, it would attract insects and mosquitoes,' Guru ji tells us.

The 14-year-old Dr. Gupta enrolled in Vaish High School at Rohtak to complete his matriculation. Studying in Rohtak meant staying in hostel, away from home. 'I would keep my clothes clean, cut my nails and also excelled in studies. So I was always given the duty of escorting important visitors like inspectors, officers and donors who would visit the school. My teacher always wanted me to sit on the first bench,' Guru ji tells us casually, with no air of pride. It must be noted that Guru ji, as he became the mentor of thousands of underprivileged students enrolled in Shirdi Sai Baba School, has been successful in inculcating

in them the habit of being neat and tidy. The students are provided with shoe polish, nail cutters and even combs in order to keep themselves well groomed. When we visit the school, the students seem to shine in their clean uniforms, polished shoes and well-combed hair. Guru ji was a smart, disciplined and an intelligent school student and, today, he is on a mission to imbibe these values amongst the children of the country, especially those who do not have the means or guidance to do so.

‘Yes, please come in.’ The story is paused as there is a visitor. The visitor is an executive in a garment manufacturing company. He is visiting Sai Dham temple with his family and has dropped in to seek Guru ji’s blessings.

In the meanwhile, the attendance sheet of the trainees of the tailoring course has been brought by the in-charge for Guru ji’s signature, who has noticed that there are two absentees. The ladies have not been able to attend the class as their children are down with fever. Well, it is rainy season and the women trainees stay in areas with unhygienic sanitation that leads to disease outbreaks in the monsoon. Guru ji understands. The meeting with the executive has concluded. Guru ji has asked if he can arrange for the placements of the women who are being trained at the vocational centre of Sai Dham. Guru ji takes one step forward in making their lives better.

We are looking at the photographs. We come across Guru ji’s photo from his student days in which he is sporting a hat. ‘The photo was taken when I was in Banaras,’ Guru ji quickly resumes the story. Following the matriculation examination in which he had excelled, he completed his Inter-Science from Banaras. We come to know that he had scored 100 percent in the final Chemistry Examination of

Inter-Science. ‘I would study the chapters on the practical’s in my hostel and then perform them in the laboratory without any book,’ Guru ji informs. He recalls that his Chemistry professor was very fond of him as he would always get the correct results in the practical. But one day, he got a neutral result in the experiment. The professor was surprised at the incorrect result of the topper of the class. It had never happened. ‘The compound contains nitrogen, you should not get neutral,’ the professor said. Finally, Dr. Gupta did get the green colour in the experiment as expected. But something funny happened. The next class was scheduled for the female students of the women’s college. They got neutral results too. The professor was surprised again. It seemed that some other compound was given to the students instead of the one containing nitrogen. He then called his favourite student and asked about the mystery of the green colour. ‘Sir, you said it has nitrogen so I put green ink in the test tube,’ Guru ji chuckled. The professor had a hearty laugh.

Not only was Dr. Gupta excellent in his studies, but due to his amiable and affable nature, he was quick in establishing a very good rapport with his professors and colleagues. In another witty incident, the students were asked in their exam to comment on a particular couplet with reference to the text given to them. Instead, Dr. Gupta wrote the life history of Lord Barren. The professor called his favourite student the next day and showed him the marks. It read 01. He then held the paper upside down and asked him to read the marks again. It became 10. The professor said that if the question was to write the life history of Lord Barren, you would have definitely received 10 upon 10 as it is so well written. But since the question was different, he

had been given just 1 mark as at least he had identified that the couplet was of Lord Barren.

Guru ji scored one of the highest marks in Inter-Science. He was eligible for admission in any of the top-ranking colleges of India for doing graduation. He chose College of Science, Bombay. During the same time, he contracted typhoid. As soon as the fever subsided, he had to leave for his new college in Bombay as he had to report there on the scheduled date. He recalls that his hostel was in Bandstand, Bandra and the college was in Church Gate. He had to buy his lunch from the market, which did not suit his health. Moreover, one fine morning, as he was exploring Bombay along with his friend, he lost his bag that contained his valuables like money and some papers. Bombay was not for him, he decided, and wanted to return to Banaras. As he had very high marks in Inter-Science, he was allowed to take late admission for graduation at the Banaras Hindu University.

Difficulties do not deter Dr. Gupta. He often says, ‘Grumbling is not the solution, facing the challenge is.’ With a sportsman’s spirit, he stumbles, falls, but never stops. Although there might be many roadblocks in the race of life, but he never cribs, as for this athlete the race itself is more significant than the goal.

Dr. Gupta is very parsimonious with words when he has to describe his achievements. Sentences are left unfinished and he takes particular care to refrain from the usage of laudatory words. The truth of the matter is that he was brilliant in studies and became the topper of his school both in Matriculation and Inter Science.

‘I opted for Physics, Mathematics and Statistics. Statistics was a new subject and a craze amongst the Science students in those days,’ Guru ji tells us.

Back in Banaras, he felt at home. He hanged out with his friends in the canteen, cycled up to Tanda waterfalls in Mirzapur and went on boat rides in the Ganga every day. ‘There was a Bengali hawker who would pass by our hostel windows selling *samosa* and *rasgulla*. I used to relish them a lot.’ Today we can only imagine the taste of those authentic Bengali *rasgullas* and Banarasi *samosas*.

Dr. Gupta would never take loan from the canteen as was common among the students. The *canteenwalla* would accompany the postman when he would come to deliver the money orders of the students in order to get his dues. ‘I was very calculative about my expenses and would make the payments upfront without any delay.’ This practice can be well observed in the financial statements of Sai Dham. Dr. Gupta keeps record of all the expenses of the organization diligently. His ideology of being economical helps in the maximum and efficient utilization of the resources. Sai Dham provides full accounting of the utilization of the funds to its donors.

‘Also, I was very particular about cleanliness. I would change my clothes both in the morning and evening,’ Guru ji continues. His love for cleanliness and hygiene can be seen as soon as one enters the premise of Sai Dham. The school, kitchens and toilets remain spic-and-span. Guru ji can often be seen cleaning his table and picking up bits and pieces of paper from his cabin and throwing it in the dustbin, although, after the hairline fracture in his hip, one can see him struggle to bend down.

Guru ji bagged a gold medal upon graduation from Banaras Hindu University. It was no surprise. After his graduation, he decided to join his family business based in Delhi and Faridabad. Dr. Gupta stayed in Delhi and



started handling the business. The firm exported henna and turmeric. Dr. Gupta recalls an incident when he got a big order for the export of bleached cardamoms to Russia. However, upon inspection, the consignment was rejected. It was a grave situation and the matter was even taken up by the Government. A barter deal was approved by the Government where the cardamoms would now be exported to some other countries and to compensate the loss, the firm was successful in procuring the licence for the import of betel nuts from Singapore. The firm was also a commission agent for products such as spices, dry fruits, etc. It was in 1958 that 24-year-old Dr. Gupta took over this part of the family business. He travelled pan-India, starting from Agra in UP to Calcutta in West Bengal and then he travelled towards the south up until Kanyakumari, then to Sangli in Maharashtra, visiting all the 46 centres of goods collection to build a personal rapport with the producers and suppliers in order to establish long term relationships with them.

Dr. Gupta's impeccable managerial skills are evident from the fact that all the organizations he led, and the one he is leading today, work with utmost efficiency and honesty. He explains the nitty-gritty of how the business had to be handled back in the days when there were no ATMs or net banking. 'It was not easy to get banks drafts made and that too from different banks for the upfront payment to the parties who were sending goods for sale on consignment basis,' Guru ji tells us. Still, the staff was asked to ensure that within three days of the final sale of the consignment, the parties must receive their dues along with credit, if any, in the sales account. The senders of the consignments were happy to get their payments promptly. More and more consignments for sale started coming in and

the business flourished. Modern and systematic methods of accounting were introduced in the shops. The competitors were astonished and a few others were shocked to see the young member taking the family business to such heights.

Then came the year 1960. This was the year of the divinely ordained union of Motilal with Kanta. An equally educated girl whose virtues perfectly matched with the groom became the soulmate of Dr. Gupta.

We are going through their wedding album. The young bride looks resplendent with a divine aura in her red bridal attire. I am hesitant but I still ask Guru ji if he had got a chance to meet Mummy ji prior to the wedding. ‘Her cousin was my batch mate in BHU. I had met her once at his home,’ he says. ‘And then, Guru ji?’ I ask inquisitively. ‘And then we got married.’ My husband couldn’t help giggling at the succinct reply.

We are looking at the photographs. A special photo catches my attention. The newly-married couple have been clicked in a car with Guru ji in the driver’s seat and Mummy ji sitting on his side. The phrase ‘Happily ever after’ comes to life in this photo. My husband and I are unable to hide our smiles as we are looking at their honeymoon photos from Kashmir.

As the age-old saying goes, behind every successful man there is a woman. Ms. Kanta Gupta was not behind but beside her husband as they were partners in life, both at home and at the workplace. She was a graduate from DM college, Moga, Punjab. A loving wife, caring daughter-in-law, dedicated mother and a responsible daughter, she carried out her duties with utmost devotion. Mummy ji was the only child of her parents. As a dutiful daughter, she took care of her ailing mother after the demise of her father.

The exemplary couple became proud parents of three daughters and a son. The eldest, Manjari, was born in 1961, followed by Mamta, Sandeep and Poonam. The children thrived in their education in the top-notch schools of the city on their own merit. Sandeep completed his education from the prestigious St. Xavier School while the daughters studied at Modern School, Delhi.

Our story is paused again as Guru ji has more visitors. *Bhajan* and *bhandara* has been organized today. The family that sponsored the event has come to seek Guru ji's blessings. The little kids are touching his feet. He gives them blessings as he embraces, tickles and plays with the children. One of the family members is an HR head in her company. She is very impressed to know that Sai Dham performs philanthropic activities at such a large scale. Dr. Gupta very politely enquires if the CSR wing of the company would like to know about the organization and contribute. She replies in the affirmative and says that she will try.

We resume the story. 'In 1963, I started my independent venture,' he says. He established an enterprise that was into the business of distribution of cotton yarn. Within two years, 29-year-old Dr. Gupta became the secretary of Delhi Yarn Merchant Association, a highly coveted position reserved only for the stalwarts and patrons of the trade. His reputation in the association was indubitable as he led from front and became well known for his judicious nature. He narrates about an incident where there was a dispute between the merchants and the brokers. The total commission earned in the business was 1.5 per cent, out of which 1 per cent was the distributor's share and 0.5 per cent was that of the broker, without any liability on them.

While the entire responsibility and losses in the transaction, if any, was borne by the distributors, the brokers enjoyed their share without any conditions. This was challenged by the association. Dr. Gupta argued that either the brokers should take up some liability on their shoulders or reduce their share to a quarter per cent. The meeting was organized in his house which stretched through the entire night. ‘I will resign, but not bow down, I said.’ Dr. Gupta has always been resolute in his decisions. Finally, the decision was in favour of the distributors.

In 1965 it was Dr. Gupta who was instrumental in introducing Canara Bank to north India. Until then the bank was active mostly in south India, with just two branches in the north – one at Connaught Place and the other at Chandni Chowk in Delhi. His enterprise conducted most of its transactions through Canara Bank, which was a boost for the bank’s growth in the new territory.

Dr. Gupta organized two big functions at the Ashoka Hotel and Akbar Hotel, Delhi, to promote the bank. Leading industrialists, businessmen, officials and other bankers were in attendance at the events. As Agra was an important market for Dr. Gupta’s enterprise, Canara bank opened its third branch in north India at Agra. He introduced many clients to the bank. The bank’s branch at Agra became functional in the year of 1966-67. Dr. Gupta remembers lending a helping hand to the regional manager on the first day of the opening of the bank to count ₹16 lakh in cash. In those days the rupee notes had denomination of 1, 2, 5 and 10 and there were no counting machines. ‘I was quite actively involved in the promotion of the bank. In fact, I became a de facto banker.’ Dr. Gupta was a special client. His cheques were directly credited to his account without

waiting for the clearing process. Because of his flawless reputation, his enterprise had an overdraft limit of ₹1 lakh, which was quite rare for traders in those days.

Meanwhile, in 1976, Dr. Gupta entered into the business of garment exports to UK. The business required a great deal of travelling to-and-fro between London and Delhi. Ms. Kanta Gupta then started supporting her husband by handling the garment business's operations in India. The business in London flourished and eventually the cotton yarn distribution business was closed in 1979. Dr. Gupta had to stay alternately at London and Delhi as he supervised the export of the garments from India and also the receiving of the consignments at London. The products would then be dispatched for sale in other parts of England as well as Belgium and Netherlands. The distribution was carried out by Dr. Gupta in his van. He was a one-man army in this overseas business. Cartons of garments would be loaded in the van; Dr. Gupta would then drive up to Belgium. On the way, the sea had to be crossed on ships. He would sometimes have to make overnight stoppage at the harbour. 'I would make cucumber sandwiches and carry black coffee in a thermos, which would be my lunch and dinner. I would sleep in the car while crossing the sea,' narrates Guru ji.

In 1979, as Dr. Gupta was driving to Belgium, his car met with a massive accident. There was a terrific storm and it was raining heavily that night, leading to extremely poor visibility. It was getting difficult to drive on the meandering roads on the hills. At a sharp turn the car slipped forward and tumbled down the hill. The car took about fifteen turns before landing. All the glasses were shattered. A ball-bearing that had to be replaced and was lying in the front of the vehicle kept bouncing everywhere and hitting all over

Guru ji's body. When he tried to get out, the car went over him. 'It was due to the cartons with garments that prevented the rupture of the car. They acted as a cushion,' Guru ji stoically narrates the incident. Upon landing, he wanted to take out his handkerchief from his right pocket, but he lay in a position such that his right hand could not reach it. His habit of keeping handkerchiefs in both the pockets of his trousers came in handy. His left hand then reached out to the left pocket to take out the other handkerchief. He then started waving the handkerchief. The patrolling officer spotted him and called the ambulance. Dr. Motilal Gupta was put on a stretcher and taken to Kent and Canterbury Hospital for treatment. His life was saved.

'I shall draw out my devotees from the jaws of death.' These are the words of Shirdi Sai Baba. Baba is omniscient. He knows the past, present and the future. Sri Hemadpant writes that like a puppeteer skilfully arranges the entire show, Sai Baba controls the lives of the devotees who surrender to Him with their heart and soul. Sai Baba the Perfect Master, thus saved the life of His beloved devotee. How could destiny harm him who was to perform the supreme duty of serving the humanity at the bidding of his Sadguru Sri Sai?

Dr. Gupta received excellent medical care at the Canterbury Hospital and later in Hunslow West hospital. Lord Swaraj Paul was Dr. Gupta's local guardian in London as he was Mummy ji's uncle (*mama ji*). Lord Paul was immediately informed about the accident and he informed his niece to rush to London. The urethra was ruptured, pelvis was fractured, there was a nose injury and the wrist was fractured too. The doctors were pleasantly surprised at the phenomenal recovery of the patient. Initially, the

hospital would send its vehicle to Dr. Gupta to come to the hospital for the check-ups but later he was encouraged to take the bus as that would enhance his walking capability. Eventually, Guru ji started walking with the aid of a walking stick.

Guru ji remembers organizing an *akhand path* for 48 hours in London. The Guru Granth Sahib had to be brought from the Gurudwara and then taken back. The food for the priests and the devotees had to be arranged. Dr. Gupta was managing the affairs. ‘While doing the arrangements how and when I started walking without the stick, I do not know,’ says Guru ji.

The overseas business continued till 1986. He was often prompted by his friends and extended family in London to permanently settle down there, but both Guru ji and Mummy ji were not ready to leave their motherland.

We come to know through Sri Sai Satcharitra about the life and experiences of the great Sai devotee, Sri Kakasaheb Dixit. I find his life story strikingly similar to that of Guru ji’s. Kakasaheb was a very well-educated solicitor from Bombay. He had gone to London for some work when his foot accidentally slipped as he was boarding a train. His friend Sri Nanasaheb Chandorkar advised him to pray to Sai Baba in Shirdi to cure his leg. In 1909, he came to Shirdi and was enrolled in Sai Baba’s *darbar* for ever. Sri Hemadpant writes that Baba told Kakasaheb that he too had been waiting for his devotee. Kakasaheb prostrated at Baba’s feet and implored him to cure the lameness of his mind rather than his leg. He devoted his life to Sai Baba’s service. He constructed the Dixit Wada for the pilgrims and made Shirdi more-or-less his home.

In 1982, Dr. Motilal Gupta returned to India and closed his venture in London but continued the exports of garments to UK and USA. Later in 1986, he renounced his business and devoted himself to the service of his Sadguru Sai Baba.



## CHAPTER THREE

### 1986: THE YEAR OF DIVINE LIGHT

*Let My man be at any distance, a thousand miles  
away from Me, he will be drawn to Shirdi like a  
sparrow, with a thread tied to its feet.*

*Shirdi Sai Baba*

Sri Sai Satcharitra, the biography of Sai Baba by Sri Govind R. Dabholkar alias Hemadpant, gives many instances where people were drawn to Sai Baba due to His grace. Many a times the people did not even know who was Baba or where Shirdi was. But there was an inner voice that called them. When they would finally see Sai Baba, some would get peace, some had their diseases cured, some got answers to their questions, some were led on to the path of spirituality and some just felt that they were home.

Sri Hemadpant narrates his own account of how he was enrolled in Baba's Masjid. He was on friendly terms with Sri Kakasaheb Dixit and Sri Nanasaheb Chandorkar, who were devotees of Baba. They would often share with him the divine and miraculous stories of the great saint and thus encourage him to visit Shirdi. Finally, on one occasion he had the good fortune of going there. He describes his first *darshan* of Baba in the following words:

All my senses were satisfied and I forgot thirst and hunger. The moment I touched Sai Baba's feet, I began a new lease of life. I felt myself much obliged to those who spurred and helped me to get the darshan; and I considered them as my real relatives, I cannot repay their debt. I only

remember them and prostrate before them. The peculiarity of Sai Baba's darshan, as I found it, is that by His darshan our thoughts are changed, the force of previous action is abated and gradually non-attachment of dispassion towards worldly objects grows. It is by the merit of actions in many past births that such darshan is got, and if only you see Sai Baba, all the world becomes or assumes the form of Sai Baba.

Another story is of the great devotee Sri Tatyasaheb Noolkar, who served as the sub-judge at Pandharpur in 1909. Sri Noolkar did not believe in saints. Sri Nanasaheb Chandorkar was posted as the *mamlatdar* at Pandharpur during the same period and he often described the various wonders of Sai Baba's blessings. Finally, Sri Noolkar decided to visit Shirdi. He became a staunch devotee of Baba, made Shirdi his home and breathed his last in Baba's presence.

The story of the old Haji, who was not allowed to enter the Masjid initially is also to the point. But due to his constant prayers to Baba and also by the request of His most intimate devotee Sri Shama, Sai Baba finally allowed him to enter the Masjid. Eventually, the old haji was enrolled in Baba's *darbar* as he became His loyal devotee. After that, Baba loved and cared for the old Haji.

It must be mentioned that not everyone could be enrolled in Baba's *darbar*. It all depended on His divine will. There were many who were not allowed to enter the Masjid in the first attempt. Of those devotees who were not allowed initially, the ones who were penitent and persevering would sooner or later be blessed by Baba. Many a times the devotees would realize the faults in them or mistakes committed by them which could

be the cause of their rejection. But upon realizing the omniscience of Sai, their repentance, faith and patience would, consequently, give them a second chance to get the blessings of Baba.

To the ones whom fortune favoured, were accepted by Sai. They were the ones who followed His teachings of love, humanity and service. Baba loved and took care of His children. Nothing could harm those fortunate devotees, as their Mother Sai protected them day and night. Baba took care of their life and beyond.

The merciful Fakir Sai has accepted and blessed many more devotees even after He left His mortal coil. The saints transcend the boundaries of life and death. It is possible that the reader of this biography has herself or himself been blessed by Sai's divine blessing in one way or the other. For the writer definitely feels the presence of Lord Sai as she treads the journey of life.

Dr. Motilal Gupta is one of the most fortunate devotees whom Sai Baba drew to Himself on His own and made him the medium to carry forth the duty of serving the humanity. Guru ji, has placed his self at the feet of the Sadguru as he performs his duty of serving the poor and the needy. The devotee is thus in union with his Master. Guru ji's benedictions are therefore blessings of Sai Baba.

Guru ji begins to describe how he was accepted and blessed by Baba in 1986. 'The biography should start from 1986. Do you have much to write before that?' He asks me very modestly. 'Guru ji, different stages of your life have different flavours. Let us not deny the readers of this feast,' I reply. *Karma* and *bhakti* are the two pillars that take us towards the ultimate goal of life. Guru ji's life journey can therefore be divided into two parts. His life prior to 1986 is

a perfect demonstration of the doctrine of *karma*. His life after 1986, is immersed in *bhakti*.

Since 10 years I have known Guru ji as a reflection of Baba. How or why he is a reflection of my Sadguru Sai, I never asked nor did I ever intend to. I have been an average student of mediocre intellect; how then can I understand such a phenomenon? It was difficult enough for me to understand the laws of nature as I struggled with science and mathematics. How then could I understand this marvel which defied the laws of nature? Spirituality for me was reading Sri Sai Satcharitra and following its teachings of brotherhood and service towards all without any discrimination. I have this firm faith that whoever resorts to this simple technique can solve many riddles of his or her life. The thought of understanding this spiritual connect between the devotee and God, and then explaining it to all could have never occurred to me of my own accord.

I consider myself very meek and unqualified for such a challenging task. But there was an inner voice that called upon me, as I sat in front of Sai Baba in the Lodhi road temple, to go and ask my Guru ji to explain this mystical relationship that gives him the strength to perform the duty of serving the humanity and then share this knowledge with all those who desire to know. I bought a small real-life, black-and-white photo of Baba from one of the shops near the temple, which was incidentally the same photo that was hung in the room in Guru ji's house where I stayed for the treatment of my swollen gums. I placed it on my study table right next to my laptop. Since then, I do not quite know how I have been writing the biography.

I have been bestowed this sacred duty. When Sai Baba assigns some duty to His disciple, He gives the strength of

mind and body to perform the same. So, in a way, Baba Himself performs these duties. The doer has no care or worry. This is how I got the most precious opportunity to listen to the blessed life story of my mentor, Dr. Motilal Gupta, and expound it to all those who have the desire to read it.

‘It was 10th April 1986, a Thursday morning.’ Guru ji is now narrating the most sacred moment of his life. Every Thursday Ms. Kanta Gupta would visit the Shirdi Sai Baba temple at Lodhi road, New Delhi. That day she asked her husband to drop her to the temple. Dr. Gupta was on his way to Connaught Place for some business work. As he dropped his wife near the stairs of the temple, an inner voice called upon him to climb up too. He was drawn inside and as he stood in front of the sanctum sanctorum, for the very first time, he felt that he was born in this world only to be Sai’s devotee.

‘As I stood in the temple that day, I felt that Baba is with me and I am with Baba. I felt complete devotion for Sai.’ As Hanuman was reminded that his existence was a reflection of his Lord Ram and that the only duty to be performed is to serve his Master, similarly, realization flashed upon Dr. Motilal Gupta that he really is a humble servant of his Lord Sai and his existence is to serve his Master through his *karma* and *bhakti*. Dr. Gupta decided that henceforth he shall serve only his Lord Sai. He relinquished his business and devoted his life to the service of his Sadguru.

After a few weeks, Guru ji went to Shirdi to offer his prayers at Baba’s Samadhi. Guru ji bought a beautiful statue of Sai Baba from Shirdi, made of plaster of paris. So overwhelmed was he with love that he carried Baba’s statue in his arms from Shirdi to Andheri, Bombay, in a

bus, and then from Andheri to Bombay Central and then to New Delhi by train. Finally, Baba's statue was welcomed at his home.

Sri Sai Satcharitra mentions that Baba allowed devotees to worship Him as they liked. A shepherdess worshipped Baba by massaging His legs, Bhagoji (the leper devotee) worshipped Baba by holding an umbrella over Him whenever He would walk outside, some read *namaz* in Baba's Masjid, the devotee Megha worshipped Baba like Shiva with *bel* leaves and Ganges water, some kept the *taziya* in the Masjid before commencement of Moharram, while some performed the *Gopal kala* ceremony on Ram Navami. Baba accepted all these paraphernalia as the devotees loved their Baba.

Dr. Gupta wanted to worship Baba but had no prior experience of how to do so. Baba then inspired him through a divine thought to visit the Sai temple at Lodhi road for 40 days and learn how to worship Him in the temple. For 40 days, the pious couple would reach the temple before 6 a.m. along with *khichadi*, which they would offer as *prasad* and then distribute it to all after the 8 a.m. *aarti*.

'The first day we saw people reciting shlokas from a booklet. The people told me that the booklet can be bought from the shops nearby. I immediately went and bought two booklets, one for me and the other for Kanta.' Mr. and Ms. Gupta would spend time in the temple observing various rites related to the worship of Baba like *snaan*, *abhishek*, *aarti*, offering *prasad*, etc. They would then distribute the *khichadi* to all. 'We would ask the people to stand in a queue. We would keep the *khichadi* at the back of our van and distribute it to all. We became popular by the name of *Khichadi wale Babu*,' Guru ji recalls.

Guru ji wanted to learn the *Ashtrotam Naamavali* (108 *shlokas* recited during the *abhishek*). Sanskrit was a new subject. Dr. Gupta has always been methodical in his learning. With the help of Ms. Abha Mittal, a Sai devotee and family friend, they were able to decipher and write the meaning and the pronunciation of the Sanskrit words in Hindi and English. Guru ji could thus learn the *mantras* by heart. Late Mr. Suresh Chandra Gupta, a great Sai devotee who was instrumental in acquiring the land for the Sai temple at Lodhi road which has become as pious a pilgrimage as Shirdi itself, became Dr. Gupta's mentor as he introduced him to Baba's teachings. Guru ji's *bhakti* was steady as Sai Baba guided him at each step.

In October 1986, 15 acres of the Gupta family's ancestral land was sold off. The earning out of it was to be divided among all the six brothers and sisters and also their mother. The buyer was to deliver the amount the next day. The same night, Sai Baba gave a vision to Guru ji. He was asked to buy the land himself. Next morning, he called up his elder brother and expressed his wish to buy the entire land. Coincidentally, the buyer called up Dr. Gupta's brother and asked for a reduction in the price as the current rate was not acceptable to his family. Dr. Gupta offered to buy the land at the initial price and thus the matter was settled. This is the land on which Sai Dham has flourished.

In February 1987, Guru ji again had Baba's divine vision. He was ordered to build Sai's temple and spread Baba's divine message of humanity and service. Dr. Gupta demarcated 3 acres of the land for the establishment of Sai Dham. He was not familiar with the technicalities and formalities of forming a trust. 'When I proposed the plan of the Sai temple to an architect, I was asked many questions

about the desired plan, who would be the trustees, the budget, etc., to which I had no answer at that moment; all I knew was that I have to build a temple and spread Baba's message,' Guru ji recalls.

Dr. Gupta constructed a boundary around the field with a small gate in the front. He bought a steel sheet, 8' by 4' in dimension, and got two iron garters from his garage in his old house in Faridabad, which were welded and painted. The signboard bearing the words 'Proposed site for Shirdi Sai Baba Temple' was fixed at the front corner of the land.

Guru ji would drive from his home in Sarita Vihar in Delhi to the proposed site in Faridabad in his van. The proposed site was almost in the middle of a jungle. Faridabad was still developing as a township. The land being quite far from the main road was not easily accessible. Initially, there was no electricity connection. The area was infamous for notorious activities. It was a daunting and daring task to visualize the creation of an institution in the middle of such a god forsaken place. But it was Dr. Motilal Gupta's faith in his Lord Sai and his determination to create the institution that he was motivated to challenge the problems. Many difficulties cropped up, but they were resolved patiently and intelligently by Dr. Gupta with his wife standing by his side as his strong ally. It was their sheer courage and faith that brought the heavens from the sky in the form of Sai Dham. God came to reside in the god forsaken place.

Dr. Motilal Gupta would supervise the cleaning and restructuring of the site, many-a-times lending his own helping hand to the workers. The henna shrubs were cleared, the water channels were closed, the well was filled and shut and the land in the front of the site was levelled. 'I placed Baba's photo under the *peepal* tree and thus Baba took



his seat in Sai Dham,' says Guru ji. A guard was allocated the work of putting the photo under the *peepal* tree in the morning and then keep it back in an old, small room in the night. Later, a new room with dimension of 20 by 26 feet was built and the old room was demolished. It is to be noted that Dr. Gupta remembers the exact dimensions and specifications of the rooms and buildings that have been constructed at Sai Dham from 1986 till now. The guard was entrusted with the duty of worshipping Baba's photo with incense sticks and *dias* which would be kept on a table. He was told to give *prasad* to all the visitors and let them know that a temple of Shirdi Sai Baba was going to be built there. Later, a concrete platform was built with a tin-shade roofing over it and Baba's photo was placed there. Those were the days when not many people knew who Sai Baba was in Northern India. Often, wild and stray animals would enter the field and create ruckus. The little money that would be collected would be looted by thieves. Once, it so happened that a few goons tied the guard to a pole with ropes and looted the entire *gullak*. Loudspeakers that were bought for the *bhajans* were stolen, chairs and tables would often be sneaked away and a few destructive elements would damage the property like the lights and toilet at night. The Gupta couple were never irked or deterred by such incidents. They would pick up the pieces and start all over again. No matter what be the obstacles, they would steadily move forward in their journey.

It is stated in Sri Sai Satcharitra, that the land on which the present Samadhi Mandir of Baba is built was initially a beautiful garden that was created by Baba Himself by His toil and effort. He would buy plants of *jai* and *jui* and then sow them in the field. Vaman Tatya, a potter devotee

of Baba would provide Baba with unbaked pitchers. Baba carried pitchers full of water on His shoulders and watered the plants. The land was thus transformed into a beautiful garden.

In a similar fashion, Guru ji too, developed a beautiful garden on the site with lush green grass and flowers. Dr. Gupta is an environmentalist who advocates planting trees and has always been particular about the greenery of Sai Dham. He also cultivated vegetables. He remembers an incident where he and Mummy ji were going to attend a conference of Sai devotees at Chandigarh. He had taken two sacks full of brinjals from the Sai Dham farm for the *bhandara*. There he saw Baba's statue placed on a seat cut out of marble. Dr. Gupta liked the idea. Upon returning to Faridabad, he decided to install Baba's statue on a marble seat in the new room that had been constructed. Mr. Jagdish Pershad, a Sai devotee and Dr. Gupta's friend, sponsored the expenses of buying the statue. With Baba's statue adorning the small temple, regular worship and Baba's *aarti* commenced in the similar fashion as would happen in Baba's Masjid back in the earlier days.

The first *bhajan* and *bhandara* of Sai Dham was conducted in 1987 on the auspicious occasion of Dussehra. This was also sponsored by Mr. Jagdish Pershad. 'We did not even know then that Dussehra happens to be the *Mahasamadhi* anniversary of Sai Baba, a very significant and special day for the Sai devotees.' *Poori* and *sabji* was distributed to the visitors who were mainly the locals from the nearby villages. Dr. Gupta remembers that the little children would come again-and-again for the *prasad*. Sometimes, they would exchange their clothes with one another so that they were not recognized for taking the food

again. This was a great learning lesson for Dr. Gupta. He realized that the under-privileged children were so hungry that they were coming again-and-again for the food, also taking some for their families. This sowed the seed of his vision to build Shirdi Sai Baba School.

The following month, Dr. Gupta's cousin sponsored the *bhajan* and *bhandara* on his birthday and then in the month of December, it was organized on Guru ji's birthday. A Sai devotee and *bhajan* singer who was acquainted with Sai Dham could not attend the *bhajan* and *bhandara* in December as he did not have prior information regarding the event. After this incident, in order to ensure the attendance of the devotees and the continuity of the event, Guru ji decided that the *bhajan* and *bhandara* would be held on every second Sunday of the month. By fixing a particular day, devotees, friends, relatives and the locals would know about the event and attend it. Those were days when telephones were rare, hence spreading the message among the masses was not so easy. 'While coming from Delhi to Faridabad if we would spot any car with Baba's photo on it, we would follow the car and then tell them, as we stopped on traffic lights, about our vision of Sai Dham and invite them for the *bhajans*,' Guru ji narrates enthusiastically.

Come what may, every second Sunday, Ms. Kanta and Mr. Motilal Gupta would leave for Faridabad from their residence in Delhi early in the morning to arrange the affairs. Tents had to be set up, cooks had to be called, ration had to be bought and other necessary arrangements for the visitors had to be made. 'We made signboards with arrows and fixed them on important landmarks to provide directions – those were the days without google maps,'

Guru ji tells us with a smile. A gentleman who came to know about the signboards decided to sponsor the cost of painting of the boards. However, in due course, most of the signboards were removed by the officials of the municipal corporation.

More and more people began to be associated with Sai Dham. *Bhajans* were now organized in people's homes as well. In those days, in north India, not many were aware of the great Saint Sai Baba and the marvels of His blessings and teachings. Guru ji wanted to spread the message of Sai Baba to the masses. In the *bhajans*, the devotees sang and rejoiced together as they praised their Lord Sai Baba. Many devotees wanted the singing party of Sai Dham to visit their house and purify it with the echoes of the sweet songs as the audience sang and danced with love and happiness. What can be a better way to express one's love towards the Almighty than by immersing oneself in the sweet poems and songs of Baba and thereby deriving bliss and peace of mind?

Guru ji's elder sister-in-law, Late Ms. Sharda Agarwal, became a staunch devotee of Baba who wrote and sang very melodious *bhajans* while another Sai devotee, Late Ms. Sheela Bhatia played the *dholak*. Ms. Bhatia was a very proactive member of Sai Dham during its initial days, organizing and conducting *bhajans* in the houses of the devotees and spreading the message of Sai and also the vision and mission of Sai Dham. Dr. Gupta's group became very popular and more and more people joined it. A gold-medallist from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and a successful businessman had renounced worldly honours as he went from house to house with his party to sing and spread the message of his Lord Sai.

There were a few people who objected to the fact that illiterate villagers were included in the *bhajans* and the *bhandara*, who did not even know about Sai Baba. They suspected that a few of the locals looted and caused destruction in Sai Dham at night. To them Guru ji replied that the idea was to spread the message of Baba to all, without any discrimination. This is the duty assigned to him. Why should anyone be deprived of the teachings and blessings of Sai Baba? The poor, the rich, the educated, the uneducated, people belonging to different religions, all have the right to listen to Baba's teachings. Baba's teachings are for all alike, like the sun rays that remove darkness.

In 1988, Dr. Gupta persuaded the Information and Broadcasting Minister to organize a special screening of the movie, *Shirdi ke Sai Baba*, produced by the famous actor Manoj Kumar, on Doordarshan which was aired on Sunday. The film is an adaptation of Baba's biography Sri Sai Satcharitra. 'In this way we could spread awareness about Sri Sai Satcharitra and its teachings,' Guru ji explains.

Dr. Gupta's savings were used to run the day-to-day affairs of the new organization. A few devotees started donating money while a few also requested their friends and families to join the cause. Slips of ₹10 were made and handed out to devotees who wished to collect donations.

The first 10 years was a period of struggle for Sai Dham. In the initial years, it had no road connectivity. Rarely could an auto be spotted and that too, about 2 kilometres away from the site. Locals were inquisitive as to who was Sai Baba. For the visitors, it was a difficult task to reach Sai Dham. To encourage devotees to visit and participate in the *bhajans* on second Sundays was not easy. Dr. Motilal and Ms. Kanta were determined to create their own path and

relentlessly tried to spread the vision of Sai Dham so that more people would join them in the cause, for institutions consist of people. Pamphlets would be distributed and notices would be displayed at important places. Credit goes to some of the regular devotees of Sai Dham who, like the Gupta couple, were steady in their devotion and regularly visited Sai Dham and also encouraged others to join.

With the passage of time, this caravan led by Dr. Motilal only grew bigger. A need arose to construct a bigger temple as the present one was not sufficiently large enough to conduct *bhajans* that had gradually increased in their scale as more and more people started attending the event. How to arrange for the funds to build the new temple was the question to be addressed. The money that was being collected was barely sufficient to run the daily operations of Sai Dham. Also, to collect a huge amount from donations would require a very long time. But destiny had other plans.

In 1996, Dr. Gupta was able to sell seven-and-a-half acres of his land in the village Sehatpur near the Delhi border. In a matter of a few months, the land prices in the area had miraculously increased and Dr. Gupta sold the land for double the price that was expected. The deal was not an easy one as a false case of plotting was registered against Ms. Kanta Gupta, on whose name the land was registered. The decision was ultimately given in favour of the Guptas.

With sufficient cash in hand, Dr. Gupta depended on nobody and constructed the Sai temple at Sai Dham. Baba's statue was installed with due rites and rituals in a three-day ceremony from 19th to 21st October 1997. An international convention of Sai devotees was organized to commemorate the event. Sai devotees from various parts of the world came to be a part of the conference. Dr. Gupta made special efforts

to promote the conference among the pilgrims at Shirdi by distributing pamphlets. Shri R. K. Agarwal a devotee of Sai Baba from Mumbai decided to sponsor the white marble statue of Baba as he came to know about Sai Dham, Faridabad. Many Sai devotees in Delhi and Faridabad took a leading role in organizing the event. Notably amongst them were Late Shri Suresh Chandra Gupta, Mr. S.K.Ghai and Mr. V.S. Kuber, a retired IAS officer who played a very significant role in organizing the convention. A huge canopy was erected in the open area of the garden, but just after the conclusion of the opening ceremony on the first day, there was heavy rain which continued for the next three days. As a result, the rest of the events were shifted to the newly constructed temple building, right in front of Baba's statue. Dr. Gupta was determined to spread the message of his Lord, nothing could deter his resolve. The event was highly successful.

Dr. Gupta has also served as the vice president of Akhil Bharatiya Sai Bhakt Samaj during the early 1990s. The society would organize conferences known as 'Sai Sammelans' once in a year at one of the Sai temples in India. One such conference was to be organized at Garkhal, near Kasauli, in Himachal Pradesh. Dr. Gupta took up the task of arranging for the transportation of the devotees from Faridabad to Garkhal. Four buses were booked. The devotees were picked up from the railway stations and airport and were first received at Sai Dham, Faridabad, and on the next day the devotees started for Garkhal. As soon as the buses started for their destination, one of them met with a minor accident at Badarpur border. All the devotees from that bus had to be shifted to the other three buses. Their luggage was randomly loaded in those buses. The group

was supposed to reach Garkhal in the morning but instead reached in the evening at 4 p.m. The stay of the devotees was arranged at different places like the *dharamshalas* or schools. The luggage of the people who were transferred to the other buses had to be sorted. The entire episode was dealt and coordinated by Dr. Gupta who was left exhausted by the end of the day.

‘That day I was not even able to go to the toilet till very late,’ he says. Dr. Gupta was struggling, and still struggles, with the aftermath of the urethra rupture due the car accident in England. I ask Guru ji if there is any physical discomfort now. ‘I have to visit the urologist once in a while and get ultrasounds and tests done,’ he replies. ‘Also, I had two falls recently.’ I am taken aback.

The first fall was in Shirdi in July 2017. The committee members of the organizing team of the event marking the centenary year of Baba’s *Mahasamadhi*— on 1 October 2017 – at the Siri Fort Auditorium, were visiting Baba’s Samadhi Mandir to seek blessings. ‘I was trying to wear my trousers when my foot got entangled and I fell. My head hit the tap and there was little bleeding.’ Guru ji closed the tap, got up and started for the Samadhi Mandir. The same day the group returned to Mumbai. Upon coming back to Delhi, X rays were taken but no fracture could be detected. Nevertheless, there was pain in the hip which did not subside, rather it increased. Later, upon consulting an orthopaedic specialist, another advanced X ray and MRI was performed. This time a hairline fracture was diagnosed. Medication was suggested for its healing.

The second fall happened in February 2019. Guru ji had some pain at night for which he wanted to take *nux vomica* (a homeopathic medicine). He went to the bathroom



to gargle and clear the excess saliva in the mouth. While he was washing his hands, he fainted and fell on the floor. Upon regaining consciousness, he stood up and went back to bed. The next morning, he started his daily routine and reached Sai Dham. In the afternoon his blood pressure shot up. He was immediately brought to Delhi and taken to the hospital. The doctors suspected a cardiac problem. Tests were conducted which came out to be clear. Later, the doctors concluded that the high blood pressure was due to the minor head injury he had sustained when he had fainted and fallen.

Medicines have been prescribed for the blood pressure which has now led to some swelling in the feet. The improvement in walking that Guru ji had gained with his regular walks was lost with the second fall. Although now, after a few months, the walking has improved, we do not know whether the pain is still there or not.

At this juncture, I asked Guru ji if he ever asked Sai Baba, why the fall? Why the pain? Why the roadblocks? The answer to this most mystical question, which we often ask in our lives, has been dealt in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### JOURNEY OF SAI DHAM

*If I take one rupee as Dakshina from anybody I have to return it tenfold to him. I never take anything gratis. The donor gives, i.e. sows his seeds, only to reap a rich harvest in future. Wealth should be the means to work out Dharma. If it is used for personal enjoyment, it is wasted. Unless you have given it before, you do not get it now. So the best way to receive is to give. The giving of Dakshina advances Vairagya (non-attachment) and thereby Bhakti and Gyana. Give one and receive tenfold.*

*Shirdi Sai Baba*

Sai Baba had manifested Himself in this world only for the welfare of the poor and the helpless. If one comes across any story of Baba, there is just one theme, that is, how Baba helped, protected, gave happiness and solace to all, Himself suffering unbearable pain at times. The vastness of the charity performed by the poor Fakir is beyond our imagination. There are innumerable accounts where Baba cured diseases by His benedictions. He would bless childless couples with children, save lives of people suffering from serpent bites or scorpion stings, bless aspirants to clear examinations, and receive promotions, transfers and retirement. Upon receiving such blessings which would bring immense happiness in their lives, the devotees remained ever grateful and obliged to Baba.

A question then arises, how does a human thank God? How does one express his or her gratefulness to a Fakir, who stays in a dilapidated Masjid, wears a tattered *Kafni* and eats by begging food from a few houses? God does not need any material for gratification. But humans, out of their love and desire to thank the Supreme, wish to offer some material 'object'. To be obliged and be thankful is a great virtue to possess. If we receive a favour from someone, we feel obliged to return it back in some way. For instance, children are taught the lesson of returning the goodwill by the concept of 'return-gifts' on birthdays. 'Thank you' is the first few words we are taught at home and school. So how do we express our gratitude to the Supreme, to God?

To delve deeper into this inquiry, I want to imagine myself standing at the door step of *Dwarkamai* (Baba had given this name to the dilapidated Masjid where He stayed), and Baba blessing me that I will clear the examination for which I have been toiling day-and-night. Eventually, I clear the exam and I come back to the Masjid to pray at Baba's feet and thank Him. My eyes are filled with tears, my devotion is firm but how, as a living being in this material world, can I thank Baba? Can I give something, however small it may be, to express my gratitude? The answer to this question will depend from one individual to another. Perhaps, I would beg Baba to accept my first month's salary. Or request Him to eat the *kheer* I have made for Him.

I was visiting Sai Dham just a few days after *Guru Purnima*. I offered my Guru ji a coconut. Not only did Guru ji accept it but also ate it with his lunch. The happiness and satisfaction I experienced by Guru ji's acceptance of my paltry offering is beyond words to describe. It was then that I realized, that as I am a human, a being with a form, I relate

to offering *something* to the ultimate power assisting me in carrying forward my worldly duties, and that gives me contentment. Not that my *bhakti* is not enough to express my gratitude but my human form deserves its material satisfaction too and that was achieved by offering the coconut. The coconut is, therefore, objectification of the feeling of my thanking Guru ji.

But Saints do not require money or *kheer* or coconuts for their selves. It is the love of the devotees and their limited capacity in thanking God that makes them offer flowers, fire, water, leaves, food, clothes or money. When Sai Baba was presented with such articles by the grateful devotees, he would distribute them to the poor in varying proportions. The money donated would be utilized in procuring and making food. Baba loved feeding the poor and the hungry. For many years, before Baba's fame had reached different parts of the country, Baba would Himself cook food and distribute it to the fakirs, beggars, children and devotees. Giving food was very dear to Baba. Baba would also distribute the money He received to the poor and the needy. He would also buy clothes like *sarees*, *dhoti* etc. out of the *Dakshina* and gift them to the visitors. Baba practised charity with generosity and sympathy. The poor Fakir, who possessed nothing, was the donor of both spiritual and material wealth.

But how am I to thank Sai Baba today? His physical form has disappeared from this world, but as He blesses me with happiness and success in my personal and professional life, how am I to express my gratitude? To whom, then, do I offer food, clothes and money in order to say 'thank you' to God? To answer this question, I recollect Baba's following dictum:

The creatures may be different, but the hunger of all is the same, though some speak and others are dumb. Know for certain, that he who feeds the hungry, really serves Me with food. Regard this as an axiomatic Truth (*Param Satya*).

Sai Baba regarded the hungry, the destitute, the helpless and the diseased as His children. Therefore, in the absence of the physical form of Baba, serving His children is the same as serving Baba Himself. And that would be the best possible way of thanking God. To begin with, we can take care of the people around us, especially those in need, for charity begins at home. We can provide for the healthcare of our staff. We can sponsor their children's education or provide tuitions to them in our spare time. That can be the first step towards the act of giving. But such acts can also be perceived as necessary and we ought to do them as our duty, not as charity. In societies where the income gaps are huge, it will be wrong not to share generously the benefits that the privileged section receives with their staff members in lieu of the services they provide. Nevertheless, it can be the first step in moving towards the idea of giving and sharing.

Next, if we have the will, determination and also the means, we should do charity beyond our homes so as to benefit as many people as possible. How are we supposed to go ahead in this endeavour? Dr. Motilal Gupta had similar questions in mind as he laid the foundation of his organization, Sai Dham. How could his devotion to Lord Sai be manifested in this material world? The answer to this question was easy. He simply had to follow the principles of Sai Baba, of helping the poor and the needy.

Sai Dham was registered in 1988 as Shirdi Sai Baba Temple Society. The mission of the founder was to spread the message of Sai Baba and perform charity for the social

and financial upliftment of the poor and downtrodden. With this aim in view, began the journey of Sai Dham.

After having set the vision of the organization, Dr. Gupta had to figure out the means and the methods to do so. In the beginning, the Society, which primarily consisted of Dr. Motilal Gupta and Ms. Kanta Gupta, a handful of staff and a few of their relatives and friends, decided to perform charity in whichever way possible. At the age of 54, Dr. Gupta had relinquished his business for the achievement of the mission. In the initial years, it was Dr. Gupta's savings, which he gave generously, which were used for the operations of the new organization. Fortunately, his young son Sandeep, started his independent venture and the dynamism of the young entrepreneur made his business flourish. Hence, Dr. Gupta could solely focus on Sai Dham as the responsibilities of the household were taken care by his son. The donations to Sai Baba's temple could be utilized for the day-to-day functioning of Sai Dham. Some friends and relatives joined hands and decided to donate money now-and-then, also requesting their acquaintances to contribute for the noble cause.

One of the first activities of Sai Dham was opening of a homeopathic dispensary. Initially, Dr. Gupta placed a kiosk at the main gate of the Society and sat there in order to treat the patients. He would also organize health camps in the rural areas with the help of other homeopathic doctors. As more and more poor people were benefitted by the free-of-cost treatment and medicines, Guru ji's dispensary gained popularity by positive word-of-mouth. Not only the poor, but the rich also flocked to the extraordinary doctor. All patients were provided the treatment and medicines for free. Some people who were astonished and moved by the

noble act, donated money to Sai Dham. Thus, Guru ji's healing powers became a magnet to attract both the rich and the poor; the donors and the beneficiaries.

The land around the Society was a jungle and hence sitting outside to treat the patients was not very convenient due to mosquitoes. Also, it would be uncomfortable during the winter season. Therefore, it was decided to construct a small shop in the front portion of the land where Dr. Gupta could set up his clinic to serve the patients. To those unable to visit the clinic, medicines were delivered to their homes. Innumerable people have benefitted by Guru ji's medicines till date.

For more than a decade, Dr. Gupta was solely responsible for running the dispensary. Some devotees, who were attached to the organization, provided space in order to open more dispensaries in Delhi and NCR. While digging out the details regarding the dispensaries of Sai Dham, I came across a 12-page document, dated October 1999 which was addressed to the then Prime Minister Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and later also sent to Smt. Sonia Gandhi. The document implored the leaders to turn their attention towards the deplorable condition of the rural healthcare system. Dr. Gupta had prepared a detailed account of how homeopathy could be used for the betterment of healthcare, especially in the remote rural areas and also in the urban slums. The document of Dr. Gupta proposed suggestions regarding opening of homeopathic colleges, preliminary first aid training to teachers and also running of mobile homeopathic dispensaries. Cost-benefit analysis was also presented, which highlighted the financial benefits of providing homeopathic treatment to the poor and how it had the potential to reduce the financial burden of the

State with respect to healthcare. Many of his suggestions were accepted and implemented by the Government. It must also be noted that Dr. Gupta published two editions of 'Compendium of Homeopathic Medicines' which was distributed amongst social workers and homeopathic practitioners benefiting lot of patients.

The long-term vision of Dr. Gupta and his planning to achieve it through the method of trial-and-error is quite astounding. He believes in doing whatever can be done at the moment in order to carry forward the task of charity. During the 1990s, when Sai Dham was taking its shape, free-of-cost homeopathic treatment to the poor was one of the major tasks that were performed by the organization in a structured manner. Another major activity that was added, was to provide free dental care to the poor on a regular basis. Other activities included distribution of clothes and blankets, financial assistance to the poor for advanced medical treatments, financial assistance to the physically challenged in order to make them independent, providing stationery and books to the underprivileged school going children and many such activities.

From the dawn of the new millennium, the activities of Sai Dham began to increase. After having established the credibility and a good reputation of Sai Dham, Dr. Gupta realized the need to perform philanthropic activities in a more structured manner. It was time to mould the organization to give it a concrete shape and establish it as an institution. Dr. Gupta started investing more time in brainstorming how the activities should be channelled in order to provide long-term and sustainable benefits to the beneficiaries, which ultimately transform their lives for the better. Guru ji's involvement in structuring the organization



did not leave him much spare time to run the dispensary. On 1 January 2000 a qualified homeopathic doctor was appointed at Sai Dham to run the dispensary.

Dr. Gupta was not satisfied by providing the poor with healthcare, food, clothes and financial assistance. Having closely observed the problems faced by the poverty-ridden population of the country, he was becoming restless to do *something* that would ultimately transform the lives of the poor citizens permanently, so that they were not dependent on others or the government for their wellbeing. This restlessness of his, for such a transformation, has only increased in the past 35 years and is ever-increasing.

Dr. Gupta understood that it was only through quality education that the socio-economic status of the poor could be transformed permanently. It is extremely vital to educate and train the young generation so as to pull them out of the misery of poverty. Dr. Gupta firmly believes that all the children of the nation, irrespective of their religion, caste, gender or economic status, deserve free and quality education. In the absence of efficient government machinery to provide high quality education to all alike, the onus to provide it lies on the shoulders of those citizens who are able enough to do so. The income gap between the poor and the rich refuses to narrow down as the opportunities are not equally available to all. A nation can be called ‘developed’ when every single citizen of the country has a decent standard of living, equal access to opportunities and all the citizens can boast of an equitable socio-economic status.

Why is it that you and I have the access to some of the best schools and universities in India while our brethren, who reside in the slums, are not even aware of the existence of such knowledge centres? The answer to

this question must be analysed with utmost seriousness. Firstly, it is destiny that we were born to educated parents. Our ancestors had enough *resources* to provide food, clothes, house and land to our forefathers. Such families could facilitate the provision of modern education available during their times to their children, which enhanced their socio-economic status even more –*resources* that they had inherited from their previous generations. But what about our fellow citizens who reside in the slums and were born to parents devoid of education and resources to provide them with education or even two square meals a day? Our ancestors were able to provide modern education, food and clothes to their offspring. But it was otherwise for our poor brethren. As a result, their grandparents had to ultimately leave their village, come to the cities and dwell in the slums in order to provide *roti, kapda* and *jhopadi*. Clearly, the present abysmal condition that they are forced to live in today is not out of their volition. It has been seven decades since India's independence, but the difference in the socio-economic status, the income gap between the privileged sections of the society and the disadvantaged ones, is still of staggering proportion.

Dr. Motilal Gupta decided to take up the mammoth task to bridge that gap.

On 5 April 2004, Dr. Gupta received a suggestion from an organization to start a part-time school for the underprivileged children at Sai Dham. He decided to set up a school but not on part-time basis. He decided to start the school as a full-time one and in a systematic manner.

Dr. Gupta has the knack of jump-starting his projects. He does his homework of pre-planning and analysing and makes no delay in the initiation. His expertise in the

execution of the projects, especially during their formative period, can be a study worthwhile for the budding managers of the country. The projects are kick-started, bottlenecks are examined, interventions to deal with the bottlenecks are designed and the projects continue to run.

A week later, on 12 April, 2004 the school was started in two rooms of the Sai Dham building. Furniture and other logistics were quickly arranged. Two Sai devotees volunteered to become teachers. This was the humble beginning of Shirdi Sai Baba School. It was difficult in the beginning to persuade the parents of the children to send them to the school. However, by the relentless efforts of Dr. Gupta and the volunteers who went door-to-door, explaining to the beneficiaries the advantages of education, they were able to convince them.

The philanthropists have the cognizance of the fact that the struggle for day-to-day survival by the poor forces them towards hopelessness. Consequently, there can be an initial scepticism from their end to accept such assistance. Will we derive long term benefits out of it? Is it worth diverting my time in education rather than labour that will bring food on my table this evening? Is it just a hollow promise? These are the questions that make them resistant to change. The onus is on the philanthropist to ensure the beneficiaries receive benefits over the long term, on a sustainable basis, of his or her charity. Such resistance should not demotivate the philanthropist. Continuous and steady efforts are required in this journey of helping others.

The school started with 46 students in attendance. Also, during the same period, the upper veranda of the temple was turned into a vocational training centre for tailoring and embroidery for the underprivileged women. These

were the temporary arrangements that were made for the two projects.

Dr. Gupta, Ms. Gupta and other members of Sai Dham brainstormed over the construction of the school building. Initially, the plan was to extend the temple building and construct the classrooms on the first floor. A detailed building plan was made. However, when they visited the Department of Education for the approval, they were told that a registered school can be started only in an independent building. The classrooms need to be a minimum of 18 by 24 feet, corridors of 10 feet width and separate toilets for boys and girls. An honorary architect was appointed and the plan of the new building was drawn as per the Government specifications for the ground and the three floors of the school building.

By Sai Baba's grace, Dr. Gupta was able to arrange for the additional funds. The impeccable reputation that he had established with Canara Bank as a businessman proved to be beneficial. The General Manager (GM) of the bank, Mr. P.P.Malya, had been invited as the chief guest for the *Guru Purnima* function at Sai Dham when Guru ji discussed with him his ideas of starting the construction of a school building for the underprivileged children. The GM was so impressed by the idea, that he immediately announced a donation of ₹50,000. Placing faith in the long-term relationship with their old customer, the GM persuaded his Head Office and got the sanction of additional ₹2,50,000 for the construction of a classroom.

During the same period, the previous General Manager at Canara Bank, Mr. K.M. Sheth, who was promoted and transferred as executive director of Syndicate Bank and had great regard for Dr. Gupta, decided to support the cause.

At that time, the chairman-cum-managing director (CMD) of Syndicate bank went on leave. The executive director took charge as the acting CMD and hence he was able to immediately release ₹2,50,000 for the construction of another classroom. An excise officer by virtue of his good relations persuaded the stone crushers at Faridabad to supply about 62 trucks of stone dust and grits for this noble cause. With these funds and the material, construction of the Shirdi Sai Baba School building was started at full swing.

On 12 December 2004, the Hon'ble Governor of Haryana, Dr. A.R. Kidwai, laid the foundation stone of the school building. In less than a year, the entire ground floor consisting of 6 classrooms, a principal's chamber and 3 toilets were completed. Next year, on the auspicious occasion of Vijay Dashami, in October 2005, Mr. K.V. Singh, Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to the Chief Minister, Haryana, inaugurated the ground floor of the new building of Shirdi Sai Baba School.

The expansion of the school building was rapid. The German embassy was one of the major contributors in the first leg of expansion of the school building. Officials of the German embassy had paid a visit to Sai Dham. Thoroughly impressed by the work, the embassy sanctioned around ₹4.5 lakhs. Many more devotees came forward to sponsor construction of classrooms. Consequently, the second and third floor of the building could also be constructed by 2008. Gradually, the number of classes increased and also the number of students.

Many dignitaries were invited for the inauguration of the new classrooms and also for the school functions like annual day and other celebrations. Dr. Gupta makes special efforts to invite many eminent industrialists,

government officials from the State, Centre and the Public Sector Units (PSUs) and other leading and notable citizens of the local community. Even if a few of the invitees turn up, this gives Sai Dham an opportunity to showcase their work.

It has been observed by Dr. Gupta that when such prominent citizens of our society, capable of supporting the NGO, visit the organization, it leads to a long-lasting impact. Actions speak louder than words and such visits lead to the validation of the NGO's credibility. One can always be in a state of doubt after donating money online and wonder whether the funds will be used for the purpose that the organization professes to work for. But a visit not only proves the credibility of the NGO but also makes one witness the people being benefitted by their contribution. This further inspires the donor to be associated with the organization on a long-term basis which leads to the sustainability of the NGO. But we must also realize that one-time provision of funds to the NGOs working genuinely for a cause provides very little benefit to them. Organizations consist of staff and infrastructure. Salaries have to be disbursed and cost of routine activities must be paid. Until and unless the NGO has a regular minimum income, how will it continue with its operations? NGOs like Sai Dham that provide absolutely free-of-cost services to the poor depend on people like us to provide that basic minimum support.

We must, as a society, ask ourselves the question, why is there a need for the existence of the NGOs? The answer lies in the fact that somewhere, as a collective society, we have failed to create a system that provides every human in our society with the bare minimum needs. Therefore, all of

us are responsible for the abysmal condition of our fellow poverty-ridden citizens. They have definitely not chosen to be in that state. It is a play of destiny that a child born at one moment shall belong to a doctor's family and a child born just a second later shall be deprived of all the necessities in life as it was born in the humble household of daily-wage labourers. How, as a nation, can we become world leaders when in many states more than 40 percent of Indians are below the poverty line?

The growing population adds to the misery. I have often heard the criticism that the most impoverished of our lot is majorly responsible for the exponential increase in our population. To them I ask, look back and ponder how many brothers and sisters were our grandparents, or even our parents. For instance, all four of my grandparents had six to seven siblings. It must be asserted that it was only modern education (that only the privileged had access to) that led to an awareness among the present generation about the benefits of having lesser number of children. But what about those who are devoid of modern education and proper healthcare facilities? They have not been exposed to the ideas about the benefits of having smaller families. To be condescending to that daily-wage labourer who has five children will be then sheer hypocrisy. In such a situation, it becomes our responsibility to pull our fellow brothers and sisters out of that ignorance that they are being subjected to live in. A few among us, like Dr. Motilal Gupta, are leading the war against illiteracy, hunger and unemployment from the front. The others, at least, must support such warriors in whatever way they can, for we must understand that there cannot exist two India's – one developed and the other struggling for survival.

Personalities like Dr. Motilal Gupta are quite rare in our society. But a few like him do exist and need the support of capable fellow citizens. It is true that many fake charitable organizations exist who profess to be working for a certain cause. It will be a waste of time at the moment to discuss why such organizations exist or how and for whom do they operate. But the important question that must be addressed is that, how are genuine NGOs to be sieved out from the list of fake ones? If I google ‘top 10 NGOs in my city’ or ‘NGOs near me’, the results that will appear may or may not contain the names of genuine NGOs. So surfing the web may not be a good idea to do preliminary research in order to identify the genuine NGOs. A good method can be to identify the cause that one is concerned about and would like to contribute. Broadly, the causes may be categorized as-education, healthcare, supporting the elderly, supporting the physically challenged, orphanages, women empowerment, material support (food, clothes, etc.) and environment. After having decided the cause that one would like to engage with, narrowing down the list of the NGOs that one wishes to be associated with will be easier. If one has friends, colleagues or neighbours who are already associated with an NGO, these can be explored. Even if the NGO that we are able to discover through reference does not match our interest, it can still be a good starting point. For instance, if the only NGO you know is Sai Dham, but the cause that you would want to be associated with is elderly care, there is a high probability that once you are associated with Sai Dham, the other members will be able to refer other NGOs that specifically work for the cause of elderly care. The reason for the high chances of finding about genuine NGOs working in different areas from the



other sister NGOs is because like-minded people often end up associating with one another. I firmly believe that if one has the will to perform charity or one's duty towards those not as privileged, sooner or later, one definitely comes across organizations that work for the cause one wishes to be associated with.

My family had the good fortune of getting connected with Sai Dham through the network of people who believe in charity. In 2010, Mr. Anand Kumar, my mother's youngest uncle (*mausa ji*), posted as Director Research & Development (R&D) at Indian Oil Corporation Ltd., had visited the NGO. Our dear Mani Nana (as we call him) is a philanthropist in his own right who has guided and counselled many students till date, even providing scholarships to underprivileged bright students in need of funds for their higher education. Mr. Kumar was introduced to Sai Dham through the GM, R&D of IOCL, Mr. R.D. Sharma. Mr. Sharma happens to be one of the most active member of the Sai Dham family, who has played pivotal role in shaping Shirdi Sai Baba School since its early days. IOCL was one of the first PSUs to be associated with Shirdi Sai Baba School under its CSR initiative. A visit related to sponsoring the construction of new classrooms at the school was organized, which gave Mr. Anand Kumar and his wife, Ms. Madhu, an opportunity to meet Dr. Gupta. The couple were highly impressed by the scale of work being done by Sai Dham. The CSR tie-up materialized and IOCL sponsored the construction of two classrooms.

Our aunt Madhu, was especially drawn to the spiritual aspect of Sai Dham and Dr. Gupta's great devotion to Sai Baba. She narrated her wonderful experience to my parents and even arranged for their visit. That is how my parents

and my brother had the great fortune of touching Guru ji's feet. During the visit, Guru ji blessed my family with the supreme gift, which has no parallel, the Sri Sai Satcharitra. We remain indebted to Ms. Madhu and Mr. Anand Kumar who helped us reach Sai Dham and to Mr. R.D. Sharma who introduced us to Guru ji.

Dr. Gupta has been actively seeking contribution from the PSUs, MNCs and private limited companies for Sai Dham. The Government has prescribed a minimum percentage for the companies to contribute to the cause of social welfare in terms of the CSR support. While philanthropists like Dr. Gupta have to go from door-to-door to seek the CSR contribution of the companies, which they rightfully deserve, it is seldom that companies take a proactive stand on their CSR contributions and try to visit and support the NGOs on their own accord. It is this slackness on the part of the companies that has resulted in mushrooming of many fake NGOs which take advantage of the CSR mandate, severely hampering the prospects of genuine NGOs which are striving to make a difference. The private limited companies possess immense resources. The intelligentsia of the country will have to come up with methods of encouraging the companies to perform the mandatory CSR in its true spirit. Very rightly, Dr. Gupta calls himself a professional beggar. He has to visit many companies, present his case, convince officials to visit Sai Dham and contribute for the cause which his NGO rightfully deserves. The request might be accepted or rejected. But the quest goes on.

The tireless and relentless efforts of the founder of Sai Dham has proved to be worthwhile as he has been able to secure the confidence and CSR support of a few

major Indian PSUs. The credit must also be given to the few enterprising and compassionate officials at these PSUs who took up the task of supporting Sai Dham as their personal mission and even went beyond their official role in providing their assistance to the cause.

One of the first major attempts to procure funds from the PSUs was made in 2009. Mr. Vijay Dheer, a fellow Sai devotee apprised Dr. Gupta about the mandate of CSR and that both the private companies and PSUs are legally obliged to spend a percentage of their profits for social causes. Dr. Gupta realized that by getting the companies and PSUs to contribute for the activities of Sai Dham under the CSR mandate, a steady flow of income can be secured. NGOs like Sai Dham that are providing basic needs like food, clothes and education to the underprivileged can function only upon receiving aid. Such NGOs do not have any means to generate income on their own. NGOs or non-profits are different from Social Enterprises. Social enterprises are organizations that employ the underprivileged, manufacture products or deliver services to their clients and receive payment for their goods or services. The social enterprises thus generate profits through their activities. But NGOs like Sai Dham, are not social enterprises. How is an NGO providing food to the hungry, educating the underprivileged children, providing basic medical care to the poor supposed to generate income for itself? Its source of sustenance is only the financial support of its donors.

Upon being recommended by Mr. Dheer, Dr. Gupta had submitted the application requesting for the grant of ₹10 lakhs to the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL). In July 2009, as Dr. Gupta left for USA to attend his nephew's wedding, the next morning a team from

SAIL visited Sai Dham. Dr. Gupta's son's construction company had started the work of building flats in the adjacent land. One of the school staff who was hosting the officials pointed out that the flats were being built by Dr. Gupta's son. The team submitted a report that as the trustees are builders, the NGO is not in need for funds. The application was rejected.

In 2010, a Sai devotee and Sai Dham board member, Mr. Yash Pal Bhutani, induced Dr. Gupta to apply afresh for funds to SAIL. Mr. Bhutani's brother, Mr. Vinod Arora, who was posted as Executive Director at SAIL's Bhilai plant, was temporarily posted in Delhi Head Office to supervise planning of a new project. He played a pivotal role in the approval of the application. The former president Mr. Pranab Mukherjee's son, Mr. Abhijeet Mukherjee, posted as GM, CSR delivered the good news to Dr. Gupta that the Director (HR) had sanctioned ₹15 lakhs for the construction of three classrooms in the second building of the school.

Another Sai devotee referred Shirdi Sai Baba School to the Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD) of Power Grid. The application was sanctioned but the funds were released for the logistical support of the school. But Dr. Gupta insisted that at the moment the need was for the construction of classrooms. Logistical support would be required later. Hence, he requested to revise the sanction for construction of classrooms. The officials concerned were apprehensive as the revision might take time or might also be rejected altogether. But Dr. Gupta was adamant for the revision or else he would not accept the grant. The point was well-noted by the company and the request was granted.

ONGC has been one of the most generous contributors to Shirdi Sai Baba School. In 2010, a friend of Dr. Gupta had suggested him to apply to the then Director Finance at ONGC to request for a grant. The application was sent but as the Director Finance and the Director HR were on leave, officials of the CSR department of ONGC placed the application directly before the CMD. And as luck would have it, the funds were immediately sanctioned and released. Thereafter, the CMD retired and the new acting CMD was invited as the chief guest at the annual day programme of the school and also for the inauguration of the new classrooms which were built with the grant from ONGC. Mr. Arun Goenka, Dr. Gupta's friend and a confidante, was instrumental in introducing the activities of Sai Dham to the new CMD. The CMD was so impressed by the humanitarian services being performed by Sai Dham that he announced an additional grant of ₹10 lakhs. ONGC continues to support Sai Dham.

After having gained experience by running the school at Faridabad, Dr. Gupta started actively exploring the prospects of replicating the Shirdi Sai Baba School's model in other parts of the country. He was in the lookout for opportunities, this time in a rural area, so as to take a small step in the development of rural India. After having explored a few options in Rajasthan and MP, it was finally decided to start the project at Niswara. Mr. Vijay Bahadur Singh, a former Member of Parliament related to Dr. Gupta through his youngest son-in-law, was interested in the development of his native village, and hence, donated five acres of his land at Niswara, in the Mahoba district of Uttar Pradesh for the establishment of the school. Dr. Gupta also bought another acre of land adjacent to the path leading to

the land so as to widen the path connecting the donated land to the main road.

Mr. C.K. Mishra, who was then serving as the CGM (CSR) at ONGC, impressed by the NGO's good work at Faridabad and its efforts to set up a school in the backward area of Bundelkhand, played a pivotal role in getting ₹95 lakh sanctioned for the construction of the school in the village at Niswara. REC Ltd. also contributed ₹30.80 lakh for the construction of four classrooms in the school at Niswara. The construction commenced in full swing and two classes were started in 2013 itself.

Today the school at Niswara provides free-of-cost education, along with food, clothes and stationery to about 600 underprivileged students of the area. Sai Dham has created an oasis of learning in the otherwise desert of illiteracy, malnourishment and unemployment. Niswara has no direct rail connection with Delhi. The nearest railway station is Harpalpur, 20 kilometres from Niswara and the nearest city is Jhansi, located at a distance of 110 kilometres. One must realize the incredible managerial skill and visionary leadership of Dr. Gupta, who has been highly successful in establishing an educational institution in one of the remotest and most backward areas of India. Now, Dr. Gupta wishes and plans to have partnerships with leading philanthropists or local NGOs in different parts of the country who would be interested in replicating the model of Shirdi Sai Baba School.

More than the financial investment, it is the emotional investment of Mr. C.K. Mishra towards the Niswara project and his commitment towards the upliftment of the disadvantaged rural populace that had made the project a success. He has been visiting the school at Niswara in his

personal capacity and remains attached to Sai Dham. It is a duty to sanction funds to genuine NGOs as a corporate's 'Social Responsibility', but to realize one's obligation towards the society and go much beyond one's official commitments is what truly captures the essence of being humane.

Apart from the PSUs, the Indian Diaspora in USA has also been actively supporting the activities of Sai Dham. The story of how Dr. Gupta was able to meet the founder and CEO of Home of Hope (HOH), Dr. Nilima Sabharwal, is quite interesting. Home of Hope is a California based non-profit organization with the mission to support and provide educational opportunities to underprivileged children. In 2009, as described earlier, when Dr. Gupta and Ms. Gupta were on a visit to USA to attend the wedding of Dr. Gupta's nephew, they met Ms. Rita Sharma, daughter-in-law of Dr. Gupta's sister's friend, in California. Greatly impressed by the work of Sai Dham, Ms. Sharma, a board member of Home of Hope, arranged for a meeting of the Guptas with Dr. Sabharwal. Dr. Sabharwal is an exemplary personality who is committed to the mission of Home of Hope. Every year, the philanthropist herself visits the organizations in India which are being supported by her organization and prepares a report of how the NGOs are to be supported further. In her next trip to India in 2010, she visited Sai Dham and was immensely impressed by the scale of charitable activities that were undertaken by the NGO. She realized that the Shirdi Sai Baba School lacked state-of-the-art computer facilities. Her organization decided to set up 25 new computers in the school's computer lab and \$30,000 was sanctioned for the project. A leading computer training institute, NIIT, was roped in to provide training

to the youth at the centre, under the vocational training programme of the NGO. The young men and women now have the opportunity to learn computer languages, graphic designing and hardware repair at Sai Dham. Dr. Gupta's dream of providing opportunities for skill development to the youth who otherwise do not get the opportunity to pursue higher education was realized with the support of Home of Hope.

If one has a strong will to perform charity, sooner or later the cosmic forces pave the way connecting the donor to the cause. Like-minded people come together, establish networks and carry forth the supreme duty of service to humanity. Mr. Ajay Chopra, a leading businessman in the US, and his commitment towards charity gives proof for this claim. He is associated with Home of Hope. A board member of the organization told him about the philanthropic activities of Sai Dham in his home town, Faridabad. Mr. Chopra then contacted his brother, Mr. Anil Chopra, back home to find out more about the organization. The more he heard about Sai Dham, the more he wanted to be associated with the organization to contribute his share in order to serve the people of his motherland. Dr. Gupta recalls talking to Mr. Chopra for the first time. 'Mr. Chopra called me on the phone from US. I was on my way to Faridabad from Delhi. It was raining heavily, with thunder and lightning, and the call kept getting disrupted and we were not able to speak.' More often than not, such is the path of charity – not very easy. The donors on their part have to be strong-willed towards their duty and then the roadblocks are automatically cleared. Good Samaritans like Mr. Ajay Chopra cannot be deterred by thunder, lightning or any barricades that hinder their path to charity. He immediately sanctioned \$25000 for



Sai Dham. Later he doubled his donation to \$50000 and has been generously contributing for the cause from 2012 till today.

It was through Home of Hope that Ms. Vineeta Bhandari, founder of Building Kidz Inc. came to know about Shirdi Sai Baba School. Building Kidz Inc. is a leading American company which runs pre-schools and kindergartens, with its centres spread all over the US. When Ms. Bhandari came to know that Shirdi Sai Baba School at Faridabad, provides free-of-cost, quality education to the underprivileged, she took the decision at once to set up a kindergarten section (KG) at the school. Dr. Gupta was highly pleased with the idea and decided to allocate the first floor of the new building, which was under construction at that time, for the KG section. Building Kidz is now running three sections of KG classes with 144 tiny tots in attendance. There is a special curriculum based on performing arts and dances. Each class has a senior and junior teacher with two support staff.

The functioning and day-to-day operations of the school are guided and funded by Building Kidz Inc. Ms. Bhandari has been able to provide the young ones of the underprivileged families in India with the same resources and facilities to play, read and learn what their counterparts get in the US. This has created a huge positive impact in terms of learning and grasping in the minds of the children whose parents do not have the means or knowledge to provide such training and facilities. Taking care of the sapling, shall definitely lead to the healthy growth of a tree. The students of Building Kidz pre-school, who subsequently enter the first standard, have turned out to be the best performers of the class.

The discussion of Shirdi Sai Baba School is incomplete without the mention of the dynamic principal of the school, Ms. Beenu Sharma. Beenu Madam, as she is known in the school, was introduced to the organization by her father-in-law. She joined the school as a teacher in 2005 and took over as the principal in 2010. Her dedication towards the school is incomparable. It was only in my third visit that I was able to meet Beenu Madam, as during my previous two visits she was visiting the Niswara campus for the recruitment of teachers and the principal. I asked her about the source of motivation that keeps her attached to Shirdi Sai Baba School. She had a simple two-word answer—my students. The discussion that ensued was about how her students have been making her proud for the past 14 years.

In 2017 the CBSE affiliation for class 10 of the school was granted. The following year the students gave stupendous performance by scoring the highest marks of 99, 94 and 93 percent in Hindi, Mathematics and English respectively. The highest overall average was 89. The topper is the son of an auto driver, the girl who scored 94 in Mathematics is the daughter of a daily-wage labourer, while the girl who scored 94 in Social Science is the daughter of a single mother working as a house-help.

The relationship of students and teachers at Sai Dham is an everlasting one. The students are supported as they explore options for higher studies after their high school. Later, they are also referred for jobs. In the years when the school did not have the CBSE affiliation for class 10, the students would still be taught by the teachers at Shirdi Sai Baba School, although they would be registered for their matriculation examination in different schools.

The alumni of the school remain attached to their alma mater. They make it a point to attend the events organized by Sai Dham. If one attends the annual day programme of Shirdi Sai Baba School, organized on 11 December, which is Dr. Gupta's birthday, and watch the children deliver speeches in fluent English, sing, dance and act like professionals, for a moment one can forget that these children belong to the underprivileged section of the society and are not students of the posh schools of the metro cities.

The love and respect that the students have for their Beenu Madam and other teachers highlights the role of the NGO in transforming their lives. I was visiting Sai Dham on the auspicious occasion of Dussehra when I had the opportunity of meeting one such alumnus, Rahul, who works for the Times of India media group. He often visits the school on festivals and other occasions. Rahul says that the reason for the good results of the school is that neither the teachers nor the students are ever absent on a working day. And the major driving force behind the regular attendance of the students is the nutritious and tasty meals that the school provides for the children. It is for this reason that even during the summer vacations, Shirdi Sai Baba School organizes summer camps and remedial classes and runs its school buses and vans to fetch the students to school so that they are not deprived of the meals. In cases of extreme weather when the schools are directed by the Government to remain closed, Dr. Gupta has to take special permissions from the municipal office to allow the Shirdi Sai Baba School buses to be exempted from the checks by the police as they are not allowed to run during the period. Dr. Gupta encourages the donors to sponsor one day's meal for the students on special occasions like their anniversaries

and birthdays. This formula has proven to be very successful as for around 70 percent of the school days in a year, the meals are sponsored. This reduces a huge burden in terms of funds.

But the path of Sai Dham has not been easy. Beenu Madam recalls the difficulties that they would face in the initial years in convincing the parents to send their children to school. The school takes special care in grooming the children. Nail cutters, combs and shoe polish are also provided along with uniforms to the students so that they can come to school well-groomed. In the formative period, Beenu Madam and other teachers would themselves comb the hair of the students in order to inculcate in them the habit of cleanliness. The students of Shirdi Sai Baba School look neat and tidy, speak in proper Hindi and English, and are well-nourished. This has been the major factor in inspiring the parents of other such children to send them to school rather than engaging them in labour work.

Today, more than 50 percent of the students of the school are girls. Initially, encouraging the parents to send their daughters to school was a major challenge. Dr. Gupta is especially committed to the cause of women empowerment. With this aim in view, in 2004 the philanthropist couple had decided to convert the veranda of the Sai Dham temple into a vocational training centre for women. Tailoring classes were started with the help of donated sewing machines. Under the watchful eyes of Ms. Kanta Gupta, the women were trained in basic tailoring techniques. Later, the training centres were shifted to fully-equipped rooms and professional trainers were appointed as teachers. Through his links in the garment industry, Dr. Gupta has also been able to arrange for jobs for the trained women, making

them financially empowered. Today, Sai Dham has a tie-up with Singer, the leading sewing machine company of India, and provides free of cost certification courses in tailoring, industrial sewing as well as dress designing.

A fully-equipped beauty salon section has been providing training to the young girls enabling them to qualify as certified beauticians. These beauticians are easily absorbed in the salons and a few have also started their independent business.

Dr. Gupta came up with the idea to promote mass marriages with the long-term vision to encourage the economically weaker section of the society to not hesitate in spending money for their daughter's education, as often the poor parents need to curtail their expenditure and save money for their dowry. By adopting mass marriage, the entire burden that would normally fall on the bride's family, can be shared by all the participants, thus reducing the cost of individual weddings. With this aim in view, Sai Dham has been performing mass marriages four times in a year since 2007. By the end of 2019, Sai Dham is credited with performing 1010 marriages.

Initially, it was difficult to persuade the families of the economically weaker sections to adopt the practice of mass marriage. A good Samaritan, Ms. Neera Goel, who is also one of the board members of Sai Dham, took up the challenging responsibility of persuading the families of the brides and the grooms to adopt mass marriage. The members and volunteers would go door-to-door in the nearby slum and rural areas to encourage the families and inform them about the benefits of such a practice. The Gupta couple brainstormed how to organize the event along with their family friend Mr. Badri Prasad and his wife Ms.

Nisha Goel. The first mass marriage was conducted on 1 July 2007 for five couples. The newly-weds were given a variety of gifts.

In the initial years, Sai Dham and its members would encourage their friends and relatives to donate clothes, utensils and other household items for the couples. Today, under the stewardship of Ms. Rekha Gupta, a life-member and trustee of Sai Dham, the mass marriage has taken the shape of a grand event. Sai Dham arranges for items like clothes, utensils, pressure cookers, gas stoves, bicycles, suitcases, toiletries, table fans, light bulbs, electric iron, woollens, household linen, ration and other sundry articles. On the day of the event, the bride and groom reach Sai Dham in the morning, along with their families. Breakfast is served to all. The beauty culture training centre at Sai Dham is given the responsibility to get the brides ready for their big day. The wedding rituals are performed in the afternoon, followed by lunch and *bidai*.

Today, many leading citizens actively participate and contribute for the mass marriages, both in cash and in kind. For the first few years, due to lack of funds, recycled, old donated items would be given as gifts. Ms. Kanta Gupta would have to sort, repair and dry clean the donated clothes to be packed as gifts, at times lending a helping hand herself. Now Sai Dham has started to provide only new gift items to the newlyweds as they begin fresh chapters of their lives.

Sai Dham, as it conducts mass marriages, also has to deal with the myriad challenges that come along with it. Necessary background investigations have to be done to eliminate the wrong kinds of persons who wish to get registered for the event. At times, underage boys and girls

are registered for the marriage by their families. Or an already married couple registers for the event in order to receive the gifts. However, the idea is not to provide gifts to the people but to inculcate in them the ideals of anti-dowry and low-cost weddings so as to lead them towards the path of women empowerment.

The responsibility of Sai Dham, at times, stretches beyond the marriages, when they also have to act as marriage counsellors. If a bride is kicked out of the house by her in-laws, she runs back to Sai Dham for help. Ms. Neera Goel is the foremost among the Sai Dham members to handle such complex cases, giving utmost priority to the well-being of the girl (and at times also her new-born baby) while also trying to counsel the in-laws.

What drives Ms. Neera Goel to undertake these challenges? Why should Beenu Madam be committed towards her students? Why should Mr. C.K Mishra go beyond his official duty and fly from Mumbai to Delhi, take a 10-hour journey by train to Harpalpur and then travel by car to reach the remote village of Niswara to visit the school? The answer lies in their passion to help and care; their passion to make a difference in the lives of those who are not privileged. And that is how they say 'thank you' to the ultimate force that has given them the position in the society to be able to give to others.

At the helm of the ship is the visionary captain Dr. Motilal Gupta. His partner for life and beyond, Ms. Kanta Gupta, was the co-captain and her absence is sorely missed by the organization. The gigantic ship, as it straddles through the turbulent waves of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and discrimination, is firm in continuing to move forward. Hats off to the crew of the ship who along with

their captain have dedicated their lives to the mission of Sai Dham.

Dr. Gupta has been successful in creating an organization that has attracted good Samaritans and given them a platform to work towards their passion for philanthropy. Since 1988, the exemplary couple has made Sai Dham their home, visiting the organization every single day. So have other notable members of the organization. Sai Dham is the magnet that attracts them all. The dedication and commitment of the managers, teachers and staff is unparalleled. The reasons for their motivation can be varied but the outcome remains same, that of performing *sewa*.

For Mr. K.A. Pillay, the dynamic manager of the NGO, who has been serving Sai Dham for the past 30 years, the source of motivation is his ardent devotion to Sai Baba; for Beenu Madam and her team of teachers, it is their students; for some it is their desire to contribute towards the education of the underprivileged; for the staff it is the culture of the organization which is that of mutual respect; and for some it is their dedication towards the founder of the organization.

My first point of contact to Sai Dham, especially for the biography project, was Mr. Vikas Malhotra, who is one of the executive members of the Board. Mr. Malhotra's dedication and commitment towards Sai Dham can be gauged from the fact that it was only in my recent visit that I realized that he was not a full-time employee of the organization. All his services at the NGO are purely voluntary.

Dr. Gupta has been able to create an organization that is based on the trust of its employees, volunteers, board members and also its external stakeholders. If we



take the example of the wholesale merchant who sells the material to Sai Dham, his long-term relations and trust with the organization is such that he is never hesitant about supplying the products even on credit, if for some reason the payment cannot be made upfront. The local community of Faridabad too has immense respect for the NGO, which can be seen in various ways in terms of their contribution in cash or kind or with their presence in large numbers at the events organized by the organization. Even the local administration, organizations and politicians do not hesitate in honouring Dr. Gupta on numerous occasions.

A striking feature of Sai Dham is that of satisfying the donors by providing them with concrete results of their contribution. If classrooms are sponsored, they are inaugurated by the donor. If meals are sponsored, the donors have the delight of serving the meals themselves to the students. If a vocational training course has been sponsored, the associated organization can be present in the certificate distribution ceremony. And the regular donors who contribute to sustain the day-to-day running of the organization are the ones whose association with the NGO is not restricted to pecuniary matters. Instead, it is their passion for philanthropy that translates into regular financial support to the NGO.

For Dr. Motilal Gupta, every day is the beginning of a new project. And every project is taken up with equal zeal and fervour. Some projects may not be sustainable, some may become highly successful and some may fail. But failures do not deter Dr. Gupta, rather they are always a learning experience. It would need a separate book to discuss all the projects that were undertaken by the founder. As I write these sentences, the newest project of Sai Dham

has begun –that of distribution of clothes. The newly set-up wing of Sai Dham is sorting, cleaning and packing donated clothes. The unwearable cotton material is being converted into sanitary napkins. Truckloads of packets are being sent for distribution in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bundelkhand in UP and MP.

It is for everybody to appreciate how thoughts have the ability to develop wings and that an individual's effort has the capacity to achieve the impossible. Dr. Gupta is an example of how an individual's untiring efforts, coupled with determination, dedication, honesty, courage and capacity for sustained hard work of 16 hours a day even at the age of 85, can achieve the difficult task of improving the lives of a large number of under-privileged people and provide them with relief from the unending miseries of life. The uniqueness of Dr. Gupta lies in the fact that his projects have humble beginnings and are subsequently taken up to great heights where they stand tall today and garner appreciation. Every aspect of *sewa* (ideas of serving the humanity) arising in his mind has been executed with excellence and a visit to Sai Dham substantiates this claim.

The Gupta couple started on this journey all by themselves. People who could identify with the philosophy of this unique philanthropist couple would join them in this journey. Some went their own way, some did their duty and moved on while some became members of Sai Dham for life. Today, Sai Dham has become an institution – an institution that lives the spirit of its motto – Serving the Humanity.

The journey of Sai Dham has not been an easy one. When a river first emerges in the mountains and begins its journey, it has to face rocks and boulders. As its flow

becomes steady on the plains, it supports crops, provides potable water, supports organisms living in it, and brings happiness and joy in the lives of many. The ultimate goal for the river is to merge into the ocean. Sai Dham is the river that provides sustenance and happiness to many as it merges in its spirit with the ultimate and Supreme, Sai Baba.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **PERSONALITY OF DR. MOTILAL GUPTA**

*Slave of slaves I am your debtor; I am satisfied at your darshan. It is a great favour that I saw your feet.*

*Shirdi Sai Baba (addressing his devotees)*

Reasons for a human to take pride in himself or herself are in abundance. Pride of one's wealth. Pride of one's position. Pride of one's education. Pride of one's lineage. Pride of one's achievements. Pride of one's beauty. Pride of one's talent.

The idea of pride or ego can often be relative. Pride in one context can become a reason for contempt in another. I might be the most intelligent student of my school. And that will make me swell with pride. I will get selected to the most prestigious college. There, if I perform poorly among my peers, I will lose all my pride and be filled with contempt. Similarly, I might be the richest person in my city and it can be my reason for pride. But then I maybe the poorest person in a conference hall filled with the richest businessmen of the world, filling me with shame. Now, since pride is relative, there emerges a need for it to be showcased as superior. Comparison is necessary to prove my superiority and someone else's inferiority is required in order to validate my ego. In today's time of social media, the job to showcase our pride becomes easier with readymade platforms. We have our little worlds on social media consisting of our acquaintances and we try our level best to showcase that pride of ours to

them. We live in a world of competition. How is it possible to stay aloof from it? We have to compare, contrast and prove ourselves to be relatively better than others. Therefore, if pride is relative, what is absolute?

What we gather from Sri Hemadpant's Sri Sai Satcharitra is that Sai Baba was the Absolute personified. He had no one to compete with. He wanted nothing to compete for. The Fakir lived all alone in a dilapidated Masjid. He sometimes rambled in the woods or sat under the neem tree or beside a stream under the shade of a babool tree. He had achieved the state of *naishkarmya*, that is, no action. Perhaps the only verb that can be ascribed for His action is 'give'. He gave health, peace, happiness and knowledge. Sai was One. He came to Shirdi all alone, with no possession. He left Shirdi all alone, with no possession. He belongs to all and all belong to Him. In such a scenario, there is no 'other'. There is no space for competition. There is no space for pride. There is no space for ego. There is no space for relativity.

Therefore, it can be concluded that if pride is relative, no pride is the Absolute.

Dr. Motilal Gupta is one such persona who is constantly moving towards the Absolute, shunning away the relative concept of pride and ego.

For Dr. Gupta, competition has no meaning. He exists because Sai wants him to exist. He performs *sewa* because Sai wants him to perform the *sewa*. When everything is dedicated at Sai's feet, what will be the reason for his pride? When his existence is for the sake of his Lord, where do we find his ego?

'When I first saw Dr. Gupta, he was dancing with joy and ecstasy,' recalls Mr. Vijay Raghavan. An ardent

devotee of Sai Baba, Mr. Raghavan is the CMD of Sai Security Printers Pvt. Ltd. An old friend and a confidante, the 23 years of friendship of Dr. Gupta and Mr. Raghavan has many sweet stories of Sai *bhakti*.

Mr. Raghavan was attending the International Sai Devotees Convention organized by Dr. Gupta in October 1997. It was also the auspicious occasion of unveiling of Baba's statue at the Sai Dham temple premise. A mass procession had been organized to mark the event. Celebrated *bhajan* singers sang melodious songs of Baba. The musical extravaganza of devotion made all the Sai devotees dance and sing in joy, much like the Chavadi procession described by Sri Hemadpant in Sri Sai Satcharitra. Sai Baba would sleep in the Masjid and the Chavadi (a small building containing a room or two near the Masjid) on alternate nights. Baba would walk to the Chavadi from the Masjid and a procession of devotees would follow Him. Devotees sang *bhajan* to the accompaniment of musical instruments and Baba would be escorted by His loving devotees to the Chavadi. Sri Hemadpant describes the procession in the following beautiful words:

On coming to this corner Baba stood facing the Chavadi and shone with a peculiar lustre. It seemed, as if the face of Baba glittered like dawn, or like the glory of the rising sun. Kakasaheb Dixit at this time came forward with a silver plate containing flowers besmeared with gulal (red powder) and threw them on Baba's body off and on. The musical instruments played their best at this juncture and Baba's face beamed with steady and added radiance and beauty, and all the persons drank this lustre to their hearts' content. Words fail to describe the scene and splendour of this occasion. Sometimes Mhalasapati began to dance, but

all were surprised to see that Baba's concentration was not in the least disturbed. With a lantern in his hand Tatya Patil walked on Baba's left side and Bhagat Mhalasapati on the right, holding with his hand the hem of Baba's garment. What a beautiful procession and what an expression of devotion!

Mr. Motilal and Ms. Kanta Gupta's devotion and their hard work bore fruit and the entire event was a grand success. The event also marked the unending friendship of the Raghavans and the Guptas, the link being that of Sai *bhakti*.

'Mr. Motilal is immersed in *sewa*. Once he sets his eyes on a project, he must execute it. Also, execute it without any delay which makes him lose his patience at times,' says Mr. Raghavan. Guru ji gets angry at times. The only reason for this is his complete absorption in his work. And a few moments later, he is calm and quiet like the clear, blue sky. At times, he doesn't even remember if he was ever angry.

Sri Sai Satcharitra has anecdotes that describe that sometimes Baba would get angry with or without any reason. And then sooner or later Baba calmed down. Sri Hemadpant describes Baba in the following words:

He scolded the devotees, and at times, He looked softer than wax, a statue of peace and forgiveness. Though He seemed to shake with anger and His red eyes rolled round and round, still, He was internally a stream of affection and motherly love. Immediately, He called out His devotees and said, that if He was ever angry with His devotees; that if mothers kicked their children and if the sea turned back the rivers, He would neglect the devotees' welfare: that He, the slave of His devotees, always stood by them, and

responded to them, whenever they called upon Him, and that He always longed for their love.

The ocean has both high and low tides. When the tide is low, the ocean looks calm and placid. The fishermen and the sailors are given an opportunity to carry out their business with least danger. People enjoy on the beach, the waves are smaller and the mighty ocean looks serene and peaceful. On the other hand, when the tides are high, the ocean looks furious, swelling with wrath. The fishermen and the sailors have to be more careful and vigilant. Even the best of the sailors must remain cautious and understand the limitation of a human in front of the indomitable nature. The ocean seems to warn the humans against their pride. The humans must submit meekly and humbly in front of the forces of nature for their arrogance will only bring destruction to them. But there remains an important point to be noted here. The mighty ocean is not responsible for its high and low tides. The ocean's existence is only to sustain life of all the creatures living inside and outside its body. The tides are created by the greater cosmic forces in play in the universe, that is, the gravitational pull of the moon and the sun.

Baba, like the invincible ocean, always cared for the welfare of His children. His wrath, unknown to the God Himself, was to remind His devotees to be modest and humble, discarding the greatest enemy of humankind, ego. Guru ji is the shadow of the greatest of the Fakirs – Sai Baba, who longed for the welfare of His devotees. Guru ji has submitted himself completely to Baba, like the ocean submits itself to the moon to guide its tides.

In of my visits, I witnessed the office peon being severely reprimanded for not keeping the keys of the staff



room at the designated place. Guru ji's anger can be severe. The peon confessed his mistake. Often, people tend to get baffled with such an outpouring as it hurts the pride and the ego of the person at the receiving end. But there seems to be no such reaction from the employees of Sai Dham upon being censured by the Chairman. And there is a reason for it. Just a few minutes later, Guru ji called the peon again to his office. '*Beta*, why does your face look red?' Guru ji spoke in a playful voice as if cajoling a child. Guru ji had already noticed that he was suffering from insect bites on his face. He also complained of fever. Homeopathic medicines were prescribed and prepared and immediately given to him. He was soon relieved of his malady.

Till a few years ago, the employees would find a very good respite from Guru ji's censure. It was none other than their dear Mummy ji's affectionate care. '*Kanta bhabhi ji* was the true life partner of Sri Motilal,' says Mr. Raghavan. Her leaving for the heavenly abode was a big loss for Dr. Gupta. Mr. Raghavan recalls rushing to the Gupta residence as soon as the news of Ms. Gupta's shedding of her mortal coil reached him. Dr. Gupta, who was stoic till then, shed tears of the pain of separation as his friend held his hand in the hour of grief.

'*Kanta bhabhi ji* was an extraordinary personality with unparalleled humility,' recalls Mr. Raghavan. 'When people would donate clothes, she herself would get involved along with the staff members in sorting and recycling. And when Sai *bhajans* would be sung, her concentration on Baba would seem like divine meditation. Such was the personality of *Kanta bhabhi ji*.'

Mr. K.A. Pillay, serving Sai Dham for 30 years as the manager, shares similar experiences. Mr. Pillay's

commitment towards Sai Dham is praiseworthy. He is one of the first few people to be associated with Sai Dham. While many came and many left, Mr. Pillay has been ever steady with his duties. He recalls that in case of any debate between Dr. Gupta and him, it would be Ms. Gupta who would be the mediator. ‘I have been visiting Shirdi three to four times a year since the last 35 years. Once I saw Dr. Gupta cleaning Baba’s statue with Lux soap and a hose pipe. I was confounded. I told him that this was not the appropriate way to clean Baba’s statue. At the Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi, this is not how it is done. Dr. Gupta immediately threw away the soap and the hose pipe. He humbly asked me to teach him the way it was done at Shirdi. The great man has no ego. He is ever ready to learn.’ Mr. Pillay adds that Dr. Gupta starts a project every day. And the matter of amazement is that all the projects are also implemented and pursued. Such is his commitment.

A couple who are a close friend of the Guptas, who are also ardent Sai devotees, Mr. D.C. Mittal and Ms. Abha Mittal, have similar stories of the devout couple. It was Ms. Abha Mittal who, along with Dr. Gupta, was instrumental in translating the *Ash trotam Naamavali* from Sanskrit into Hindi and English through her relentless efforts. The book was published and thus became available to be read and understood by numerous devotees. They recall that from the last three-and-a-half decades, the Gupta couple would reach Faridabad in the morning, work throughout the day and return home only in the evening. Many a times Dr. Gupta would sleep at Sai Dham itself. It was only in the past 10 to 15 years that the area in and around Sai Dham has been developed and roads have been constructed. In earlier times, there was not even a *kutcha* road. Dr. Gupta would

drive his blue van and Ms. Gupta sat beside him to reach Sai Dham to accomplish the task of building the institution brick-by-brick that stands tall today.

On one occasion, we had the chance to meet the elder brother of Guru ji. The nonagenarian sat quietly in front of his younger brother, observing him attend to the work of Sai Dham. As he left his cabin, he looked proudly towards his younger sibling and very softly said, ‘You are doing a great work indeed.’

Dr. Gupta is known to all his friends and relatives as the one who stands beside them in their good times and especially in their bad times. Whether it is a relative’s operation or their children’s admission or any official obligation, Dr. Gupta is called upon to help and his response is immediate. In the words of Ms. Monika Kumar, a Sai Dham member and a Sai *bhajan* singer, he truly lives up to his name *Moti* – he is truly as precious and pure, as pearl.

If one spends just an hour at Sai Dham, one can witness Dr. Gupta managing the affairs of the institution, asking people to have meals and helping and caring for people. His charity seems to be effortless and yet effective. On my previous visit, the in-charge of the office pantry had big pustules developed all over her face and eyelids which became painful. Guru ji immediately prepared medicines and gave them to her. On my next visit, I was happy to see her face all cured, with no marks at all. She said that it was Guru ji’s medicine that cured her completely in a few days.

Guru ji is a healer. His homeopathic medicines have cured diseases like epilepsy and dengue. Innumerable incidents of Guru ji curing his patients through his medicines can be told. A few of these incidents have been narrated here.

In 2000, a Sai devotee rushed to Dr. Gupta with his four-year-old son. The little boy's lower lip had become bluish, full of spots and was hanging. This seemed to be a curious case. Guru ji sought Sai Baba's blessings and prescribed some medicines. He also noted down the entire case and the medicines prescribed in detail as he thought that the treatment might take a longer time. But due to Baba's grace, upon having the first set of medicines, the lip became absolutely fine and normal, without any spots. Today the young boy is pursuing his higher studies in the UK.

Only a couple of months ago, Guru ji received a call from his friend Mr. Mahavir Goel, who is a journalist. He was seeking help for his brother who was detected with dengue. It was past 9 p.m. and Guru ji was about to leave Sai Dham for home. He immediately prepared two sachets of medicines, marked 1 and 2. He called up Mr. Goel and asked him to collect the medicines from the night guard at Sai Dham. He was told to give his brother the medicine sachet marked no. 1 the same night. If there is no fever the following morning, then the sachet 2 needed to be given, which would relieve the patient of the body pain as well. Instructions were followed and the patient was completely cured of dengue. The grateful patient has now set up a homeopathic dispensary in his factory at IMT, Faridabad, which was inaugurated by Guru ji.

Similarly, the daughter of an office staff at Sai Dham would suffer from epilepsy and had to be admitted to hospital every two to three months due to the attacks. Also, the daughter of the founder of a leading educational institution in Dehradun suffered from similar epileptic attacks. Likewise, a frantic call was received from a Sai

devotee from Hubli, Karnataka, seeking treatment for his child suffering from the disease. All the three cases of epilepsy were completely cured by Guru ji's medicines.

From the year 1990 to 1996, Guru ji would visit Shirdi once or twice a year, accompanied by a group of devotees. They would travel by the Karnataka Express, which would stop at Kopargaon, a few miles away from Shirdi. Guru ji would carry his bag of medicines with him and often held medical camps in Shirdi. Once at Kopargaon, as the group waited for the train at the station, a hawker approached Guru ji as he observed him giving medicines to one of his fellow devotees. He pleaded his case saying that though married for the last 12 years, he had no issue. Guru ji gave him the medicines and a year later received the good news of the hawker being blessed with a child.

'It is not the medicines but Sai Baba's *kripa* that the patient gets cured,' the divine doctor says feelingly.

Guru ji is also a spiritual healer. An incident must be narrated at this juncture. Father of Mr. Praveen Kumar Gupta – GM Finance, NTPC and now a trustee of the Sai Dham trust – was suffering from an illness for the last five to six years. The illness was so grave that every time urine had to be extracted from the urethra. His father implored Dr. Gupta, praying to him to plead to Sai Baba for moksha. Guru ji meditated upon Sai Baba for His mercy on the patient and he got a vision. According to the vision, many years ago, the patient had denied giving a donation promised to a poor widow for her daughter's wedding. This was the cause of the suffering; one has to reap what one sows. The family recalled the incident and indeed the vision was true. Immediately, Mr. Praveen Kumar, along with his brother, took a solemn promise to sponsor one wedding each at the

upcoming mass marriage. Their ailing and aged father, who had been suffering from the past five to six years, finally breathed his last within 48 hours and was blessed with the moksha that he had been desiring for all these years.

Dr. Motilal Gupta has given health, happiness and solace to many. The extent of his charity has no bounds. His actions inspire others to walk on the path of righteousness. His speeches addressing the school children infuse them with positive energy to become proficient children of their parents and able citizens of the country. There are also many who got inspired by him to begin practising charity –like a banyan tree stands tall, providing shade and comfort to birds, beasts and humans, and from it many other huge branches shoot out, serving the same purpose.

My conversation with Mr. S.K. Mathur, a retired electrical engineer, who now spends most of his time at Sai Dham providing voluntary services, was an interesting one. Mr. Mathur's first visit to Sai Dham was work-related. Neither had he ever seen philanthropic work happening at such a large scale, nor had he ever thought that he would become a philanthropist himself, in his own right. Mr. Mathur was so impressed and moved with Dr. Gupta's ideas and his work, especially his mission to educate and feed the needy children, that he joined the organization and became an active volunteer for the NGO. Today, he takes care of all the electrical works of the organization and is actively involved in organizing various events of Sai Dham.

Mr. Mathur has been inspired by the relentless charitable activities of Dr. Gupta and has started his own foundation by the name of Kartavya. Kartavya is into distribution of sanitary napkins in some of the government schools nearby. 'What is charity? Why should it be undertaken? And how to

perform *sewa*? I learnt it all from Bauji,’ says Mr. Mathur. He was deeply motivated to undertake philanthropic work at an individual level and hence carry forth the mission of Sai Dham. The programme of sanitary napkin distribution was started at a small level and today Mr. Mathur is able to distribute the napkins every month to the nearby government schools. He has also been able to have tie-ups with the *aanganwadis* for the distribution. The funds for the cause are collected from his friends and neighbours, most of whom are retirees. Dr. Gupta too provides financial assistance for the noble cause.

The project related issues that arise are discussed with Guru ji and are eventually sorted. One problem related to the disposal of the sanitary napkins in the schools was brought up. The problem was resolved by establishing a tie-up with the manufacturer of the disposal machines which are now installed in schools on a need basis. Vending machines have also been installed at a couple of schools.

Apart from the distribution of napkins, Mr. Mathur has started a campaign to stop the use of plastic bags. In order to do so, he has hired women with tailoring skills who sew bags made of old linen that he collects from his friends and neighbours. On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, Mr. Mathur has distributed 800 eco-friendly bags in the *sabji mandi* of sector 16, Faridabad. Mr. Mathur acknowledges that the reason to take up philanthropy is Dr. Motilal Gupta, and that whatever he knows about *sewa* is credited to Guru ji.

I must also narrate the story of Bright Future, an organization that supports the after-school education of the children of the slum dwellers of Ghazipur in East Delhi. The dedicated founder of Bright Future, Ms. Komal Singh is a friend of Dr. Gupta’s daughter. In 2009, Ms. Singh, a non-

resident Indian, approached Dr. Gupta and expressed her wish to work for the slum dwelling children but had no idea how to go about it. Ms. Singh says, ‘Uncle did not spend much time enquiring how or why. In fact, he is a man of few words but precise and speedy action. He explained the basics of setting up a trust and provided me the name and number of a person who could help me with the same. The speed with which he solves problems has always stunned me. His response is always immediate; his action is always *now*. His paperwork is immaculate as is his team. He never ever says I will do it tomorrow. He works tirelessly, seven days a week. His focus, like Arjun, is single pointed.’ Since, 2009, Ms. Komal visits India every year for three to four months to work for Bright Future.

My rendezvous with Mr. Chandar, the volunteer at Sai Dham who looks after the media coverage and press release of the events of the organization, revealed a yet another interesting story. Six years ago, Mr. Chandar, a young lad from the neighbouring village, had landed in Faridabad in search of opportunities in the field of journalism. Mr. Chandar had heard about Sai Dham and about its founder who was a great philanthropist. One day he mustered up courage and walked straight into the office of Dr. Gupta. Guru ji, by his very nature, is an attentive audience to anyone who calls upon him for help. But Chandar did not even know what help to ask for. After all, he was just a naïve village boy who had turned towards the big city to realize his dreams. As luck would have it, Dr. Gupta became his mentor. ‘He listened to my ideas, gave me a good meal and then discussed with me about my career in journalism. I became his fan,’ says Mr. Chandar. Dr. Gupta immediately sanctioned ₹27,500 for his camera. Mr. Chandar started his



independent journalism activities and is now responsible for the media cell of the NGO. He has also taken up the task of encouraging the youth of the nearby slums of Faridabad to enrol themselves for the free vocational training that is being provided by Sai Dham. The most important lesson the young journalist has learnt from his mentor is to never react to unnecessary criticism but to continue with one's duty with utmost dedication towards one's job.

Guru ji has helped and guided many youngsters to pursue their dreams. His benedictions are the blessings of Sai Baba Himself. It is Guru ji's divine blessings which have transformed my career for the better. Guru ji has similarly blessed my brother also. My brother first visited Sai Dham along with my parents in 2010. On their first meeting, Guru ji had severely scolded him for not being sincere enough in his studies. Guru ji's wrath was a direct blessing for my brother as this was the most auspicious moment for him; he had been blessed with a mentor, a Guru. In 2016, as he was struggling for job opportunities, he visited Guru ji to seek his guidance. Guru ji assured him that within a month he would receive the good news. And by Guru ji's divine prayers, Sai Baba blessed him with a job that transformed his career.

Then, in 2018, I was visiting Guru ji along with my family. I was quite anxious about the college admission of my brother who had applied for Masters in various universities abroad. Most of the results were out and he was not satisfied with the colleges whose confirmations he had received. During our visit, we observed that Guru ji was trying to resolve some technical glitch related to an online money transaction portal. My brother was asked to look into the glitch. By Baba's grace, he was able to

find a solution for the issue. Guru ji then blessed him, ‘OK, so now leave in September for your Masters.’ We knew that Guru ji’s benedictions will always come true, but to us it was a surprise as according to our knowledge all the results were already declared. A-month-and-a-half later, my brother called me. It was the day when I had completed Sri Sai Satcharitra’s reading cycle. He said that Guru ji’s blessings have indeed come true and he had been selected by a leading university in the UK for his Masters. He could hardly recall filling its application form as he thought that he had no chance of being selected by such a prestigious college. My brother boarded his flight for UK on 29 September 2018. Guru ji’s words came out true to the letter.

Dr. Motilal Gupta’s life is extraordinary. To capture the essence of it, has been a challenging task. A skilful doctor, a miraculous healer, a zestful teacher and a compassionate philanthropist, Dr. Motilal Gupta has many facets to his personality. Yet, there is no trace of pride in him. For him, the idea of self, the concept of ‘I’, has no meaning. His life is all about *karma* and *bhakti*. Having completely surrendered his body, mind and soul at the feet of his Lord Sai, he teaches us the lessons of renunciation while living in the material world. Words fall short to describe his persona. And yet it can be concluded in one line – that he is a true devotee of the greatest of the Saints, Sai Baba of Shirdi.

I was visiting Guru ji at his residence in Greater Kailash. He was suffering from knee pain. I asked Guru ji, ‘Why don’t you ask Baba, why the pain, why the suffering?’ To this he replied that he doesn’t ask Baba for anything. When the servant has submitted himself to the Master, why ask?

Whatever He gives must be for the good. Even the pain. We must suffer the consequences of our *karma*, both good or bad. We must endure. With Sai Baba as his saviour and protector, Guru ji has nothing to worry about.

In September 1998, Guru ji suffered from a mild heart attack in the middle of the night. His dutiful son, Mr. Sandeep Gupta's heartfelt recollection of the incident seems like an anecdote from Sri Sai Satcharitra itself. 'It was 2 a.m. in the night, I was awakened from my dream that Papa needed me,' recalls Mr. Gupta. That particular night, only the two of them were at home as the rest of the family members were out of station. As he went to his father's bedroom, he did not find him on the bed. Mr. Gupta knocked on the washroom's door and heard a faint sound. Realizing that all is not well, he knocked on the door again and somehow made his father open the door. He then rushed Dr. Gupta to the nearest hospital where the doctors diagnosed a mild heart attack. The next morning an operation was performed and a stent was placed in the blocked artery. It is the firm belief of Mr. Sandeep Gupta that it was their Sai Baba who awakened him from his deep sleep and made him rush to his father's rescue. Such are the ways by which Sai Baba protects his beloved devotees!

Ms. Poonam Motwani Gupta, Dr. Gupta's daughter-in-law, was making schedules for Guru ji's meals and a doctor's appointment had to be organized. Ms. Motwani Gupta is a successful entrepreneur herself. She says, 'Dad is a spontaneous decision maker. Just a few days back we were visiting an ophthalmologist who suggested that he needs six injections in his eyes. I was hesitant and wanted to seek a second opinion. But Dad didn't want to waste any more time on this and immediately the decision was taken

to get the injections. And so his eyes were injected right at the moment.’

After the demise of Ms. Kanta Gupta, Ms. Poonam Motwani Gupta and Mr. Sandeep Gupta have decided to take forward the baton of Sai Dham, assisting Dr, Motilal Gupta in carrying forward the mission of serving the humanity.

The next day we were leaving for a meeting at Nehru Place regarding editing of the content of the Sai Dham website. After having completed his physiotherapy routine, Guru ji swiftly got ready for the meeting. Siya *bhaiyya* was again serving me *aloo parathas* for breakfast. I broke my last time’s record and lost the count of the number of *parathas* I ate. This time with the meal, we were also served *sharifas*, a favourite fruit of Guru ji as well as mine. Bhola *bhaiyya* had arrived on time and quickly kept his Bauji’s briefcase and laptop in the car. Off we went to Nehru Place. As the website contents were being discussed and edited, Guru ji received numerous calls on his phone. The gardener of Sai Dham was reprimanded for not mowing the grass of the school ground, some papers had to be signed which was redirected to his residence, clothes had to be packed for the next dispatch, a peon had to be transferred from the office to the clothes sorting department and a printer at the Niswara school was out of order and had to be dispatched to Delhi for repair. In the midst of all this, Guru ji had noticed that the duster of the white-board of the office we were visiting looked quite good and was of a superior quality. It also had a holder for the marker. Guru ji very humbly asked the office manager if he could borrow the duster for a day and he would return it by the evening. The meeting was over in time for me to catch my train to Kanpur. On our way back

for lunch Guru ji said, ‘Bhola, look these dusters are of a superior quality. Next time when ordering for dusters for the school, we will ask them to deliver these ones. Show this sample to our supplier and return the duster by the evening to this office.’

## CHAPTER SIX

### **SRI SAI SATCHARITRA: THE SUPREME TREASURE**

*Those who are fortunate and whose demerits have vanished; take to My worship. If you always say 'Sai, Sai' I shall take you over the seven seas; believe in these words, and you will be certainly benefited. I do not need any paraphernalia of worship. I rest there where there is full devotion.*

*Shirdi Sai Baba*

Sri Sai Satcharitra is a poem. A poem that is singing the divine life of the Saint whose incarnation in this world was only for the welfare of the people. The poem has so many different flavours hidden in it that one lifetime won't be sufficient to capture its gist. While it is true that the mind might fail to understand the spirit of the poem, but the soul within has the potential to flow with it. The poem connects the two souls of the petty human and the mighty God through strings of love. Love is precious. It is love that connects us to our mother, father, siblings, friends and our partner. Love is as pure and transparent as water. Pour it in different jars, it takes different shapes. Love for a mother will be different from the love for a partner, which will be different from the love for a teacher. Although it takes different shapes, but the essence remains the same –that, of love. Love is indispensable. But is there a love that doesn't need a jar to contain it? Is there a love that fills the entire universe and so everything

gets contained *in* that love? Is there a love that is so much in abundance that it shall last till the end of time and beyond? Is there a love that is beyond the umbilical cord and solemn promises? That love, which is unconditional; it occurs without cause; it has no beginning; it has no end; that love that transcends the limitations of time, space and gross human body.

That love is the love for Sai Baba, the love for the Supreme.

Sri Sai Satcharitra sings that love. It gives numerous short stories of love that Sai Baba bore for His devotees. It was His love for the people that gave them success, health, happiness, comfort and joy. Sri Sai Satcharitra remains one of the earliest first-hand accounts of Sai Baba's life and His teachings that is readily available. The interested readers can experience this love that once lived in human form in the village of Shirdi in Maharashtra. It is a small window that gives us a chance to look into what it really was when Sai Baba treaded the soil of Shirdi. An imaginative reader who reads the book can bring to life the Shirdi village through the words of the writer.

What we know about the writer from the book itself is that he had the good fortune of getting Baba's darshan in 1910. The writer heartily expresses his gratitude to his friends, Sri Nanasaheb Chandorkar and Sri Kakasaheb Dixit, who had encouraged him to visit Shirdi and get enrolled in Baba's durbar. Sri Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, alias Sri Hemadpant, was a government official in British India who retired in 1916, two years prior to Baba's Mahasamadhi. Chapter 3 of the book mentions that post retirement, due to Baba's benediction, he got another government job which was of a short duration. After the temporary engagement,

he completely devoted himself to the service of Shri Sai Baba Sansthan.

The original book is written in Marathi Ovi. Ovi is a poetic metre that is rhythmic in its composition, exclusively used in Marathi language. The poetic style is said to have originated in the 13th century. Premier Marathi poets of the past millennium – Saint Sri Gyaneshwar, Sri Eknath Maharaj and Sri Namdev – composed great philosophical works in the Marathi Ovi. *Gyaneshwari*, also known as *Bhavarath Deepika*, the interpretation of Bhagwad Gita by Saint Gyaneshwar of the 13th century, has been composed in the Marathi Ovi. The oral tradition of singing poems in the Ovi metre by the womenfolk predates the 13th century.

In chapter 52, the last chapter of the original book, Sri Hemadpant gives his concluding remarks. The writer also promises to give an index, as is the tradition in Marathi Ovi poems, that describes the contents of the respective chapters in a verse or two. But no such index was found in Sri Hemadpant's papers. It seems that the writer's ultimate conclusion was his mergence in Sai in spirit rather than words. The index was composed by another devotee of Baba, Sri B.V. Dev, who served as the Mamlatdar of Thana in British India. Some of the experiences of Sri B.V. Dev have been recorded in chapters 40 and 41 of the Satcharitra. Sri Dabholkar left for heavenly abode in 1929. Sri Sai Satcharitra must have been published in its original form after 1929.

The first translation of Sri Sai Satcharitra into English was done by Sri Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji. A lawyer by profession, Sri Gunaji was an eminent scholar who is credited with writing over 28 books. He was deeply interested in Sai Baba's teachings and therefore took upon



the task of adapting and translating the original Sri Sai Satcharitra from Marathi Ovi to English. Sri Gunaji passed away in 1963. Hence, it can be inferred that the Sri Sai Satcharitra was available to the non-Marathi readers by then. In 2003, Ms. Zarine Taraporevala, a great devotee of Sai Baba, accomplished the task of translating the original Sri Sai Satcharitra into English, Ovi by Ovi. The task of editing, typing, creating the chronological index of events, adding the photographs and sketches and, subsequently, its publication was accomplished by Mr. Vijay Raghavan (who lovingly called Ms. Zarine as his Didi) and Dr. Motilal Gupta. Ms. Zarine expresses her heartfelt gratitude to both of them for their invaluable and voluntary contribution in the acknowledgement of the book ‘Sree Sai Samarath Satcharitra’. The copyright for the subsequent publications of the book has been given to Sri Sai Baba Sansthan.

What must it have been like to look at Sai Baba in the Masjid –how he spoke, how he ate, how he laughed and cried with the people of the Shirdi village? We get a glimpse of this God’s humanly life in this world and his teachings through the words of Sri Hemadpant.

Who is God? Does God have a form? Does God really exist? We, the humans, have not seen God with our eyes. Our intellect often requires proofs and inferences to believe something. Those who believe often create an image of their God through their vivid imagination. God can exist in the human form in mythological stories, God can be carved out of a stone or wood, God can be worshiped as nature in the form of sun, rivers, trees and mountains or God can just be an abstract concept. In the village of Shirdi, there came to live a poor Fakir, whose origins no one knew. The humans had the opportunity to see the Fakir through their own eyes,

hear His words and be witness to His miraculous deeds. Such deeds could not be understood through rationality or logic. How is it that Baba would declare the past, the present and the future of a person by merely looking at him or her? How is it that Baba would cure diseases like malaria, epilepsy, tuberculosis, plague, pronounced as incurable by the doctors, only by his benedictions? How is it that Baba would bless a woman with motherhood whose desire for a child had remained unsatisfied for the past 27 years? After having seen and experienced such miracles of Sai Baba, the grateful villagers of Shirdi started worshipping their Sai as God. The humans had got their proof. Henceforth, Sai's words were to be considered as the doctrine of truth. For the humans who had been thinking hard to decode the concept of God, there came a Saint who first showed His deeds as beyond humanly capacity, and then gave the interpretation of the mystery through his various sweet stories. Sri Hemadpant was supremely fortunate that he was blessed by Sai Baba to write down the stories, experiences of the devotees and the teachings of Baba in Sri Sai Satcharitra, which if carefully read and grasped, gradually unfolds itself to unveil the ultimate truth which perhaps cannot be explained in words, similar to love which has no definition. It is to be experienced.

‘Allah Malik’ –the two words of Baba are the essence of Sri Sai Satcharitra. If Baba says Allah, then Allah exists. All the forces of the universe and beyond converge into a Supreme Energy. From the Supreme energy all emanate and into the Supreme Energy all culminate. That Supreme energy is ‘God’. Baba says, Allah is Malik, the Master, the Puppeteer of the entire show of this universe. If Allah is Malik, we are the servants. The word servant is impregnated

with beautiful sub-texts. The noun is servant; the adjective is servitude. Servitude is to surrender, to submit oneself to the Master. Complete submission is only possible when the ego is completely annihilated.

What is ego? Ego is reflected in 'I'. 'I' is one worded, with no room for the other. It is singular in its existence. It is aloof. It is alone in its spirit. The solitary 'I', therefore, shall consider only its own welfare, as the 'I' does not know anybody else. 'I' only has the motive to satisfy itself; 'I' is self-absorbed. The singular 'I', laden with ego, desires the best only for itself, spends its lifetime (or lifetimes) in the quest to satisfy its own being. The ego wants itself to be the most successful; it shall not fail. The self shall acquire wealth, position, honour, progeny and also knowledge to strengthen the ego. Moreover, Maya or attachment entraps the ego. Attachment to property, attachment to progeny or attachment to position propels the ego to do whatever it can to preserve Maya. The ego will not bow down in front of any other entity. Ego breeds pride. Pride is the armour of ego and protects it. The iron-strong pride makes it difficult to bow down, for the ego considers itself to be undaunted, unrelenting. But when the self gets surrounded by miseries and sufferings, which is inevitable in this world, it then seeks relief. Misery can be terrible. More often than not, it is misery or the thought of misery that compels a human to look beyond 'I'. Can there be an 'other' which can cease or reduce the misery? Sometimes, attaching with an 'other' singular self reduces the misery. But two 'I' or even many 'I' together are sometimes not enough to overcome misery or suffering. Because even in their togetherness, the different selves are separate entities, they are not one. Their pride, their ego, their arrogance hinders their sight to look at that

Supreme entity which is beyond ‘I’, which is omnipotent and invincible. Eventually, it is the perpetual misery that impels the self to acknowledge the presence of the Supreme and then bow down to implore to help save and preserve its Maya. The praying can be transactional in nature. The ‘I’ prays to the Supreme for the health, wealth, happiness and success, for itself and its own kith-and-kin. The ‘I’ promises to donate money, land and gold to the Supreme in order to make its wishes come true. ‘I’ struggles, fights, leaves no stone unturned to preserve its entity, its pride, its ego. The pursuit of ego is a rigmarole, an unending quest.

Servitude is the opposite of ego or ‘I’. The servant breaks the shackles of its pride and places its faith entirely at the feet of the Master. With no pride, all the desires vanish. The ‘I’ surrenders unconditionally. Let the Master decide what is to be done with the self – this is how the servant thinks. There remain no goals to be achieved, there are no wishes to be fulfilled, for the servant does not know what is to be desired and what is not to be desired. When everything is being taken care by the Master, why worry? There is no room for misery then. The servant exists only to serve the Master through the twin tools of *Karma* and *Bhakti*. The boundary between the ‘I’ and the Supreme starts fading away. There are no struggles, no fights but only peace and bliss. Ultimately, the ‘I’ gets merged into the Supreme.

‘Shraddha Saburi’ – Baba has said that cultivating the two virtues of faith and patience can ferry us across this ocean of worldly existence without much trouble. Saburi is patience, the ability to endure, to be perseverant. Baba would say that patience is a mine of virtues. Shraddha is faith. Sri Hemadpant writes that Baba would assure that those who

completely placed their faith in Baba while simultaneously getting rid of their egos, would be taken care of by Him. Baba would urge to ‘destroy the wall’ between Him and the devotee’s self so that they can ‘meet each other’. By destroying the wall of the ego and the Maya, Baba assures that the servant merges with the Master, then, there remains no difference between the two. The self converges into the ultimate energy from where it originally got fragmented into this singular, meek, individual self, straddling all alone in this world that is difficult to traverse on account of Maya.

The human, once it understands that the ego is to be conquered in order to get pure, everlasting happiness, it must then perform the necessary Karma while placing its faith on the Supreme. Baba, while Himself leading the life of a poor Fakir, taught the people how to conduct themselves in this world. Sri Hemadpant narrates many anecdotes through which Baba would encourage the devotees to inculcate the virtues of forgiveness, benevolence, calmness and charity. Baba did not like slandering and cautioned the individuals against the ills of speaking against someone behind their back. He would ask His devotees not to react upon being criticized or if someone did anything wrong to them. Sometimes it is better to suffer and endure as reaction might just enhance the problem. He taught the lesson of being satisfied with one’s lot, not to covet another person’s property and not to be greedy. There is no contentment and happiness for a greedy human being; greed only multiplies itself. Baba even said that upon being asked for help, if we do not have the means or intention to provide the help, we should politely refuse and never harshly deal with the person or deride them. Baba did not allow His devotees to keep fasts. Sri Hemadpant writes that if a person is starving

how will they get the energy to worship? So it is better to eat in moderation so as to have a healthy mind and body. The great Fakir, who loved cooking food and feeding the hungry, could have never wanted His devotees to starve, especially to worship Him. An obedient child always listens to the mother and places faith in her that whatever she gives is for the child's betterment. It is only the stubborn one who will resort to means like starving or causing harm to themselves so as to get the attention of the mother in order to have their wishes fulfilled.

Baba, who was Himself a repository of knowledge, always inspired and helped those who were in the quest for knowledge. The knowledge-seekers would go to Baba with the books they wanted to study. Baba would then give suitable instructions so that they could grasp the real meaning of the contents of the book. Sri Hemadpant, in Chapter 39 of Sri Sai Satcharitra, has given an elaborate account of Baba explaining word-by-word, the meaning and gist of the verse 34 from Chapter 4 of the Bhagwad Gita. Sai Baba's elucidation of a single *shloka* from Gita is so profound that one wonders if Baba was Saint Gyaneshwar Himself. Baba encouraged people to read metaphysics and philosophy. His devotees were given the responsibility of reading *Gyaneshwari* or the *Bhagwad* or *Bhawartha Ramayana* by Sri Eknath and explain it to the audience. Many books were entrusted to the devotees who desired to read spirituality or philosophy.

Sri Hemadpant writes in Chapter 39 that before when crowds started flocking to Baba, He would have individual meetings with the devotees in the Masjid. In one of these meetings Sri Nanasaheb Chandorkar had the good fortune of listening to the lessons of Bhagwad Gita from Baba

Himself. What we can decipher from these words is that it was much later that Baba allowed his fame to reach far-and-wide. For the majority of his stay in Shirdi, he lived a quiet life. He lived in an old and dilapidated Masjid, begged his food from a few houses and was surrounded by the villagers of Shirdi who were his most intimate devotees.

Baba had first appeared in Shirdi as a young lad of 16 years, practising meditation under the neem tree. The people wondered from where had this young lad had turned up. Then He disappeared and returned to Shirdi with the marriage party of one Chand Patil whose wife's nephew was to be married and the bride was from Shirdi. When Baba descended from one of the bullock carts, Sri Mhalsapati, who would become one of the closest devotees of Baba, accosted the Fakir as 'Ya Sai!' And thus He became Sai Baba. Infinitely fortunate were Sri Mhalsapati and Sri Tatya Kote Patil who were His closest devotees. The premier servants of Baba would sleep with their Master in the dilapidated Masjid, talking and chit-chatting till late at night. Sri Tatya Kote would call Baba as his Mama. Sri Tatya's mother, Smt. Bayajabai, would roam in the jungles in search of the Fakir every afternoon and request Him to eat bread. Supremely blessed is Bayajabai who showered her motherly love on the Fakir, who was the Saviour, the Mother of all. Equally blessed is Smt. Radhakrishnamai who would look after the needs of Baba by providing Him food and cleaning His Masjid. It was Smt. Laxmi Bai, who would offer milk and bread to Baba daily, who received the blessing of nine coins from Baba just before He left His mortal coil. Sri Hemadpant writes about Sri Shama, the village schoolmaster, as the most intimate devotee of Baba. If anybody could not approach

Baba directly, they would request Sri Shama to speak for them. Even Sri Hemadpant himself could not ask Baba, so he requested Sri Shama to procure the permission of writing the Sri Sai Satcharitra. In this way Sri Shama and other intimate devotees of Baba like Sri Bala Shimpi and Sri Nanasaheb Nimonkar would be approached by numerous devotees to plead their cause in Baba's durbar. The list of Baba's intimate devotees is incomplete without the mention of the name of Sri Bhagoji Shinde, a leper devotee who was the premier servant of Baba. It was these devotees, the simple villagers of Shirdi, who welcomed their God in their village, worshipped Him, showered their love, composed sweet poems and songs and in front of whom Baba left Shirdi, quietly, discarding His finite body to assume His infinite aspect.

Baba's fame has exponentially increased after his Mahasamadhi in 1918. It seems that Baba purposefully chose a time to incarnate Himself in this world when He would be able to live a fairly discreet life of a poor Fakir in the small village of Shirdi. And after His leaving the body, His fame would reach far-and-wide. But why should Baba's fame be ever-increasing and reach different corners of the world even 100 years after His passing away? The answer lies within the hearts of all those who take to His worship—it is no secret. The answer is that Baba listens even today. Baba listens to the heartfelt prayers of His devotees and satisfies them. Sai is the God who once lived on this planet and saved humankind from various miseries. Sai is the God who laughed, walked, played and talked with the people of Shirdi. Sai is the God who, like the sun, the moon and the clouds, did not discriminate between the people based on their religion, caste or gender. His love for



all was equal, without any differentiation. Sai is the God who is beyond rites, rituals and superstitions. Baba is love incarnate. Baba had no mission, no goals. His sole concern was the happiness of people; happiness which is the rarest gift in this world of Maya. Baba taught the humans to live a meaningful life, to perform their designated Karmas, while remaining unattached to them. Rare is a Saint, a Fakir like Sai Baba, who incarnated only for the welfare of His devotees, and listens to their prayers even today. Sai Baba is birthless, deathless, transcendental; Sai Baba is *Para Bramha*.

Sai Baba's worship is incomplete without the reading of Sri Sai Satcharitra and consequently, following the teachings of Baba to the letter. Baba's biography is a gold mine of knowledge. The reading of Sri Sai Satcharitra purifies the soul. Sieving out the impurities, what remains is the pure essence. The devotees on their part, have to be steady with their devotion. And then, Baba listens, gives instructions and sets the devotee on the path of righteousness. The easiest way to verify this claim is by reading the great book. All what is needed on part of the reader is faith and patience.

On 30 May 2010, my parents and my brother visited Sai Dham for the first time. The founder-chairman of Sai Dham presented them with four copies of Sri Sai Satcharitra with its stamp and his signature. This was the most precious moment for my family. Dr. Gupta became our teacher, our mentor and our Guru, for real knowledge is not possible without the grace of a teacher. Our Guru ji has endowed us with the key that opens our eyes of the intellect to experience what the real knowledge is. Sri Sai Satcharitra, through its various sweet stories, provides

invaluable lessons for life. So simple is this technique that it can be followed by anyone.

Guru ji, the beloved devotee of Sai Baba, became to us, in today's time, Sri Shama or Sri Kakasaheb Dixit, who would be our link to the God. In matters great or small, we look upon Guru ji for his guidance and blessings. His benedictions are the dictum of Sai Baba. His life is a practical demonstration of the teachings of Sri Sai Satcharitra. Guru ji has dedicated his life for spreading the message and teachings of his Sadguru. The institution created by him is infused with values of righteousness, honesty and heartfelt charity. Sai Dham emanates an aura of positive energy. One has to see it to believe it!

Guru ji has taught us that charity or *sewa* benefits the individuals at both the ends, the giver and the receiver. For the receiver, it definitely provides him or her with relief. And for the giver, it purifies the spirit. But the giving has to be accompanied with love. One can feel the love that Guru ji has for all those he serves. The giver has no pride, no haughtiness for the fact that he has the upper hand while the hands spread in front of him are inferior. There are no hierarchies in love. Guru ji performs charity while remaining totally unattached to it, with no trace of pride as he dedicates his Karma to his Lord Sai Baba. This is the uniqueness of the charity of Dr. Motilal Gupta.

The act of charity loses its essence if there is pride associated with it. It is just a matter of chance or luck that the giver has been endowed with the resources that they are able to give. Luck is a tricky business; it might just reverse its stance for an individual. Hence, giving with the feeling that what I give is not mine, it ultimately belongs to the grand storehouse of nature, of which I have been made a

temporary keeper, and to be thankful to be in that position, is what captures the real essence of charity. To help someone with no expectation of any return, to give because that is the right thing to do, to have sympathy and love for the other, without any conditions, is what charity is.

The biography of Dr. Motilal Gupta and the journey of Sai Dham is an incredible story that teaches us how to apply the moral values that we are taught and put them into practice. All the readers of this story have the potential to perform charity in their own right, with whatever means they have. If the charity cannot be performed independently, then contributing to the already existing organizations like Sai Dham can be a great step towards philanthropy. The contribution need not be monetary in nature. Contribution with one's expertise, providing voluntary service, inducing others to become a part of such organizations and to be emotionally attached to the cause are some of the other significant ways to contribute. Sai Baba, the merciful Fakir, gives enormous strength of body and mind to those who wish to walk on the path of righteousness. What is wanted on the part of the doer is complete submission at the feet of Baba. When one's Karma itself is offered at His lotus feet, there remains nothing to be afraid of. The entire universe assumes the shape of Sai.

I came across a real-life picture of Sai Baba with a child resting on His lap. Baba, I imagine myself to be that child. My Baba, who is love incarnate, whose fingers I hold as I learn to walk in this mysterious world, in whose lap I rest to find comfort, with whom I sing and dance as I celebrate His marvels— as a Sufi saint once sang:

*'Na tera jeya hor disda'*  
*(Can't see anyone like you)*



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My parents, Abhay Shekhar Prasad and Nirja Prasad and my brother Navesh Kumar, join me in thanking all the above-mentioned people as writing the biography of our Guru ji, Dr. Motilal Gupta, has been the most holy and auspicious experience for my family. My husband, Navrose, as usual, stands by my side as I write down these words. We feel that our Lord Sai has truly blessed us.

## PHOTO GALLERY



Young and dashing Dr. Motilal.  
Picture taken on 14 July, 1954





Boat ride in the Ganges at Banaras



With batch mates at Banaras Hindu University  
(standing, second from left)



With Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri ji  
(standing, behind Shastri ji)



The newly-wed – And they lived happily ever after



Mr. Motilal Gupta and Ms. Kanta Gupta in Kashmir



With their children (sitting left to right, Manjari, Sandeep, Mr. & Ms. Gupta, Poonam, Mamta)



With friends in London





Homeopathic Dispensary and office of  
Saidham in the initial year



The Samadhi Mandir of Shirdi Sai Baba  
at SaiDham under construction



International Convention of the  
Shirdi Sai Devotees in October, 1997



Unveiling of Baba's statue,  
Ms. Marine Warren offering her prayers



Distribution of school bags and stationery to the underprivileged children



Independence day celebration at Shirdi Sai Baba School

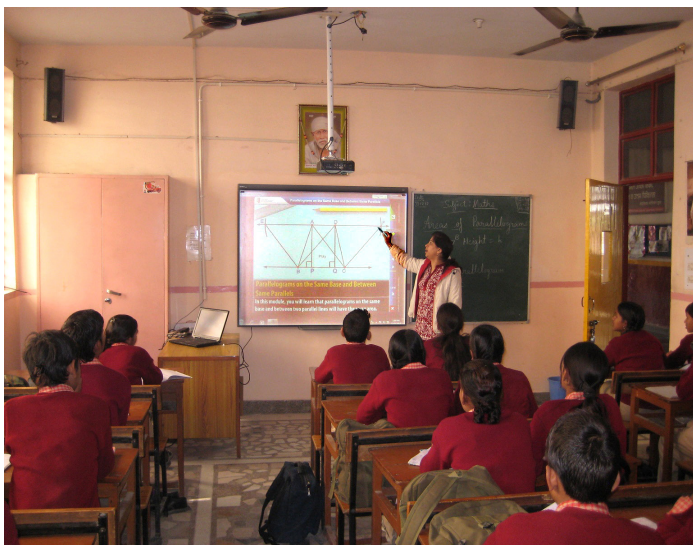


Laying of the foundation of Shirdi Sai Baba School,  
Faridabad in December, 2004





Healthy body, healthy mind



Smart Class at Shirdi Sai Baba School, Faridabad



Annual day celebration at the school



Sports facility



Kindergarten Section sponsored by Building Kidz



Ms. Shabana Azmi visiting the vocational training centre at Sai Dham





Computer training centre at SaiDham



With the brides and grooms at the Mass Marriage



Health care facilities



Shirdi Sai Baba School, Niswara, Uttar Pradesh



Clothes Distribution in Jharkhand



Ms. Kanta Gupta and Dr. Motilal Gupta. Conferring of the honourary doctorate degree by YS University, Florida



Two visionaries