

Shree Peetha Nilaya

SERVE A DEITY NEWSLETTER

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JAI GURUDEV

In this newsletter, you'll get to know more about these very kind and loving deities, Rukmini-Panduranga, the saints who loved Them, what the *pujarinis* do to serve Them here at The Ashram, and a special recipe you can use at home to serve Them too!

Shree
Peetha Nilaya



RUKMINI-PANDURANGA PUJARINI TEAM INTRODUCTION



Jai Gurudev Everyone,

Panduranga, or Vitthala, or Vithoba: it doesn't matter what name you use, the quality of the Lord that is most remarkable, and the one He is most known for throughout history, is His closeness to His devotees.

He loves them, cares for them, wants to be around them, and even appears in their lives for long periods of time to help and serve!

There are so many stories of saints that describe how the Lord Himself came to be with them, not just in dreams or visions, but in a personal and physical way in their lives. And, since we have such a treasury of *satsangs* and stories that Gurudev has told about Panduranga, we wanted to feature them in this newsletter for you.

Here's what Gurudev said about Lord Vitthala in two *satsangs* near the end of the year 2020. The first one below took place on Babaji Day, when He was speaking about

a famous painting of Vitthala where He is shown as carrying many saints. Gurudev continued to speak about the painting the month after that in Mauritius, too:

That madness is what love is, you know. Sometimes spiritual people need this little madness. (Well, I guess you are all mad, but such madness is a different madness, you know.) So, you are mad, but not mad about Him. You are mad about everything else. You are mad about yourself, and you become more crazy about that. But if you were mad about Him, He would have given Himself to you.

And in that madness, when you look at that beautiful picture of Vitthala, you see He is carrying Sant Dnyaneshwara. He is carrying all the saints with Him around, holding them all like babies, you know, hanging upon Him. It's one of the most beautiful pictures one can have. (photo page 4)

There is no limit to it. There is no 'Oh, He is Bhagavan, I can't jump on Him.' No! There is no restriction. In that Love, in that madness of Love, there is no restriction. The *gopas* and the *gopis* in Vrindavan didn't have any restriction with Krishna. Such is Love, you know. That doesn't mean that respect is not there. Respect is fully there, but the ego is not there, the 'I' and 'mine' is not there. It's only Him.

- [Satsang, Babaji Day, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 30.11.20](#)

There is this beautiful picture where you see Panduranga and all the saints hanging on Him. ... You see Vitthala is there, Dnyaneshwara is there, Tukaram is there, Namdev and all the saints are hanging on Him, you know, like a Christmas tree. [The audience laughs] But it's very symbolic, it's very deep, you know. They have transformed, that's why they are hanging on Him.

'You see, you are so much hanging upon your ideas of what is spirituality: 'I will do this, I will follow this *satsang*, I will follow that, I will follow this path, I will follow that path, I will follow this Master, I will take this teaching,

I will take that teaching', you know. You are just doing teaching, you are just going from one exercise to the other, but you are not transforming yourself. So, that's what He meant by the mind transforming, that mind [getting] destroyed and changed.

- [Satsang, Mauritius Temple, 24.12.20](#)

Just like in that painting that Gurudev was describing, here at Shree Peetha Nilaya a dedicated team of over 25 *pujarinis*, the largest *pujari* team of any deity at The Ashram, 'hang on' to Panduranga and Rukmini, caring for Them every day in their special *mandir*, rain or shine, no matter what.

What most people may not realise is how Gurudev is working by making such a big *pujarini* team. As we all know, Gurudev doesn't do anything without a reason. In this case, He could have easily assigned a specific team of six *matajis*, (just like He has assigned the *prabhu* teams for all the temple deities), but instead He gave the honour to 'the *matajis* of Shree Peetha Nilaya' which is a team of more than 40 women! So, He gave us the opportunity to sort things out together, to be supportive together, to be creative together.

In fact, sometimes it feels like our beloved deities find different ways to keep us with Them much longer than we expected! Perhaps we have to find a way to make a new necklace stay in place, or arrange Their hair differently, or get a forgotten *puja* item.

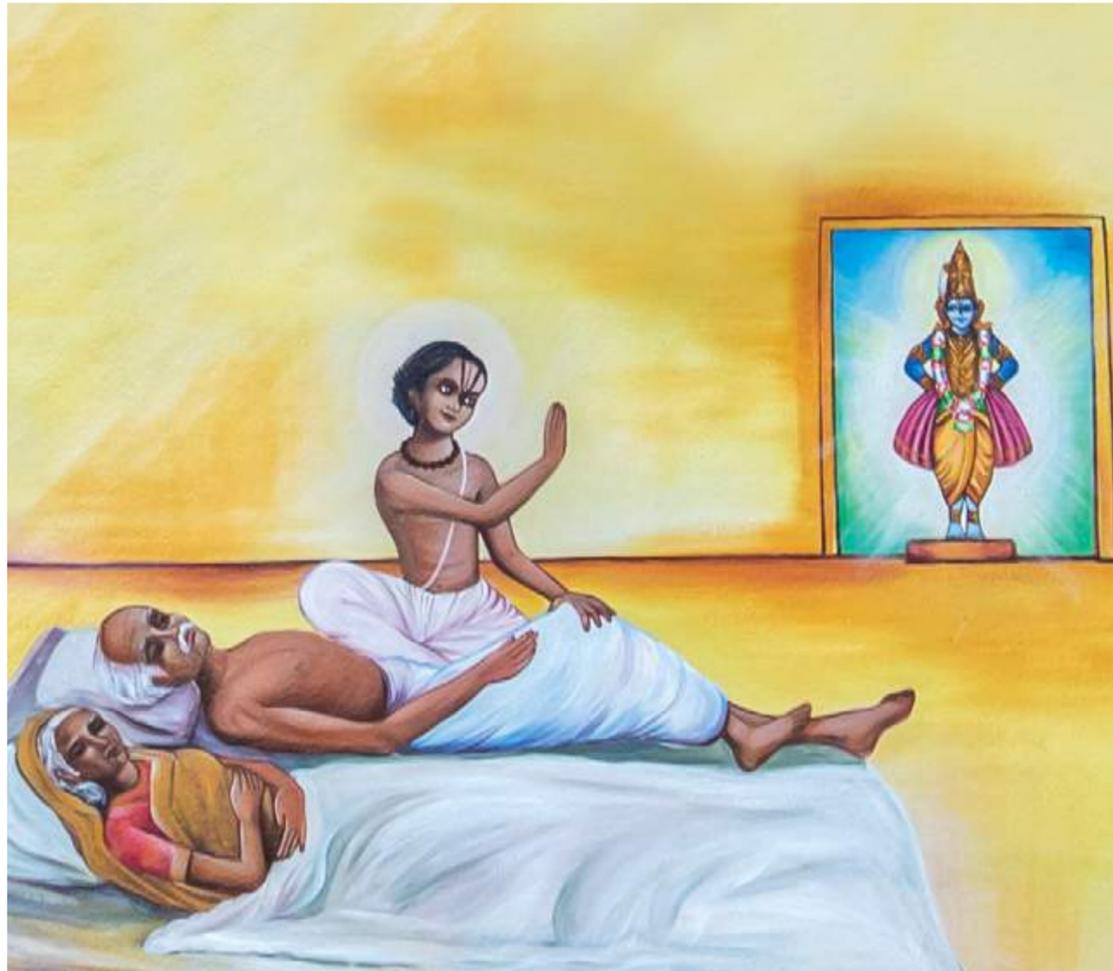
But when this happens, we can see that They are deliberately keeping us with Them for our own benefit!

To be honest, there are days where we may need to do service with someone who is not our favourite, but the main thing He teaches us is to focus on the Lord and not on ourselves. It's about equanimity and about selfless service: giving the best service with whoever we are put together with. It's not about friendships; it's about serving. And when we do that service well, we naturally find our hearts opening to God and to each other, too.

Although Gurudev has given us the opportunity to serve Panduranga, in reality we know that it is Him serving us, and the stories we will share with you later on will show you just how He does!



DEITY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: PANDURANGA



Panduranga, also called Vitthala - the Lord who is standing on the brick - appeared 5000 years ago to a saint named Pundalik. Being pleased with Pundalik's devotion to his parents, Panduranga told Pundalik to ask for anything and He would happily fulfil it. Surprisingly, Pundalik just requested that Panduranga would forever stay in this form, standing on the brick with the hands on His hips, in Pandharpur. So, Panduranga left Pundalik His *swayambhu*, His self-manifested *vighraha*, which is still today present in Pandharpur.

The vicinity of Pandharpur is completely infused with devotion to Panduranga. Every year, thousands upon thousands of people walk to Pandharpur for 40 days from all parts of Maharashtra, carrying *padukas* of well-known saints like Sant Tukaram and Sant Dnyaneshwara from Alandi, Sant Eknath from Paithan in Aurangabad, and so on, chanting, 'Vitthala, Vitthala, Vitthala, Vitthala' the whole way. They all arrive on the day of Ashadi

Ekadashi in the month of Ashadha (June-July).

What's remarkable is that, after coming so far on such a long journey, most of them don't even get to see the deity of Panduranga! There are so many people, they may see only the *kalash* at the top of the temple, and then they turn around and head back home! Such is their level of devotion that the experience of the journey is all they need.

Interestingly enough, Panduranga is also referred as Vithu Mauli. *Mauli* means mother, and with this name, devotees refer to Vitthala as mother instead of father because He is as caring as a mother.

But wait....remember the name Vithoba? When you add 'ba' as a suffix, it means you are referring to someone as your father. So Vitthala's names show that He is both mother and father to those who love Him.

DEITIES AT THE ALTAR OF THE RUKMINI- PANDURANGA MANDIR

Of course, you know the large deities in the *mandir*, Panduranga and Rukmini, but here's some info about the other deities you'll see there:

The small *utsava* deities are made of metal. *Utsava* deities are representation of the larger deities. Although originally they were Radha-Krishna, in this case Radha became Rukmini. The story goes like this:

One day Gurudev came to the *mandir* after evening *arati* and He was looking at the deities. He pointed to Radha saying, 'Look at Radha. But, you know, She is not Radha, She is Rukmini.' (So, from that day onwards we refer to Them as Rukmini-Krishna.) You might wonder, how Radha and Rukmini can be the same? Gurudev explained it in the story where both of Them met.

After the great Kurukshetra battle, Rukmini brought some very hot food and gave it to Radharani, and Radha took it with Her bare hand, but Her hand didn't burn. Then, Rukmini saw the hand of Krishna, and Krishna's hand was burned. That's when She realised that Krishna and Radha are one; They are not separated. At that point, She realised how great Radharani was, and why Krishna always praises Radha.



Actually, what He is praising is that devotion which Radharani has for Krishna: She doesn't think of Herself, She only thinks of Krishna. In contrast, all Krishna's queens think only about themselves. Despite their devotion, they think, 'How can I make myself happy by making Him happy?' Gurudev pointed out the big difference: to them, their own happiness came first. That's the difference between the queens and Radharani.

So, Rukmini realised how great Radharani was at that moment. But when She realised that, Radha also became part of Her. That's why in the *arati* we sing, 'You married Rukmini and You also married Radha.' 'rukmini vallabhā rāicyā vallabhā', 'rāicyā' is Radha.

BHU-DEVI-VARAHA - Photo 1

Varaha is the manifestation of the Supreme Lord in the form of a boar, who went to the bottom of the ocean to lift up Bhu-devi, Mother Earth, and save Her from being kept captive in the oceans. (The Lord always comes to save His beloved wife.)

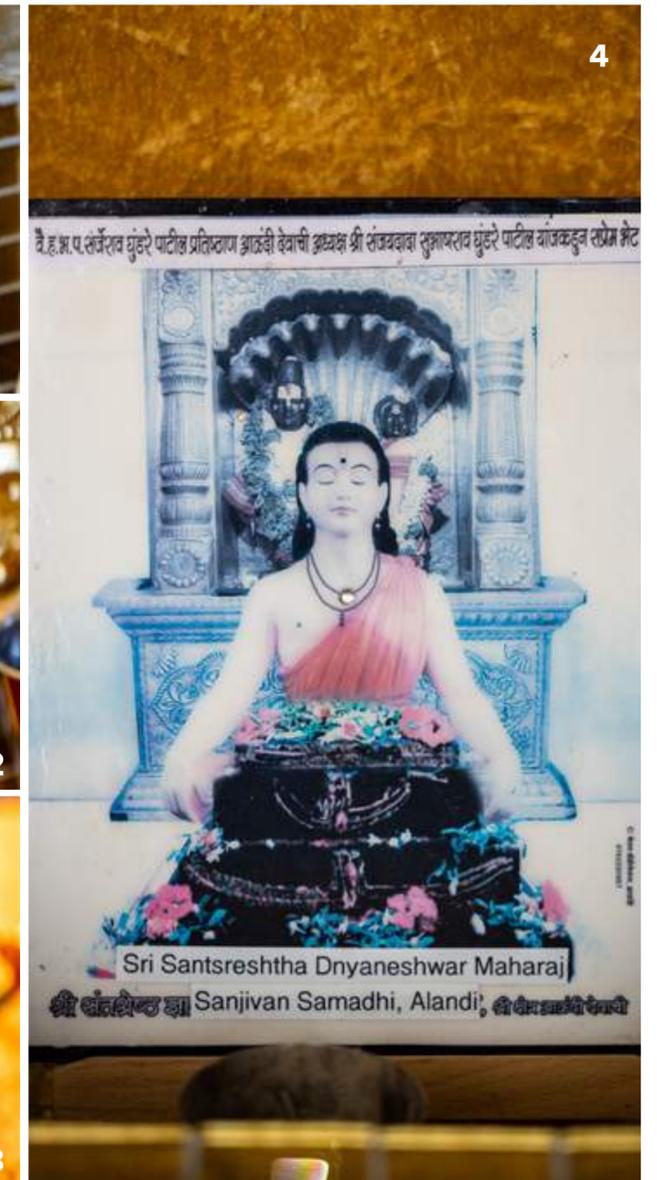
TWO SHALIGRAMAS - Photo 2 & 3

Small *Shaligrama* of Panduranga which Gurudev brought from His personal *Shaligrama* temple. Large *Shaligrama* of Rukmini and Panduranga.

A PICTURE OF SANT DNYANESHWARA - Photo 4

Gurudev brought this picture from the pilgrimage to Maharashtra and asked us to put it in the *mandir*. In a recent *satsang* from Mauritius in February of this year, Gurudev mentioned that Sant Dnyaneshwara is an incarnation of Bhagavan Himself.

Sant Dnyaneshwara is known as a 13th-century Indian Marathi saint, poet, philosopher and *yogi* of the Nath Vaishnava tradition. He translated the *Bhagavad Gita* into the Marathi language, wrote a commentary on it, and was a great devotee of Vitthala. When he was only 21 years old, he took *sanjivana samadhi* in Alandi, Maharashtra. (This kind of *samadhi* means that Sant Dnyaneshwara is still alive. In fact, in the Bhakti Marga Mauritius temple in February, Sant Dnyaneshwara and Vitthala appeared to Gurudev!)



THE LILAS OF PANDURANGA WITH HIS DEVOTEES

A CLASSIC STORY OF PANDURANGA'S LILA WITH HIS DEVOTEE, PUNDALIK, AS TOLD BY GURUDEV

[This is the story that was dramatised on 14 June, 2021, by the residents of Shree Peetha Nilaya at the new ashram, Sri Vitthal Dham, in Germany.]

Chances like this are also a reminder of one's spiritual path, you know. Often, you will see your life all over again. Second life doesn't mean only when you had a certain traumatic accident, or illnesses, and you are cured and have a second life. Second life means also when you find your spiritual path, when you take your old life and how you used to live, and you put it by the side and say, 'I am a new person.' This is also a second life. It should not only be in a reminder in a drastic, terrible way.

The same when we are singing the glory of Panduranga. It's such a wonderful story, actually. It's a story of Sant Pundalik.

Sant Pundalik was not always a saint. He was somebody who would harm people in the forest. Same as Valmiki. But he used to serve his parents, his mom and dad. He loved his mother and his father very dearly and he would serve them, but to everybody else he would be very cruel.



One day, he got married. The moment he got married, his whole attitude towards his parents changed completely and he became cruel to his parents. He would torture them and not even give them food. The parents became so fed up with their life that they said, 'Listen...!' They didn't have any joy of living in their place so they decided they would go to Kashi for pilgrimage, because Kashi is a very holy place. So, they said to their son, 'We are going to Kashi with the pilgrims.' When the son heard that, he told his wife and the wife said, 'Okay, we will go to Kashi, too.' Pundalik and his wife went by horse and made their parents walk. The parents walked for days and whenever they would stop at night, they had to feed the animals and so on.

Again the same torture was going on. They regretted so much that they went for the pilgrimage.... 'Oh, my goodness, why have we decided to go to this pilgrimage?', you know. So, like that, each time they stopped for the night, it would be terrible for the parents.

Finally, they came to an *ashram* of a sage called Kukkut Rishi and they decided to stay for a few days there. Again, the same

procedure happened. So, that night in Kukkut Rishi's *ashram*, Pundalik could not sleep, so he asked the *rishi*, 'Where is Kashi?' The *rishi* said, 'I don't know.'

Pundalik said, 'Eh? How come you don't know? You are such a great personality, you are so revered as a saint, how come you don't know about Kashi?'

The *rishi* said, 'Well, I don't know about Kashi because I don't have a need to go there. You know, if you want to know something, you have to have a need.' He didn't have a need to go there. He said, 'I am in my *ashram*, I don't need to go anywhere.'

That night, deep in the night, Pundalik could not sleep and was wondering, 'What kind of person is that?' You know, everybody knows where Kashi is, such a very holy place, how come he doesn't know? For sure Pundalik thought that he was missing something. So, having these thoughts in his mind, he suddenly saw in front of him three beautiful ladies but they were dressed completely in rags and dirty clothes. They came in the *ashram* and started cleaning the *ashram* of the *rishi*. He was shocked and thought, 'How come these women look like they are from

high society, and why are they there cleaning the *ashram* of such a saint, such a *guru*? And also, so late at night?' He went to bed thinking about that.

The next day, the same thing happened. The third night, the same thing happened: he saw them going inside, washing the *ashram*, cleaning the *ashram*, putting everything in order, then go in a room, and come out very beautiful with very elegant clothes, jewellery and everything and then leave the *ashram*. He was intrigued. Every night was the same drama. Who are these ladies? So, he approached them on the third night and said, 'Please, can you tell me who you ladies are, and why you are cleaning the *ashram* every night?'

The first one said, 'I am Ganga.' The second one said, 'I am Yamuna.' And the third one said, 'I am Saraswati.' The three holy rivers: Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. They said, 'We come here because everybody who comes to us washes their sins in us and we come here to clean the sins of all the people by serving Kukkut Rishi.'



Then he said, 'But why?' You know, in his mind he said, 'Wow! This is a man who doesn't even know where Kashi is, but yet, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati themselves come to him.' Then he was wondering, 'Why is he so special?'

Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati told him that Kukkut Rishi is such a great person and he had attained that degree of spirituality just by serving his parents, nothing else. He didn't serve anybody else, only his parents. By that he had accumulated enough *punya* that Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati had come to serve him. And by serving him, they are cleansing the impurities and sins of all the people who bathe in them.

Hearing that, Pundalik was shocked. Then he started realising his mistake. He realised what he had done to his parents. From that day on, there was a complete transformation in him. He started serving his parents with *nivrita-bhakti*, single-minded devotion. So, the next day the parents were on the horse, and the husband and wife were walking behind. They went to Kashi, visited all the holy places, and came back to the place where they were staying in Pandharpur.

This is when Lord Krishna paid them a visit. Bhagavan Krishna came to the door and called for him, 'Pundalik!' At that time, Pundalik was busy serving his mother and father. So Pundalik said, 'Bhagavan, please wait.' Then, he took a brick that was there, threw it outside and said, 'You stand on that brick, I will come.'

After some time, after the parents have been served and everything, Pundalik came out, bowed down to Panduranga, to Krishna, and said, 'Lord, forgive me, I was serving my parents.'

Bhagavan was so touched by his devotion that He asked him, 'What do you want?'

Seeing this beautiful form of the Lord standing on a brick, he said, 'Bhagavan, I would like You to stay here forever.'

So, the Lord manifested His form. From Him, a deity of Panduranga appeared outside standing on the brick. This is the deity which you see in Pandharpur. It's not a carved *murti*, it's a *swayambhu*, which means it's a self-manifested deity.

So, you see, a second birth or a reminder of life comes in many ways. For some it comes

in a very shocking way, but for some it comes as a reminder through the *guru* and the saints. But one has to be appreciative of life itself and how precious life is, and why God has given life, which is only so that you can attain Him. This reality will finish, but your relationship to Him doesn't finish. You may not remember, but He does remember. That's why He sends His calling cards from time to time!

- *Satsang*, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 18.04.18



ATTRIBUTES OF LORD PANDURANGA



WHY DOES PANDURANGA WEAR FISH EARRINGS?

At the inauguration of the Panduranga Mandir, Gurudev gave this touching explanation of the earrings that Panduranga wears that are shaped like fish:

You know the story of the fish? You see, there was a devotee of Vitthala who was a fisherman. And he lived a bit far away from Pandharpur. And so, throughout his life, he saved his money to go to Pandharpur to have *darshan* of Vitthala-Rukmini. And that was his aim. He said, 'Even once if you go to Pandharpur, and then you die, it doesn't matter. That's the aim for life, you know.' So, he saved money and everything and went to Pandharpur.

But, you see, when you go and visit somebody, you never go empty-handed. So, what did he do? He didn't know what to bring to Vitthala. He was a fisherman and so what would he bring? Fish!

So, he took a basket and put some fish inside and brought it as he went to Pandharpur. And when he had *darshan* of Vitthala, of course, he put his covered basket down in front of Vitthala and said, '*Prabhu*, I brought this. This is the only thing I have, I brought it for You', and happily he went out.

And when the *pandhar* opened the basket, it was stinking and smelling of fish. When he opened the basket, they saw fish and they got really mad and angry. So, they all rushed out quickly to this man, to this fisherman and beat him up and said, 'How dare you bring fish into the temple to offer to Vitthala?!' And he had a good beating (bruises and everything) and was thrown out of the temple. This poor man was sitting there with his basket of fish, crying, you know, because - not because they have beaten him up, because Bhagavan had not accepted his offering. He said, 'Because I am poor, that's why God has not accepted my offering. Because I don't have anything else to give Him.'

And as he was crying, of course, the merciful Lord hears everybody's call when they are sincerely calling from the heart. Vitthala and Rukmini appeared in front of him and He said, 'Give Me your offering. Give Me that

fish.' The moment Bhagavan touched the fish, the fish transformed into golden earrings. Bhagavan wears those earrings always in remembrance of that devotee.

So, that's why you see that Rukmini also had these fish earrings from that fisherman. But it is through that devotion more than anything else, that *bhakti* which this fisherman had for Vitthala, that made Bhagavan come.

So, I pray to Vitthala-Rukmini that you also have such a devotion, even if it is not in this life, maybe next life. If you can do that in this life, do it. If you can't do it, in your next life be born again as a devotee. So, then you can carry on your spiritual path. But if you have that deep longing for God and really you make Him the most important thing in your life, like all the saints that we talk about, then for sure you will dwell with Him. That is His promise that He has given: that He is with you through that devotion, through that *bhakti*.

So, Jai Gurudev everyone!
rukmini maharani ki!...jai!
pandharinatha maharaja ki!...jai!

- Installation of Rukmini-Panduranga in the temple, Mauritius, 10.04.21 (photo on the right)



WHY IS PANDURANGA'S TILAK ROUND? GURUJI EXPLAINS

Why is the *tilak* for Panduranga different? Because He is Krishna and Panduranga is none other than Krishna, no? In the North, we talk about different aspects of Lord Krishna and the Panduranga *lila* is the fourth aspect of Krishna. When Krishna did the *lila* of Panduranga, He was not only Himself; in that aspect of Panduranga, Vitthala, there was also Shiva with Him.

There is a *Shiva-lingam* on Panduranga's head. This is because when Krishna was going to Rukmini to enact the *lila* as Panduranga, He first went to Shiva and said, 'I am going to do that *lila* now, so you come with Me also.' And Shiva came on the top of Panduranga. That's why for a very long time they didn't know that Panduranga was Krishna. Even today, many believe that Vithoba is Shiva. But in reality, no, He is Krishna. But because of the *Shiva-lingam* and because on His arm there is also Adishesha, a Sheshanaga, a snake, on His ornaments, many people confuse Him. Of course, nowadays no, but in the 12th century they were confused. Same thing as Tirupati also, Balaji.

So, coming back to your question: that *tilak* represents Shiva. It's very interesting, because very often Vaishnava and Shaivite are separate, but in that aspect, no, because Shiva is the greatest *bhakta* of Krishna. There is no other one more devoted than Lord Shiva. That's why it's a *Shiva-lingam*, you see. That's the *yonis* and the point is the *lingam* itself. Which means His mind is always focused on His *bhakta* as the *bhakta's* mind is always focused on the Lord Himself. That's why He has that *tilak*.

This relationship is so amazing between Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna. From the beginning itself, you see clearly in the life of Krishna how important Lord Shiva was. When Krishna was born, He was swapped, you know. So, Krishna was with Yashoda, and all the aspects of the *devas* came to have a glimpse of Lord Krishna. And, of course, Lord Shiva also wanted to go and have the *darshan* of Lord Krishna, but he decided he would not change his aspect; he would come just as he is. You've seen how Shiva is on the outside: matted hair, dark skin, with the snake and everything. So he came in that aspect and said to mother Yashoda, 'I want to have *darshan* of your son.'



Seeing a *sadhu* there, mother Yashoda wanted to give some alms. But he said, 'No, I don't want anything, I have everything. By the way, Annapurna is my wife, so no food is missing. But what I really want is to have *darshan* of your son.'

Already from the very beginning, when the demons were trying to kill Krishna, of course mother Yashoda was very protective of her child. So she said, 'No, ask me for anything, and I will give it to you, but I will not let you see my son.'

So, Lord Shiva had come, but yet, due to *maya*, they could not recognise him. Same thing, due to *maya*, due to the mind being so obstructed by so many thoughts, one doesn't perceive the Lord Himself. When will one perceive the Lord? When one's mind is fully absorbed upon Him. So, when one's mind is fully absorbed upon the Lord, then He is also thinking of you. You know, we say relationship - when you have a relationship with people, it may be one-sided, yes, but with Bhagavan it is not one-sided. It's two-sided, because as you are thinking of Him, He is also thinking of you. The point is, that you sometimes think that you are so sincere when you are not, but He knows that sincerity. That's why He places Lord Shiva on His forehead, because as much

as Shiva is meditating, He is meditating only upon the Supreme Lord. And just as Lord Shiva is meditating upon the Supreme Lord Himself, so the Supreme Lord's mind is on Lord Shiva.

This is the relationship between the *bhakta* and Bhagavan. All the saints here on the temple wall with Panduranga and Rukmini are the saints who have a personal relationship with Panduranga and Rukmini. You will notice that even though the Lord is wearing 'Shiva' in His *tilak*, the *bhaktas* don't wear the same *tilak*. Even in Pandharpur or anywhere else, you will never see anybody wearing that *tilak* because no one is in that state. So, the Lord's mind is with Shiva, but yet, the human mind has to be focused on the Feet of the Lord. You are not in the same state or the same stage of Lord Shiva. You may say, '*Shivoham, Shivoham*', but you don't become Shiva, you know. There are many who say, yes, '*Shivoham, Shivoham*', and they think, "Yes, because I say, '*Shivoham*' or, '*so'ham*' or, '*aham brahmasmi*', I am already fully realised." It isn't like that!

Shiva is fully absorbed in the Lord. There is no doubt. There is not even a bit of ignorance inside of him. There is not a bit of, 'Oh, yeah, my mind should not be upon the Lord

Himself.' No! But in people's minds, yes. That's why the mind of the devotee has to be focused upon the Feet of the Lord. That's why no one wears Panduranga's *tilak* like Panduranga does; only He wears that aspect of *tilak*. Even the devotees of Panduranga don't wear that *tilak*. They wear the Feet of the Lord. This is where the mind of a *bhakta* must be focusing: upon the Feet of the Beloved.

- *Satsang* in the temple, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 14.04.19



QUALITIES THAT THE DEITY REPRESENTS

There are several main qualities associated with Vitthala and Rukmini, and fortunately Gurudev speaks about them quite often:

- Patience
- Joy and Happiness
- A Personal Relationship with Him
- His Loving Service to His Devotees

Here are some wonderful excerpts from Guruji Himself:

Patience

...The most important thing is that love relationship that you have with Him, you know, and that sincerity. When we look at the saints themselves and how they are constantly chanting the Name, there is not a single time that the Divine Name is not present on their lips. Whatever they do, wherever they are, they are eternally with Him. And when, deep inside, continuously, you are longing for Him and you are thinking about Him, don't you think that He is also longing for you?



1- Sant Gora Kumbhar of Ter 2 - Sant Janabai of Pandharpur 3 - Sant Savata Mali

He also has that longing. His longing is much more because He is waiting to have one devotee, like I was saying during the inauguration and blessing of Vitthala and Rukmini: He has waited thousands of lives to have one devotee. Because of those gems that a devotee carries inside of them, it's not just like a normal being, you know. Even though He is eternal, He can wait, you know. I tell you, He is very patient. [The audience laughs] But when He reveals Himself, one has to take the chance. It may not be how you want it; it has to be how He wants it.

- Satsang in the temple, Mauritius, 12.04.21

Joy and Happiness

Panduranga is the Lord who is always joyful. There is no misery in Him. Misery is in your mind. When you are looking for misery, you will find it. If you are looking for a problem, you will create it! Even if there is no problem! And of course, when He sees that you want problems, He will ask His dear sister Maha-maya to help you.

He will ask His sister to overshadow you, not because He is very malicious, or that He wants to harm you. No. It's because you are stupid! It's so simple! He just wants to remind you how stupid you are.

When He gives Himself, and you say, 'No.' And then you want Maya. He says, 'Yes, take!' How long would you enjoy that there? So, in this form He is saying that life is joy. But real joy is something that is permanent, something that carries on; not a joy that it is limited. He wants to give you eternal joy.

So, that Lord of joy, that Lord of happiness, wants you to have eternal joy, eternal happiness.

- Rukmini-Panduranga Temple Inauguration, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 14.04.19

A Personal Relationship with Him

...when you are worshipping Him, your service to Him, that relationship that you have with Him - it's an endless relationship and it is personal. Your *sadhana* is personal and this is how He becomes real for you. Because if you say, 'No, He is not personal, He is impersonal', then He can't be real. How would you feel Him? How would you see Him? Only when He is personal can you see Him, feel Him, serve Him.

Somebody who is not dear to you, do you bother about them? No. You walk on the street, you meet so many people, do you feel something for everybody? No, you don't! You

may say, yes, you love everybody, thousands of people are passing by you,...but if you see some person, one person that you know inside, what would you do? 'Hi! How are you?' You stop, you start talking. But you don't stop and talk to everybody.

So, the same thing: that personal relationship is unique and it's only when your mind is surrendered truly that nothing can happen to you, nothing can move you.

- Bhakti Marga Centre, Maribor, Slovenia, 15.12.17

He Comes to Serve the Devotee

When we look at all the great saints, from Maharashtra especially, how wonderful their *lilas* are! Once, Janabai was very tired because there was a prayer, you know, and it finished late at night. Normally, in the morning, Janabai always prepared the prayer for Namdev Maharaj.

So, Namdev Maharaj was awake. But Janabai had overslept. So, in a rush when she woke up, she just took the clothes and went to the river to wash. And as she was going to the river, she thought, 'Oops, I forgot to prepare the prayer for Namdev Maharaj, what will happen?'





So, as she was thinking about that, an old lady came and she said, 'Daughter, you look so tired and stressed, please, give me the clothes. I will go and wash them for you.'

And Janabai said, 'No, no, no, please. I don't know who you are, firstly, so why would I give you my dirty clothes to wash?'

But that old lady was very insistent, you know, 'Please, give me your clothes.'

So, the lady just took the clothes, went to the river, washed them, dried them and came back to give Janabai the clothes. Then Janabai took the clothes and went to Namdev Maharaj. And as she was there, she was thinking, you know, 'Oh, poor old lady, I didn't even give her anything. So, let me go and ask her if later on I can render some service to her, if I can help her. I will go find her.' As she went looking for that old lady, she could not find her at all, anywhere. Then she was in trouble, you know!

So, she went to Namdev Maharaj and said, 'There is this poor lady who had come. I went around looking for her, but I am troubled because I don't even know where she came from. I don't even know who she is and she just disappeared.'

And, of course, when Namdev Maharaj heard

that, he saw the state Janabai was in (you know, Janabai explained that, 'I forgot to prepare for your prayer. Look what has happened!')

So, Namdev Maharaj started smiling and said to Janabai, 'Jana, you know, that old lady was not an old lady. It was Vitthala Himself who had come.'

Instead of being happy, she got even more sad and more depressed, because she said, 'Vitthala has come in disguise, but I didn't even recognise Him. Why did He come like that? And why did He have to wash my clothes? How much He does for His devotee!' And she was crying.

Then, seeing her, Namdev said, 'But listen, Jana, you are so engrossed in the remembering of Vitthala, why would He not come? Your mind is fully saturated in Vitthala, every breath of yours, every beat of your heart, is Vitthala. Each moment that you spend, even while you are talking right now, is Vitthala. If Bhagavan doesn't come to you, to whom He will come? For sure He came. And because He came, you are so blessed.'

And the people around, when they heard that, bowed down to Jana and said, 'Because of you, Jana, we consider ourselves also very blessed.'

And Jana kept saying, 'Why? Why did He come

in that aspect? Why didn't He just come in His normal form?'

But Bhagavan is so merciful. Look, if He would have come in His normal aspect, a devotee would never allow Him to do anything. You see, as such, a devotee is a pearl that comes after millennia. That's why Bhagavan said in the *Gita* that, 'Out of millions who long for Me, only a few get to know Me truly. And among those few who get to know Me, only one knows Me in reality.'

So, realise how important this is and how He longs for you. You have that longing, yes, for Him, but His longing is a million more times. He has waited for you even millions of more times, you know, to give you that grace to get to know Him, to serve Him, to get to remember Him. He has given you His Name to call for Him.

Just don't be lazy. One thing that stops many people is that laziness. When laziness kicks in, one loses everything. One loses even the capacity of reasoning, the capacity of thinking. They will become lazy, they will do other things, thinking, 'Yes, let me do it later on.' How many times in your life itself, have you found excuses not to do your *sadhana*, not to do your *japam*. Imagine how He is waiting for you!

- Story of Janabai, Installation of Rukmini-Panduranga in the temple, Mauritius, 10.04.21

RUKMINI PANDURANGA QUOTES FROM GURUJI

'The devotee is not concerned about how the external things are, or whether they have or not. They rely completely upon the providence of Vitthala, the providence of God, that He will provide. And when you are into His mercy completely, you don't really bother about anything else.'

- Satsang Live with the Master, 08.10.20

'You can make your heart the temple where Vitthala is dancing. And Vitthala will never let go of you. The whole world may let go of you, but Vitthala will not let go of you.'

- Satsang, Sri Vitthal Dham, 14.06.21

'Be careful: like Rukmini, He will come and kidnap you one day without you knowing. That's *bhakti*, you know. When you have *bhakti*, you don't look for Him, He comes to you. And when He comes to you, know one thing: He will kidnap you.'

- Navaratri, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 25.09.17

'Look at Dnyaneshwara: Sant Dnyaneshwara was rejected completely. But who was his companion? Vitthala was his companion continuously! Look at Namdev Maharaj. They were all rejected from society. Look at Gora Kumbhar: he was a potter. Look at... who was the one who was cleaning? Chokhamela. They were all from a low caste. But who was their companion? Vitthala was their companion continuously. So, if Bhagavan would only look at somebody who is a *brahmana* because they know how to chant some *mantra*, because they know how to do big, big, big prayers, all these things, then this group would have not been such great devotees! But yet, through their devotion, they have become even greater than those *brahmanas*.'

- Narasimha Chaturdhasi, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 25.05.21



BEHIND THE SCENES WITH OUR DEITIES

An Interview with Phalguni: Head of the Pujarini Team for the Shree Peetha Nilaya Panduranga Mandir

Immediately after the inauguration of the Shree Peetha Nilaya Panduranga Mandir, Gurudev answered the burning question that many residents of The Ashram had on their minds: now that Panduranga and Rukmini were present in the temple, who would get to serve the deities from that day on?

To the crowd packed in the temple, Gurudev announced that the honour would go to...

...the *matajis* of Shree Peetha Nilaya!

Cheers erupted from the crowd and the resident *matajis* were so excited. Panduranga, Rukmini and all the other deities He placed in that *mandir* would be theirs alone to serve.

Later, He personally selected a team leader to organise the service schedule, ensure the

mandir is maintained, train the *pujarinis* as needed, and of course, be one of the team of *pujarinis* serving the deities every morning and evening.

That team leader is Phalguni, and a recent interview with her brought out some background information on a most remarkable effort: making the deities clothing by hand. The idea for the *matajis* to design, crochet and knit the clothes themselves came quite spontaneously, and Phalguni also leads this team effort. It brings approximately 20 *matajis* together to collectively clothe all the 'Divine Couples' of the *mandir*: Panduranga and Rukmini, Rukmini-Krishna, the *utsava murtis* of Panduranga and Rukmini, and Bhudevi-Varaha.

How did the idea for making handmade clothes for the deities come up?

Phalguni: The project first started with winter 'nightcaps' for the big Rukmini and



Panduranga. Then it turned into a desire for more beanies or shawls for the night’.

So, we got some donations, and I gave someone money and she bought the rainbow blue/green yarn. And then after some time, like half a year or so after, in the beginning of December, I saw some photos from deities and even Radharamana dressed in knitted outfits. In the wintertime, He always has knitted clothes. And I was thinking, oh, it would be so nice to do outfits, complete outfits. So, I asked a couple of *matajis* that I thought might know how to do this.

We just came together, I told them my idea, and we all said, okay, let's just try, let's just start and see how it goes. And each *mataji* by themselves were searching for patterns, trying things out, and then it developed. At first, we did only for the small ones. We didn't even think about big ones. And then when the small ones were done, Gurudev came and He was like, 'Wow!'

So we also did for Giridhari and Thakurji, and then when Niranjani gave Him some clothes after the evening *arati* at the Kali temple, He said, 'You will do for big ones also?' And she immediately said, 'Yes, we will!'

And that's how we began to make clothes for the big ones. Gurudev really orchestrated everything and supported us. He showed us we can do more than we thought we could. It was amazing.

One night it was *parikrama* after evening *arati*, and Gurudev was down in the temple and not to be seen anywhere. And so I went inside as the last one for *parikrama*, and while walking around the deities I hear, 'Gurudev is coming, Gurudev is coming.' He entered the *mandir*, and I'm 'stuck' inside also. It was so sweet how He made it so that I was there in this moment.

This was the first time He saw the big ones all dressed in Their handmade outfits?

Yes, and He said, 'Wow, you are becoming professionals!' He really liked it, and He asked, 'You all do it?' I told Him we were around 20 *matajis*, and He was very pleased. He commented about Rukmini's skirt and asked does She have something underneath so that She is not cold? I told Him that yes, She has an underskirt. And He said, 'Okay, good, good.' So sweet. And even when He saw these white and gold outfits, He said 'do more'.



What is also amazing is that They are leading everything. First, you have an idea and you start it, but then They change it!

They change it? What do you mean?

Yes! For example, we are making this outfit now. And so I had in mind, okay, the next big event is Shivaratri, so we will make it for Shivaratri. But They had another plan. Everything evolved in a way that we couldn't do it because of the *sangha* training, because some *matajis* had a super busy span of time, so they couldn't manage, and me as well. And then it looked like, no, They want it for some other event, They want something else for Shivaratri. And it was already developing in that direction. Bhavani had made all the accessories: trishuls and crescents, and we bought snakes, dreadlocks, and so on, so They were in the Shiva mood. They wanted it like that.

It's like, you have one plan in your mind, but then They completely change it, or They go with the flow if you are more in tune. So, it's a process of also letting go of what you want and really listening to what They want, but not going too much into the mind.

Not thinking too much, you just do how it comes, following the feeling and just going along with it.

It was like that with the white Christmas outfits also. It happened in a natural way. We didn't have any plan about when to put those on Them. But then as Christmas was coming closer, a couple of *matajis* that still had their items to do, one by one, just finished their items and everything was really completely done just in time for that event. And we didn't need to put in any extra effort or anything. It seemed like it was meant for this event and then everything came together.

So tell us some details: what items were made for that Christmas outfit?

We started a long time in advance and made a skirt, *dhoti*, and pullover tops. I did the *dhoti* in the springtime. And then Niranjani took it in springtime last year to do the border on it. And then she finished it during the lockdown in December. Basically, I didn't require anything from anyone, but just let go. I didn't push, but just let it develop.



But then the skirt wasn't finished. All the parts were done and sewn together and border also, but something was missing to make it complete, some decoration was needed. However, since we had gone to an Indian shop (just shortly before Navaratri last year in the last moment before lockdown), we had purchased a lot of borders and items for the deities. And there was this border which was like, 'oh, maybe this would be good for this winter outfit', so I just took the whole thing, not just one metre, but the whole roll! Much later, Anadhi Nidhana Dasi was working on the skirt and she was completely stuck, thinking, 'I don't know what to do with this skirt. I don't have any idea, I don't have any inspiration on how to finish it.'

And so I tried this border. I was sewing it like a *gopi* skirt. (You know how you have a *gopi* skirt with the seam lines coming down from the waist to the bottom?) So I used this border like that and wasn't sure if it was going to be enough for the sides also. But I thought, okay, if not, I won't put it on the sides. And turned out that it was just EXACTLY enough for all the seams and I had just a little tiny piece left!

So, the whole process goes like this.

Exactly what items are you creating now and how does the process go?

Dhoti, skirt, pullovers, shawls for both of them. That's for the big ones. We even made the belts the last two times for the big ones. And then for the small ones, the whole outfit.

It goes like this. First we do the small ones and each *mataji* can pick whichever part they want. Like if they want to do just shawl for Krishna or shawl for Rukmini, or *dhoti*, or skirt, or whatever. And then some take more pieces, while others take just one piece.

For the big ones, we try to do it in a way that we share the load. Like for example, you are doing a shawl right now. This is something that can be shared easily because you can make a row, and someone else can make a row, and then someone else can put them together.

But it can be that it flows for you. It's feeling that when someone is into it, they just do it. Because it pulls them. For some reason He wants you to do this. And when you chant as you do it, it's like a *sadhana*, and that makes doing clothes for Them a process of purification.



That's a really good point. It's a purification process, it's a spiritual practice. What's your experience of this *sadhana*?

Well, even though I have my ideas, They teach me to let go of what I want and instead do what They want. They teach me in this way to be patient.

Once the outfit is done, what's it like to dress the deities?

It's amazing. The first time we did this blue and green outfit, it was really amazing. It was like in heaven. And Gayatri Dasi from France was there also because she was at the last moment doing a collar for the pullover for Panduranga and she was stitching it at the last moment, actually while in the *mandir*! And when we put the pullover and *dhoti* on Him, we were like, 'Ooooooh', He was so sweet.

Different from the normal experience of dressing Them?

Yes, different. So super sweet. We were totally as if in Vaikuntha. And even though Gayatri Dasi had finished her job, she was just sitting there and looking at us as we were putting on the clothes, decorating, this and that, and you know, we were so excited! It's really like a

Rasa somehow: when you do something, but you don't really know how it's going to turn out.

Like this white and gold one (for Christmas), I was thinking, it will be simple, it won't be so royal, you know, it will be plain, I had it in my mind. But when we finished, I was like, wow, I couldn't believe it. They really make it like that. It's amazing to dress Them because that connects you deeper with Them. It builds your relationship to Them.

So, dressing the deities is a lovely thing, but when you actually make the clothes, and then the deity wears and then puts them on....

It's another level. It is more personal.

It's also a unique thing that we're doing here, right? That there's a whole team taking part? How do you feel that makes a difference?

This is amazing, because it's also a nice *sangha* activity, a *matangi* activity, and we all come together to do it. This is something that Gurudev always says: when you are together, you are stronger. And you can see the results. Everyone does their part, and then it's visible what we did.



And if we can do this, we can do much more. And I think this is why Gurudev really appreciates it.

How do you make it happen? Because we are all so busy, it seems like just one more thing.

But it's not. It's like a joy. It's like a remedy. It's creative. It's not just one more thing. You want to find time for it, even though you are so busy. And this also really calms the mind. You focus because you are just doing THIS. That's why I said it's a *sadhana* because it's really like you cannot think much of any other thing, you have to really focus on what you are doing. And then you are focused on Them: how it's going to look on Them, how it's going to fit, etc. You want to make it perfect for Them. So yes, we find time to do it even though we're super busy.

What do you feel makes this seva so special?

Because it comes from inside, and you are doing something to please Them, to make Them beautiful, to make Them warm and comfortable, and you are feeling, 'Ah, now They are warm'. Maybe you even see that They smile more or you feel They are content. And you just want to look at Them all the time. It's like you want to admire Them all the time!

They take your attention and start to occupy your mind and thoughts more and more.

And the reward for doing this is...

It's this inner feeling. Even if Gurudev was praising what we made, it's not just that. You don't do it because of that. You do it because you feel drawn to do it and it's so nice to decorate Them this way. A friend told me that she perceives that They wear it in a special way. She said, 'You did it so beautifully and They wear it with such dignity'.

So you're saying that it turns plain yarn and simple crochet into really royal outfits. You take that yarn and you soak it in love and appreciation, and it comes out fabulous, even though it's only yarn.

Yes, this is what Gurudev always says: God is in everything. God is in the yarn here. And that's why everyone looks at Them in awe.

If a *mataji* group for another country's temple wanted to start doing what we are doing here at The Ashram, what would you recommend? How would you recommend that they start?

Well first get together and get some ideas. Then just buy yarn and start doing it.

For example, we now have this beautiful turquoise and pink yarn from Turkey because a devotee bought it there last summer and brought it to us.

So, that will be the next set of outfits, right? When will that set be revealed?

I have no idea. Only They know!! But it will be the perfect time, for sure.

PUJARINIS EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE TO RUKMINI-PANDURANGA

The Pillow Lila / Dhanurdharini Dasi - photo 1

One morning, after we woke up the small *uttsava* deities and placed Them on the altar, we noticed something strange.

Even though Panduranga was standing, His pillow was mysteriously behind His head and appeared to be hovering in the air!

We were both astonished. After quickly removing the pillow, we started joking that maybe the Lord was tired and that is why He took a cushion with Him when He got up!

Gurudev often reminds us that everything happens by the will of Giridhari, and that things happen to help us get closer to *guru* and God. With this in mind, the 'pillow *lila*' played in my mind and I found my own personal meaning for it. Then, after some time, I saw photos in the Rukmini-Panduranga Fan Channel of the Panduranga deity in Pandharpur, India, who also had a pillow behind His head on the very same day! (photo 2 & 3)

Curious, we wanted to know more, so we asked a devotee in Pune to see if she could provide more clarity. She told us that normally during the time of *Ashadha* until the end *Chaturmas*, Panduranga gives non-stop darshan, 24-hours a day, for four months! As anyone who stands for that long would probably feel back pain, the *pujaris* provide pillows to support the deities' backs. The devotee also said, she was really shocked to hear this from the temple authorities and was touched by their *shraddha* (faith) and *bhakti* (devotion).

While serving in the temple of Rukmini and Panduranga we, as *pujarinis*, get to know that a *lila* is something that really does happen. *Lilas* are not only limited to books; through the grace of the Divine, we too are also able to experience and witness them for ourselves.

A Difficult Day Transformed / Anjali Dasi - photo 4

At one point, I was having a difficult day dealing with some conflicts and, as a result, I was feeling quite sad and negative.

I was scheduled to do a *puja* to Sri Rukmini-Panduranga, but as I was feeling very discouraged, I tried to find a replacement. Sometimes while in negative states, we don't feel so good to be in front of the Lord. Especially when we have to serve the Lord, we try to be in a good mood, so we can be more present.

But I ended up not getting a replacement, so I went to do the *puja* with a heavy heart.

I entered the temple and it was only me and the Divine Couple. I bowed down, and as I started to do the *puja*, little by little, my inner state was fully transformed. By the end of the *puja*, I was again free of that immense weight that was with me when I arrived.



As I gazed at the Divine Couple, I could really feel how much love and care They have for us and how, on that day, They had arranged for me to serve Them, so They could take care of me and transform the negativity I was carrying.

Sometimes we think we serve the deities, but, in reality, by serving Them, we open ourselves to allow Them to serve us.

Answered Prayer / Swaprakasha Swaroopini Dasi - photo 5

One night I had Panduranga service with Dhanudharini Dasi, and we met in Panduranga temple for evening *arati*. I was a little bit afraid of this new *mantra* we had to sing before our normal Vitthala *Arati* and we spoke about this together, trying to figure out how we should do it because we were alone. The *Mukunda-mala-stotram* chanting had already started in the main temple, so nobody was there at the *mandir*. (Normally people always come, but this time nobody came and we were alone.)

So, I said to Dhanudharini Dasi, 'He will help us.' Like, it comes from the Lord, so I pointed to Panduranga and said, 'He will help us.' And then I wanted to start to light the *arati* candle, but then Anandani Devi came and said, 'No, no, no, wait, wait, wait, Gurudev is coming.' And so, I waited.

But then He walked by. He looked in a little bit, but then He went by. So, I wanted to start again, and then suddenly He came back, looked at me, came inside, took the *arati* lamp from me and then He did *arati*! He was singing this *mantra* very loudly, you know. And for me it was like I asked Him somehow for help. I was sure He would help us, but I wasn't thinking in this form, you know!

But He came, and He was singing with us, and we were happy, we three *matajis* and Him. He did *arati*, and everybody was happy.

Lord of Happiness / Anuprabha photo 6

A while ago Gurudev was mentioning how Panduranga stands for happiness and this gave me a 'sting' since I had the feeling for quite some time that happiness was missing on the scale of my inner feelings. And already I was kind of aware something had to be changed in my mindset to get rid of the heaviness that had accompanied me these last days.

At Shree Peetha Nilaya, we do *puja* regularly to Rukmini and Panduranga. But since no date really fit in my work schedule and I was a little lazy to really commit myself to serve our deities, I hadn't done it for awhile. So, this day, when I felt so gloomy, I was passing by this beautiful temple of Rukmini and Panduranga and suddenly

They caught my eye and I stood still in front, contemplating Them. They looked so bright and shiny and full of light, immediately it reminded me of what Gurudev had said about Panduranga and happiness. And I prayed to Panduranga to guide me out of my mood. Somehow, I regretted deeply now not being able to do service to Them, as the schedule was already fully booked by others. So 'what to do?' I thought. Next time I would be faster and more committed to put my name into the schedule to do service to Them!

In the evening, it happened that I was standing beside Sudhamayi and we started talking a little bit. All of a sudden she asked me: 'Do you want to do Panduranga service tomorrow with me? There is a free space.' So I really got a shiver all over and happily said 'Yes, of course!' Panduranga had heard my call and made it possible for me to serve Them!

What a blessing it was the next day to do service to Rukmini and Panduranga and I felt happy and light. These kinds of wonders happen all the time while being here and I am most grateful for it, what a blessing for all of us!

So, this was a turning point for me. It made me again aware of how important it is to be immersed into the service of God, having only Him on my mind and heart. My gloomy mood is since gone and God helped me with it.

pandharinatha maharaja ki - Jai!



4



5



6

They are the Centre of the Universe / Phalguni, Aruni and Ratnamanjari

One night, around Christmas time a few years ago, three *pujarinis* were putting the deities to bed at night when, suddenly, the electricity went off.

Looking around, we noticed the glow from a small string of Christmas lights on the altar. The mirrored walls were alive with colour and we were mesmerised with the beauty and a feeling that we were in the centre of the universe with Lord Panduranga and Rukmini as the *bindu* point.

We were so joyful and awe-inspired, we started singing 'Vitthala, Vitthala, Vitthala' and dancing. We were so moved by the experience, we took a video and sent it to Guruji with this note, 'The electricity went off for some moments. They are the centre of the universe...the Lord revealed.' He wrote back, 'So cute.'

The next day, someone asked Him in *satsang* what was the meaning of, 'They are the centre of the universe'. He responded with this:

'When you view that the Lord Himself is the centre of everything, you perceive beyond the limitation of what you see. This is a different

vision in itself. And that centre point of the Lord is also present in each person, in each thing, knowing that everything is only made up of only this. It's only Him.'

Even as we were all sitting together to recall this story, He showed Himself again. We were just saying that Guruji and Panduranga are the centre of the universe and, as if on cue, the Lord walked in and smiled at us all. A few minutes later, we finished our meeting saying, 'So that's it, we are done.' Again, Guruji walked by, showing us that He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of everything.



SAINTS WHO WORSHIPPED THE DEITY



When we examine the saints that are most associated with Panduranga, we see a repeated theme: the divine relationship they had with Him. However, this was not just with a 'vision' or 'feeling', but with His actual physical presence! As Gurudev describes it, '...when we look at Tukaram, we look at Namdev, we look at Sakhubai, we look at Janabai - for them Krishna was not just Vitthala who was standing there in the temple. No, in their day-to-day life Krishna was with them. Did He not give His body to them? He did! He went and served them. He went and helped them continuously.'

It is this extraordinary relationship that is the hallmark of the beloved Panduranga, and it is what makes Him stand out amongst the rest.

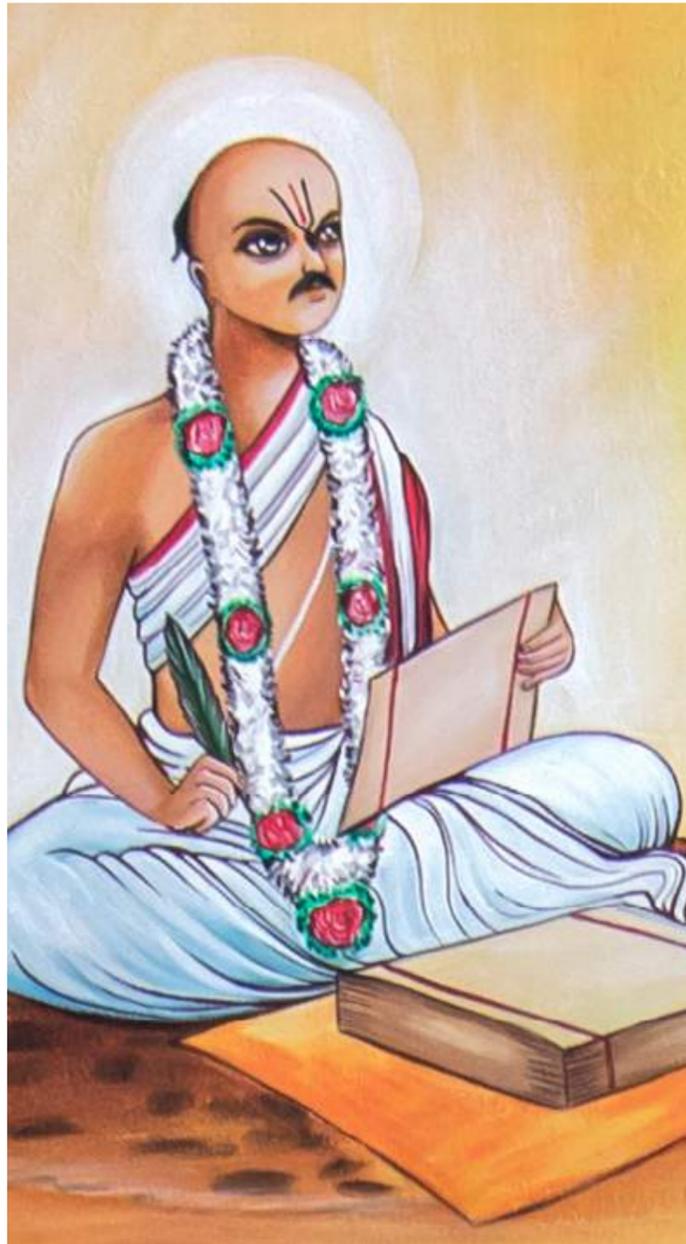
Gurudev often tells stories about these saints who had personal experiences with Panduranga, so we'll highlight a few of them here: Sant Eknath, Sant Namdev, Sant

Tukaram, Sant Dnyaneshwara. Each of the following stories is told by Gurudev Himself.

EKNATH

There is this beautiful story of Sant Eknath. (Sant means saint.) Sant Eknath had his *guru* and every Thursday his *Guru Maharaj* would meet his *guru*, his *satguru* who was Lord Dattatreya. (Lord Dattatreya is still alive, you know.) So, every Thursday, his *guru* Janardana Swami would go and meet his *guru*, Dattatreya, and they would sit in quiet.

Eknath always wanted, 'Please, I want to see your *Guru Maharaj*. I want to see Lord Dattatreya and I want to see him in his *swarupa*, which means I don't want to have a vision of him, I don't want to have him in dream, I don't want to see him in disguise, I want to see him as people describe him.'



When you see Dattatreya...how is Dattatreya? With three heads: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh together standing, while behind him there is a cow and there are four dogs, no? That's how he wanted to see him. So he forced his *guru*, and said, 'Please, please, please!'

Seeing this really intense longing, his *guru* said, 'Fine, next Thursday I will bring you.'

The next Thursday was appointed, and he was ready. Of course, Lord Dattatreya will not appear just like that, you know. People think that when you take shelter at the *guru's* feet, the *guru* has to give you everything just like that. No, a test is important. Without testing, it's not possible. Even in school, if you have to move from one grade to the other, you get tested, no? Testing is not something bad. Actually, it is to make you stronger and make you better.

So when Lord Dattatreya, came with his *guru*, Janardana Swami, Dattatreya took the form of an old man in rags. You know, completely smelly, dirty and the cow had become a female dog and the four dogs which symbolise the four Vedas had become chickens! So, in his mind he expected to see Dattatreya sitting, because, you see, Eknath was very special, so he expected that Lord Dattatreya would grace him like that. As Janardana Swami was

talking and they were happy with each other, he was thinking, 'Oh my goodness, I prayed to see Dattatreya, maybe this is Dattatreya, who knows? Guru Maharaj is talking with him, must be something special.' So, one week finished, second week the same, third week the same. Eknath was getting annoyed.

Then the fourth week came. But seeing his persistence, Lord Dattatreya was very happy with him, so he gave him a final test. Lord Dattatreya said to him, 'Milk the dog! Milk the dog!' You know, it's female dog, so he started milking the dog into his begging bowl! Then he said, 'Bring the milk, I will drink it.' So, he drank half and then gave it to Janardana Swami. Janardana Swami drank the other half. Then, Dattatreya asked for water. He washed his mouth and spit the water in the bowl and gave it to Eknath, saying to him, 'Go and throw this water in a place where you will not even kill an ant.'

Eknath Maharaj thought, 'Where will I throw this?' He was in a dilemma. Then he said to himself, 'This is *Maha-prasad*. This is the *prasad* from my *guru's guru*. This is *Maha-prasad* and he is telling me to throw it somewhere where I can't even kill an ant!' So, what did he do? He drank it. And the moment he drank it, Lord

Dattatreya appeared in his true aspect in front of him.

You see, our eyes, our mind, our senses, are all limited and when we try to utilise this to attain the grace of Mahavatar Babaji, if they have not transformed into Divine first, we will come to a point of limitation. Even when He tests you, when a test comes your way, you will fail. But if you are really sincere about attaining His grace, nothing can stop you, not even your mind, not your senses, no one.

And sometimes the test will be great, you know. Like *prabhuji* was saying earlier, He will not tell you everything in case you get scared. So, be sincere. I will not tell you to be strong. Just be sincere. Be sincere towards yourself. When you are sincere towards yourself, you will have a different power inside of you, a different strength inside of you. And that sincerity is very important for yourself, not for me. And not for Him for sure. You see, I always say it: the lives of the saints are rich in how to surrender. If you feed your mind with their wisdom, with their *lilas*, with their stories, and meditate upon them, and take the example which they have given, you will transform.

- Babaji Day, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 30.11.17



NAMDEV MAHARAJ

There is a saint there [pointing to the mural on the Bhutabhrteshwarnath Mandir wall] called Namdev Maharaj, up there, the top one.

So, Namdev Maharaj, actually, nobody knows where he comes from. Such a great saint, actually, who was in constant devotion and constant talking with Lord Krishna. So, the father of Namdev Maharaj... Actually, he was not born like normal people, because Namdev Maharaj was a reincarnation of Uddhava. Whoever has read about the life story of Krishna, Krishna's best friend and devotee who was always with Him till the end, was Uddhava. So, Uddhava incarnated as Namdev Maharaj. But when Lord Krishna asked Namdev to incarnate, Namdev said, 'I don't want to go back into *maya* like this.' Because to be born, to have a mother, to have a family, it's too much!

So, Bhagavan said to him, 'Don't worry, you will incarnate, you will manifest yourself. Because incarnation means to manifest. That's why we say for the Lord, well, Lord Krishna is not born, you know. He manifested Himself, because the totality of the Supreme Lord Himself manifests in full totality here. That is what manifestation is. He doesn't take birth, because He ever exists.

So, Namdev Maharaj also appeared. He appeared in a bundle like a baby, in a bundle of clothes floating on a river. So, the parents of Namdev Maharaj, Damashet and Gonai, didn't have children and they were praying to Vitthala to have a child. But they were very old. You know, an old person can't have children. And Gonai would say to her husband, 'Please, ask Vitthala. You go every day to have *darshan* of Him, please, ask Him, to give us a child.'

So, one day as he went to take a bath in the river Chandrabhaga - that night he had a dream, actually, that Lord Krishna came and said, 'Tomorrow morning when you go to bathe, you will find a bundle of clothes, and inside those clothes you will find a baby. Take that baby; it is yours. It is a very high soul who has incarnated. It is Uddhava who has incarnated, so he will be a great blessing for the welfare of humanity.'

The next morning when he went to take his bath, he saw a bundle floating. So, he jumped on that bundle of clothes and to his amazement, he opened it and saw a baby inside. So, he brought the baby home with great enthusiasm and joy; the couple was so happy. Now their life was full, they had a child.

Namdev's father was a very learned priest and then he taught Namdev. One day, his father had to go to a nearby village, so he said to the child Namdev, 'Please, I've taught you how to offer food to the Lord, *bhoga*. You offer *bhoga* to Krishna.' So, very happily the father went away.

When the time came to offer the *bhoga*, Namdev took the *prasad* plate and brought it to the temple and offered the *bhoga* very innocently to Krishna and said, 'Please, take it.' And then he waited. Nothing happened.

Then he said to Krishna, 'Listen, if you don't eat that, I will hit my head here on Your Feet'. And his call was so sincere, that Krishna came out from the deity and ate the whole *prasad*, and He said to him, 'Please, don't tell anyone!'

'Fine.'

So, he took the empty plate, went home, and the mother asked, 'Where is the *bhoga prasad*? It is *Maha-prasad* now, where is it?'

And he said, 'Mom, Vitthala ate all the *prasad*.'

'Yeah, whatever! Vitthala ate all the *prasad*.' The mother was thinking that he [Namdev] ate all the *prasad*, you know!

So, then he said, 'No, He ate it!'

'Okay fine', a child's story.

Then the next day, when the father came, the mother told the father what happened and the father said, 'Well, let's see.' Again when it was *bhoga* time, he gave the *bhoga* tray to Namdev Maharaj and he followed him. So, in the temple the father was hiding and Namdev was holding the plate, and said, 'Vitthala, please, accept the *bhoga* like yesterday.'

And Krishna said, 'No.' 'I can't. Your father is here, watching.'

And Namdev said, 'No, I'm alone.'

Then Vitthal said, 'No, look, behind there, he is hiding.'

So Namdev Maharaj looked behind and called the father out, saying, 'Don't hide. Come, come!' But then his call was so sincere, he said, 'Oh, Vitthala, please, you know, they will tell me I am a cheater, you know. Show Yourself.'

So, Vitthala could not say no, could not refuse, and He appeared in front of both of them and ate the *prasad* and left some for them to have *Maha-prasad*.

You see, why I was telling you this story of Namdev Maharaj: our relationship with Bhagavan is different, you know. For each person they will have a different feeling inside of them. Not everybody will have the same feeling, the same mood. For some people, He will even appear talking like that. For others, He will appear not talking like that, but this is the appearance of the Lord Himself. Like I said, if you don't perceive Him inside of you, you will never perceive Him in anything outside.

So, first learn to listen to what is inside of you. Hear Him in what He is saying through your intuition, firstly. Learn to trust that intuition. And as long as you are not satisfied with your intuitive voice, study what He said in the *Bhagavad Gita* and in the *Bhagavatam*. Let your mind dive into that, let your mind attain that state of silence, stillness. When your mind has attained that state of stillness, that innocence that is inside of you will surface.

Otherwise, you will keep barking, the mind keeps barking, you know. Then it's difficult.

- *Satsang in the temple, Shree Peetha Nilaya, 29.11.19*





TUKARAM

You will be free only when you become the servant of the Lord. And that will humble you. Because with even a slight thought that is diverted, He will not reveal Himself. He is very possessive; He loves you and He wants you...That's why there are only few who attain Him. Because only a few can really love Him like that, no?

Once, there was a saint, Tukaram. Every day Tukaram would praise the Lord. And when he would sing the glory of Panduranga, Panduranga would be in front of him. He would feel great joy. So, he sang the glory. It so happened that, one day, while he was singing, Panduranga was standing in front of him. Somebody came, and for a slight second his mind was diverted and in his mind he said, 'Oh, you also have come!' Just that thought, when he turned back to look at Vitthala, Vitthala was not there. The next day again he sang, but Vitthala was not there. And he started to feel that sadness inside of him, saying, 'For sure I have done something, I have made a big mistake.' So, he implored Rukmini.

Rukmini came, and he said, 'Mayi, what I have done that *Prabhuji* is not coming?'

She said, 'Listen, what you have done is just a thought. When the Lord was in front of you, your thought was diverted into the outside.' It's just the thought! That's why He doesn't come.

Often, we think that He is very easily attained. He is very easily attained when we have that devotion towards Him. You understand? To have that devotion, you have to be humble. It's not how much money you have, how you are dressed, all this, humility is something which is inside of you, and if you remind yourself constantly that you are His servant, a servant can't have pride. When you forget that you are His servant, yes, then pride, arrogance, ego, everything will jump up. So, what you have to do is make your mind humble so that there will be no chance of becoming arrogant.

You know, when we are chanting *om namo narayanaya*, we are saying eternally we are servants to Lakshmi-Narayana. That's what we are saying. 'I don't belong to myself. I belong to Them, to Lakshmi-Narayana.' So, how can pride and ego arise on that?

- Satsang, Riga, Latvia, 09.09.19



SANT DNYANESHWARA

There is a beautiful story of Sant Dnyaneshwara. You have heard about Sant Dnyaneshwara? Sant Dnyaneshwara is one main saint from Maharashtra.

Sant Dnyaneshwara and his brothers and sister were very much looked down upon because his father was a *brahmachari* who had left *brahmacharya* and got married and then had children: Dnyaneshwara, Muktabai, Nivritti and [Sopan]...They are Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh and Maha Lakshmi. So, they came down as siblings.

There is one part of Sant Dnyaneshwara's life, actually—you see, when they were chastised by the *brahmanas*, the *paithan* where they were staying, the *brahmanas*, had given them the acknowledgement that they could do whatever they wanted, but there was one man who was always fighting with them. His name was Visoba Chatti. So, Visoba Chatti was always against Sant Dnyaneshwara. Whatever Sant Dnyaneshwara would do, he would always find fault and was always throwing out all kinds of words to hurt him.

Sant Dnyaneshwara didn't bother about him, you know, so whenever Visoba would be there,

Sant Dnyaneshwara would walk somewhere else, you know, just to avoid him so as not to create any offences, because he didn't want Visoba to create offences by fighting with Sant Dnyaneshwara. (This is the beauty of a Vaishnava, you know: a Vaishnava doesn't allow anybody else to create any offences either.) So, like that, Sant Dnyaneshwara would live his life.

It was a fine day of Dipawali. So his sister, Muktabai said, 'We want to cook food for Diwali.' So, she said, 'Okay, I am going to the marketplace to buy what is necessary for cooking and a pot for Dipawali', you know, a new clay pot. So, she went and when she saw Visoba, she became very nervous.

And Visoba said, 'Where are you going?' in a very angry way.

Because of his anger, Muktabai, very shy, you know, said, 'Listen, I am going to buy things and food for Dipawali. I am going to buy a clay pot at the potter.'

And he started to fight with her. Then, Visoba left quickly and went to the potter and said to the potter, 'I warn you, if you sell a pot to Muktabai, I will be very angry with you and I will make sure that nobody will come and buy anything'.

When Muktabai arrived at the potter and the potter saw Muktabai, he went in a rage and started fighting with Muktabai. A small girl, you know, she was scared. And he didn't only argue. He hit her. He hit her with a pot and she was bleeding. So, she went home crying, crying, crying.

When she arrived home, Sant Dnyaneshwara saw her and said, 'Muktabai, what has happened to you?'

She said, 'I went to buy, but we didn't get any pot to cook.'

At that moment Sant Dnyaneshwara said, 'Don't worry.' Sant Dnyaneshwara was always calm, you know. [But at that moment], he beamed like a charcoal that is on fire. He became red, his eyes became red like fire, and fire came out from his mouth. And he lay down and he said, 'Muktabai, cook whatever you have to cook on my back.' And she cooked all the food on his back, the chapatti and so on, on his back.

By then Visoba was thinking, 'Ah, now they will not celebrate Diwali because they can't cook anything.' When he came to check how they were doing, he saw that! He saw that aspect of Sant Dnyaneshwara and he

regretted what had happened and what he had done. And, of course, they had all eaten and everything...and [Sant Dnyaneshwara] had calmed down. And he started running quickly. You know, in the hot pot he put his hand to take the *prasad* and he ate the *prasad*. And seeing that, he asked for forgiveness from Sant Dnyaneshwara but Sant Dnyaneshwara didn't let him finish. And Sant Dnyaneshwara said, 'I curse you that you will become a demon.'

Then he fell down and really regretted and cried at the feet of Sant Dnyaneshwara. So, the word demon: *khecara* is what it's called. So, he said, 'You will become a *khecara*.' And seeing that, Visoba said, 'Please forgive me. I was in ignorance'. And seeing the sincerity of his repentance, Sant Dnyaneshwara said, 'It's fine. You will not become a ghost. Only your name will be changed. You will not be Visoba Chatti anymore, you will be Visoba Khecar. You will be Visoba, the ghost.'

So, you see, Bhagavan can take any aspect in whatever, because Sant Dnyaneshwara is an incarnation of Sriman Narayana Himself, you know? So, He can take any aspect to protect His devotee, even a fierce aspect, but He is not bound by any personal

emotion. It's always that He will take an aspect to protect.

- *Satsang, Mauritius Temple, 09.01.21*



Relic from Sant Dnyaneshwara

PILGRIMAGE PLACES OF RUKMINI-PANDURANGA



On 13 January, 2020, the pilgrimage to Maharashtra visited many places dear to Vitthala, and some wonderful stories were told. Here is one example, taken from the blog published online at that time:

AARANGAON, SOHLAPUR, THE JIVA-SAMADHI OF SANT SAVATA MALI

Savata Mali lived in the 12th century, and today he is survived by his 16th descendant, Ramesh Maharaj, who greeted Gurudev and the rest of us on arrival.

After taking *darshan* and *arati*, we were given a short history of Savata Mali, his legacy and how close he was to Sant Dnyaneshwara and Namdev.

Although living a simple life as a farmer, he was a great devotee of Lord Vitthala. He was far ahead of his time as he opposed certain practices, including *balidhan*: animal sacrifices that were offered to the Lord in the

hope of cure and cleansing. He encouraged his community to live cleanly by keeping the house clean, the roads clean, using cow dung in the garden and fields because of its many healing properties, and boiling water before using it. He preached *karma-yoga*, which means that your working life is itself a *sadhana* when offered to the Lord.

Lord Vitthala Himself visited Sant Savata Mali when He was tired of His devotees in Pandharpur and wanted to hide. It is believed that Savata Mali, in order to hide the Lord, cut his own stomach and hid Him inside his body. This is why Sant Savata Mali is also considered an incarnation of Hanuman. His local devotees explained that even though everybody goes to visit the Lord in Pandharpur, Lord Vitthala Himself visits Sant Savata Mali in Aarangaon.

Sant Savata Mali took *samadhi* precisely two years after Sant Dnyaneshwara.

We invite you to explore the entire adventure to Maharashtra with this link that gives you a day-by-day journal of what the group saw and did, and the beautiful connections made with the saints and Vitthala:

[paramahamsavishwananda.com/
following-the-master/4-maharashtra-
adventure-2020](https://paramahamsavishwananda.com/following-the-master/4-maharashtra-adventure-2020)

FEEDING RUKMINI-PANDURANGA WITH THEIR FAVOURITE FOOD



PURAN POLI

Puran Poli is a popular Maharashtrian recipe for a sweet flatbread stuffed with a sweet filling made from split *chana dal* and *jaggery*. In the Marathi language, the sweet stuffing is *puran* and the bread is *poli*. *Puran poli* was offered by Sant Namdev to both Vitthala and Rukmini every day.

When we heard about this, we just had to try it ourselves and offer it as *bhoga* for our Vitthala and Rukmini too. They seemed surprised and delighted to see it, and so we have promised to offer it to Them more often!

INGREDIENTS (for 6 to 8)

For making the *puran* (sweet stuffing)

1 cup *chana dal* (husked split Bengal gram)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
Salt (pinch)
1 cup *jaggery* (grated)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ginger powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. nutmeg (grated)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cardamon green powder

For making the *poli* (dough)

1 cup all-purpose flour
Salt (pinch)
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup olive oil
Turmeric (pinch)

METHOD

Making *puran poli* is easy, but it takes time. To make it in less time, you can prepare the sweet stuffing a day before and refrigerate it, and then make the dough the following day and assemble it at that time.

Making the *puran* (sweet stuffing)

1. First, rinse the *chana dal* very well in water. Soak the *chana dal* for 30 minutes to one hour and then drain the water.
2. Add approx. 4-5 cups of filtered water along with the *dal* in a pressure cooker. Cook the *chana dal* for 6 to 7 whistles. If cooking in a pot, then cook for 30-45 min. Once the pressure settles down on its own, check the *dal*. The *dal* should be cooked very soft. You can test it by mashing it between your thumb and index finger: it should mash easily.
3. Transfer this to a strainer and keep the *dal* there for some minutes so that all the stock is drained out. Cool it, put the *dal* into a blender jar, and make a smooth paste. Alternately, you may pass it through a strainer. To do that, rub the *dal* against the strainer with a sturdy spoon or steel cup. Collect the smooth *dal* at the bottom.

4. Heat the *ghee* in a non-stick pan and add the mashed *chana dal* and grated *jaggery*. Stir and let this *puran* mixture cook on a low flame till the mixture becomes dry and begins to leave the pan, stirring often for 5 to 10 minutes. The *jaggery* will melt and the entire mixture will turn gooey.

5. Add cardamom powder and grated nutmeg. Mix well and turn off the stove when the consistency is thick. Cool this completely. As it cools, it will thicken even more.

Making the *poli* (dough)

6. Put all-purpose flour, a pinch of salt and a pinch of turmeric in a bowl. Mix well.
7. Add a little bit of water and olive oil and mix. Begin to knead the dough, adding water as required. The dough should be smooth and soft. Cover and put the dough aside to rest for 30 minutes -1 hour at room temperature.

Assembling the *puran poli*

8. Divide the dough into 6-8 equal parts and the stuffing into 6-8 equal parts.
9. Take a dough ball, slightly flatten it and with the help of your thumb and fingers on both your hands, begin to shape it.

10. Then place a ball of *puran* in the middle and push it into the dough. Bring the sides of the dough higher by simply pressing it in your hands and stretching the dough up on the sides.

11. Keep pushing the *puran* in and stretching the dough on the sides until you can bring all the edges together towards the centre. Join all the edges and pinch them. Flatten this gently in between your palms or with your fingers. This is now a small circle-shaped pad of dough with the filling inside: a *puran poli*.

12. Sprinkle some flour on a rolling board, take one of the *puran polis*, and use a rolling pin to carefully press and expand it into a shape approximately 15-20 cm across. While rolling, take care to do it so all the *puran* inside is distributed evenly and it is quite thin. You can turn it over several times, dusting with flour each time. If you see the *poli* becoming too thin and about to tear, sprinkle some more flour on it and gently pat it in.





Frying

13. Heat a heavy griddle on a medium flame (we put a little oil on it, just in case). When the pan is hot enough, dust off the excess flour from the *puran poli* and transfer it to the hot griddle.

14. Soon you will see bubbles on the *puran poli*. Flip it gently to the other side, pressing down lightly with a spatula so it puffs fully. Cook the other side till you see some brown spots, flip to the other side. Cook evenly on both sides to a perfect golden-brown colour.

15. Transfer to a serving plate and brush some *ghee* over the *puran poli*. Add them one at a time, stacking them on the plate.

16. Garnish with a little cup of additional *ghee* and offer to the Lord.

Enjoy the *prasad*!

To see a delightful chef make this special dessert, check it out here:

youtube.com/watch?v=EduK3JXMSmw

Did you make this yourself? Let us know how it worked for you and how you liked it!



UPCOMING LIVESTREAM DEITY JOURNEYS



We are happy to present to you the next Livestream Deity Journey:

Journey with Rukmini-Panduranga on **6 August 2021**

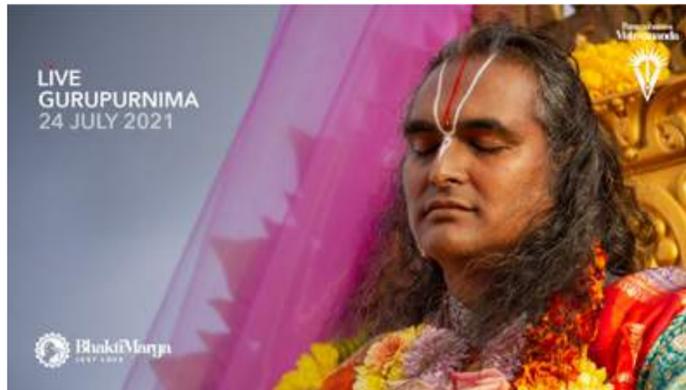
For further information and if you would like to sign up, please go to the BM Event calendar and register on the event.

More Deity Journeys will follow in 2021.

Livestream Journey with Rukmini-Panduranga

bhaktimarga.org/event/livestream-journey-with-rukmini-panduranga/

UPCOMING LIVESTREAM EVENTS

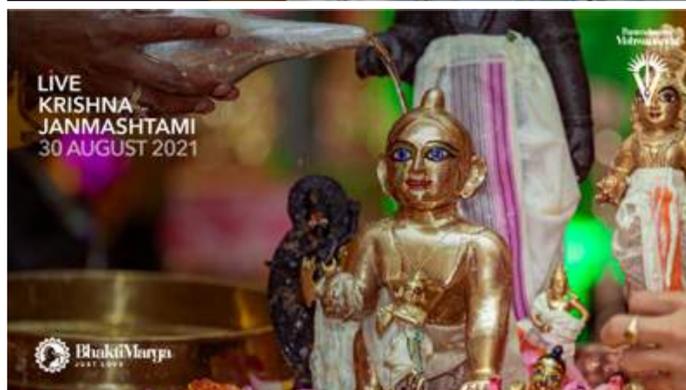


Livestream Gurupurnima
will take place on **24 July 2021**.

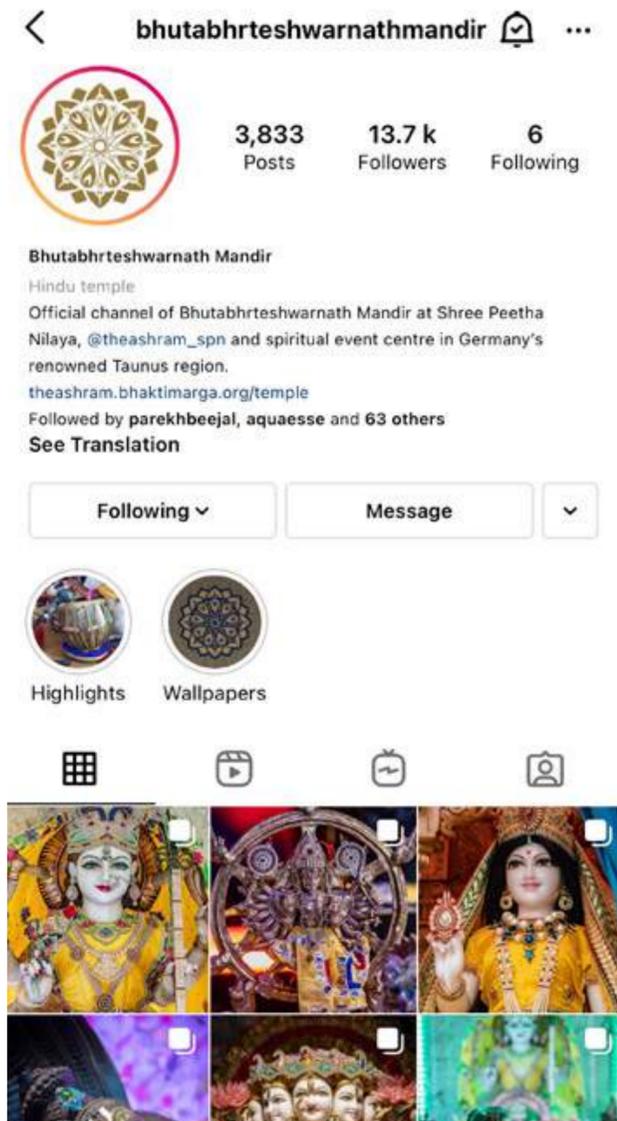
Sri Yantra Seminar
will take place on **13-15 August 2021**.

Livestream Krishna Janmashtami
will take place on **30 August 2021**.

For more information go to:
bhaktimarga.org/events/



STAY CONNECTED



We are so happy that you are part of our service to God in the home of Guruji. We invite you to continue to be a part of it and to stay in touch with us daily, weekly and for special events. Here's how:

Connect Every Day

Feel like you are part of our morning prayers and evening *arati* with our livestream.

theashram.bhaktimarga.org

We post 30 stunning photos daily to give you the opportunity to receive *darshan* wherever you are.

[instagram.com/bhutabhrteshwarnathmandir](https://www.instagram.com/bhutabhrteshwarnathmandir)

Connect During the Week

You can also stay connected with our Telegram channel for the Temple Satsangs: morning *Srimad Bhagavatam* and evening *Divya Prabandham satsangs* given in the temple by Swamis and members of the Bhakti Marga Academy. Just sign up here:

https://t.me/SPN_Temple_Satsangs

Note: To connect this way, you will need Telegram downloaded on either your phone or laptop.

We hope that you enjoyed reading this new style of newsletter. Our next Serve a Deity newsletter will be centered around Kali-Ma.

Much Love

The *Pujarini* Team of the Rukmini-Panduranga Mandir and all contributors of this newsletter.

**MAY YOUR
HEART
BECOME
THE TEMPLE
FOR VITTHALA.**

